

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)
held at 10.00 am on Thursday, 3 October 2019

Present:

Members: Councillor K Sandhu (Chair)
Councillor P Akhtar
Councillor J Clifford (substitute for Councillor B Kaur)
Councillor J Lepoidevin
Councillor G Lloyd
Councillor P Male
Councillor C Miks (substitute for Councillor L Kelly)
Councillor R Thay
Councillor C Thomas

Co-Opted Members: Mrs K Jones

Cabinet Member: Councillor P Seaman (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People)

Employees (by Directorate):

People J Gregg, P Smith, L Walsh
Place G Holmes, M Rose

Invited: M Rose – Adoption Central England (ACE)

Apologies: Councillors B Kaur and L Kelly
S Hanson

Public Business

17. Declarations of Interests

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests.

18. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 19th September, 2019 were approved.

Further to minute 13/19 'SEND update' information had not yet been received. Further to minute 14/19 'Education Performance' the link to the previous report had been circulated. Further to minute 15/19 'Work Programme' Cllr Sandhu would follow up further signs of safety training

19. Adoption Service Annual Report

Further to minute 5/18 the Scrutiny Board considered a briefing note of the Deputy Chief Executive (People) which provided an update on the changes to the

Adoption Service in Coventry. Appended to the briefing note were the following documents:

- Appendix 1 – Annual Report of the Adoption Service 2018-2019
- Appendix 2 – Adoption Central England (ACE) Annual Report 2018-2019
- Appendix 3 – ACE Adoption Panel Chair's Annual Report

The establishing of a Regional Adoption Agency was previously considered on 21st June, 2018 and the Board requested that this item be further considered following an operating period to identify outcomes from the new arrangements. The Annual Adoption Report documented the adoption activity in Children's Services for the year 2018/19. This included a report of the activity of the Regional Adoption Agency of which Coventry City Council was now a part of. The Adoption Regulations required the executive to scrutinise the work of the adoption service each year.

Coventry became part of a Regional Adoption Agency on 1st February 2018. The Agency was a shared services arrangement in partnership with four other local authorities. Currently the hosts of the Regional Adoption Agency were Warwickshire County Council. An Annual Adoption Report was required by regulation and had been written jointly between staff from Coventry City Council Children's Services and the Regional Adoption Agency. It documented the progress of adoption in the city for the year 2018/19.

The Board welcomed Melissa Rose representing ACE at the meeting.

The Board questioned the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, officers and ACE on the following:

- Key areas of progress and challenges
- Decisions at court
- Placing children outside Coventry
- Qualifications and practices including Therapeutic Parenting
- Workforce
- Consistency for children
- Performance
- Social Worker Case Loads
- Responsibility and accountability
- Equality, diversity and inclusiveness of the Panel and Adopters
- Financial implications
- Relationships with regional partners and potential increased membership
- Exit interviews
- Support for Birth parents through partnership working and charities such as Pause

The Cabinet Member noted the positive progress that had been made over the first 18 months and the importance of the role of Corporate Parents. Officers also referred to a strong start at working together as a region noting the benefits of increased choice for suitable matches, less bureaucracy and the innovative recruitment of ACE. An area of improvement that officers felt was particularly important was improvements in placing complex adoptions.

ACE were also pleased with partners working together and discussed the importance of training and how it supported adopters to understand behaviours.

Further information was requested including:

- A glossary of acronyms
- An enquiry to Warwickshire regarding their policy on zero hours contracts
- ACE to further report on their work with support to birth parents following adoption
- The next annual report to contain information about the equality, diversity and inclusiveness of the Panel members and adopters

RESOLVED that

- 1) the Scrutiny Board note the briefing note and thank all those who support adoption in Coventry**
- 2) request that the Chair give further consideration to how Scrutiny could review partnership working opportunities to support birth mothers following the adoption of their children**

20. **Children's Services Improvement**

The Scrutiny Board considered a briefing note of the Deputy Chief Executive (People) which provided an update on progress with Children's Services improvement reported to the Continuous Improvement Executive Group on 12 August 2019. The next Continuous Improvement Executive Group would be held on 22nd October 2019.

The Continuous Improvement Executive Group would ensure tighter focus on continuous improvement and Ofsted preparation. The impact of performance would be managed and monitored by the group. This was an interim measure before returning to business as usual in accordance with the revised arrangements for Children's Safeguarding, and subject to satisfactory inspection by September 2020. At this time the Executive Group would cease, oversight and monitoring would be transferred to Coventry Safeguarding Children's Partnership. Improvement Board members fully supported the revised arrangements and membership of the group.

The Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive continued to give public commitment that Children's Services remained a key priority for the Council. This included prioritising funding for Children's Services to maintain its capacity to improve. The Council, alongside partner organisations continued a relentless focus on securing improvements in services for children, young people and families to ensure they were safeguarded and achieve positive outcomes.

The next standard Inspection of Children's Services was likely to be between September 2019 and September 2020.

The report noted progress with the following:

- Children's Services Redesign
- Workforce
- Recording Workshops
- Back to Basics Programme
- Family Drug and Alcohol Courts (FDAC)

- Performance Progress
- Sustaining Continuous Improvement

The Board questioned the Cabinet Member and officers on the following:

- Improving information contained in case files
- Drug and Alcohol Court financial constraints
- Recording improvements
- Social workers
- Nomination for social worker academy award

The Chair informed the Board that she had now been invited to attend the Continuous Improvement Board.

Officers discussed training and the benefits of a less transient workforce. The valuable work carried out at the Family Drug and Alcohol Court in order to keep families together was highlighted and officers were also thankful for cross-party support they received.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People encouraged members of the Board to talk to Social Workers.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board noted the briefing note and requested that an opportunity to speak to Social Workers be arranged.

21. **Work Programme**

The Scrutiny Board noted the work programme and the possibility of a venue change for the next meeting.

22. **Any Other Business**

There were no other items of business.

(Meeting closed at 12.05 pm)