

**Coventry City Council**  
**Minutes of the Meeting of Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)**  
**held at 10.00 am on Thursday, 9 January 2020**

Present:

Members: Councillor K Sandhu (Chair)  
Councillor P Akhtar  
Councillor J Blundell  
Councillor B Kaur  
Councillor L Kelly  
Councillor J Lepoidevin  
Councillor R Thay  
Councillor C Thomas

Co-Opted Members: Mrs S Hanson and Mrs K Jones

Cabinet Members: Councillor P Seaman (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People)  
Councillor K Maton (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills)

Employees (by Directorate):

People J Gregg, K Nelson  
Place G Holmes, M Rose

Apologies: Councillor G Lloyd

## **Public Business**

### **30. Declarations of Interests**

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests.

### **31. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 28<sup>th</sup> November, 2019 were approved.

Further to minute 13/19 'Special Educational Need and Disability (SEND) Update' it was reported that Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) had conducted the joint local area SEND Inspection in Coventry between 14<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> October, 2019 and feedback had been positive, further information would be provided to Members. The Scrutiny Board congratulated officers and the Cabinet Members.

Further to min 27/19 'Post 16 Transitions and Young People who are not participating in Education, Employment and Training (NEET)' members found the input from students at the meeting useful.

### **32. Libraries Update**

Further to minute 41/18 the Scrutiny Board considered a briefing note of the Deputy Chief Executive (People) which provided an update on the current position of the Coventry Libraries and Information Service. The note included information about the recent service changes and delivery of savings, as well as updating the Board on current key performance measures and recent developments.

The Council introduced the Connecting Communities programme in 2015/2016. The programme was introduced in two phases with changes to Library Services introduced alongside changes to a number of other Council services. The main changes to Library Services included reductions in opening hours, reductions in the amount of money spent on library stock, a move to three library types (core, partnership and community-led) along with the de-commissioning of the mobile library.

Phase one of the changes resulted in budget reductions of £802k, phase two of the changes supported a further reduction of £503k, totalling £1,305k. In line with the Medium- Term Financial Strategy in November 2018 a third set of proposals focused on increased self-service and other limited service reductions was consulted on with staff and service users which reduced budgets by a further £319k.

A summary of the current status of the 17 public libraries which operated in the City was provided and performance information was detailed in the appendix to the update. Visits and loans from Libraries remained positive and the use of ICT (both number of sessions and hours) showed an increase year on year. Changes to the opening hours of community-led libraries had started to result in improved performance. A recent Cipfa survey identified Central Library in Coventry as having the second most visitors in the West Midlands (after the Hive, Worcester) and the third highest number of loan issues (after the Hive, Worcester and Rugby Library).

The three community-based organisations delivering Cheylesmore, Earlsdon and Finham libraries continued to have healthy numbers of volunteers supporting these libraries. The Library Service itself also had positive opportunities for local people to volunteer, training over 113 with now around 62 volunteers supporting Council library settings. Recruitment of volunteers was now part of the day-to-day operation of the service. Volunteering in Libraries had been a stepping-stone for many into paid employment, including at least 3 who had gone on to be appointed to Library Service jobs.

The Council consulted with staff regarding plans to introduce single-staffed libraries last year. Following representations from staff, Trades Unions and from others including the Scrutiny Board, it was decided in consultation with the Cabinet Member not to pursue this in the form proposed. As future budget proposals were considered and options for the co-location of services were developed, opportunities for creative staffing models would be explored.

Other proposals for reduced budgets were introduced as per the proposals discussed by the Board in November 2018. These included the introduction of a 'Library Express' model at Central Library, ending the provision of hard copy newspapers and magazines (except for the Coventry Telegraph) the introduction of a privately-run café within Central Library, which should be fully open in early

2020 and an externally funded Visa scheme, which had been successful with an expansion of the capacity planned from February.

The development of the Cultural Offer included:

- Central Library continued to host live music events in association with the Arts Council, supported by Get It Loud in Libraries.
- Discussions with the Arts Council and City of Culture around a bid of national significance to support the digital agenda in Coventry Libraries. Potential partners included the BBC and British Film Institute. A secondary bid was also being developed with the Arts Council exploring reading in the City. The project aimed to achieve 1 million reads in 2021 by engaging people in Coventry in a wide range of reading activities.
- Collaboration with the two Universities and plans for Libraries from each institution to deliver a range of activity including a readathon, reminiscence boxes, a human library and festival of reading for reading groups.
- Partnership with the Shakespeare birthplace trust to deliver a new Early Years programme of activity in libraries.
- Discussions with Coventry University regarding the potential move of the Fab Lab into Central Library. This move would bring together digital creativity sessions with digital fabrication opportunities and so create a central location offering opportunities of play, creation and learning as well as providing stimulus for local entrepreneurship.

Libraries continued to play an important role in promoting good health and mental wellbeing. One recent initiative which the service was very proud of was the Creative Kindness partnership with Grapevine. Led by volunteers, the group meets at Central Library and provided valuable support for isolated people. Reading Well for Children would be widely promoted and launched in February 2020.

Coventry Library Service was well placed to become recognised as a 'Library of Sanctuary'. Work was progressing with the National Libraries of Sanctuary movement to achieve this certification.

The Cabinet Member was pleased that despite financial constraints the city still had libraries within neighbourhoods and recognised the important role played by volunteers enabled by the City Council.

The SB questioned the Cabinet Member and officers present on the following:

- Increasing community libraries in the future
- Increasing technology and e-books
- Library locations, buildings and opportunities
- Anti-social behaviour
- Managing cover
- Volunteers who take books to people unable to access the library
- Demographics of volunteers

Officers reported on the evolving nature of the service, the challenge of low numbers of ebooks available from publishers, behaviour in libraries and work with

Age UK. Officers agreed to provide details of the demographics of volunteers and staff for the Scrutiny Board.

The Scrutiny Board thanked officers and volunteers all of their support in making this important service remain open in local communities. The Scrutiny Board were pleased that their views on single staffing in libraries had influenced decision making and asked that ward Councillors be kept informed about any changes so that they can support their local communities.

**RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board**

**(1) recognise that despite challenges faced by the Library Service the service was still provided within neighbourhoods and would like to thank all the volunteers and officers involved.**

**(2) That consideration be given by the Cabinet Member and officers to opportunities available to address the condition of the library buildings in Canley, Coundon and Jubilee Crescent to ensure they are able to maximise community activities.**

**33. Update on Early Help and Family Hubs**

Further to minute 46/18 the Scrutiny Board considered a briefing note of the Deputy Chief Executive (People) which provided an update on progress with the Early Help Offer of the Family Hubs, including information regarding access by children, young people, and their families, and service reach from the Hubs into the wider communities. The report also provided

- further data regarding the support for young people accessing the service over 16 years, and the re-referral data,
- the development of the early help dashboard, including data for those over 19 using the service
- an update on the priorities identified in the previous report
- the Early Help Strategy and embedded transformation plan, which included the continued development and delivery of the Family Hub model as part of the early help offer

**The report noted that there were 8 Family Hubs in operation across the city, serving local communities and focusing on delivering early help to children aged 0-19, and up to 24 for young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and their families.**

**The Family hubs had been operational since November 2017 following the Cabinet decision in March 2017 to agree the implementation of Connecting Communities programme, which included the reduction of Children Centres and the redesign of Children Services. It was agreed at that time that 8 of the previous Children Centre buildings would become the Family Hubs, and the Local authority would base its newly formed Early Help family support staff within them.**

**The Family hub practitioners deliver a range of services targeted at families who need early help, and the buildings also host universal services for all families such as well baby clinics, and targeted services such as Coventry Independent Advice service. Family Hubs were a delivery point in local communities to provide interagency working and they aimed to deliver the**

**right help at the right time. Practitioners working from the Family Hubs included Local Authority Children Services staff, health visitors, midwives, school nurses, adult learning, Police community support officers (in East and Central), Coventry Independent Advice Service, and an increasing range of other partners to meet the local needs.**

Anyone can access the family hubs, and there is a daily “Here to Help” service available for people that come to the centres, phone up or make a “request for early help”. There are also a timetable of activities and services delivered throughout the year that serve as opportunities for children, young people and adults to engage with the Family hub and the early help offer.

From January, 2020 there would be a new digital sign in system operating in all family hubs, which would enable more accurate “footfall” data and improvements were being made in the data collection, and analysis process to enable more accurate performance reporting

The report also provided the following:

- data including the number of children in each area by age and early help episodes/requests and staff caseload
- information about new early help assessment and plans
- a workforce development strategy
- hub user survey

New initiatives had been established by the hubs for example:

- Woodside (Willenhall) supported the foodbank
- Families for all (Foleshill) served 2,628 meals with food donated from local supermarkets
- Harmony (Hillfields) had a youth group and kids club
- Pathways (Radford) used the provision outside of working hours
- Aspire (Lower Stoke) had a Breakfast club during half term and provided youth work and targeted intervention in partnership with the Police, to support girls at risk of criminal exploitation and involvement in gangs
- Moat (Wood End) held youth groups to support social skills and self-esteem for children in years 6 and 7
- Mosaic (Tile Hill) had worked in partnership with Canley Firestation on transition work with year 6 about keeping safe

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People congratulated the bespoke and flexible work taking place in the hubs around the City and encouraged members to support and promote the use of the hubs by their communities.

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

- The location of the hubs and difficulties accessing the allocated hub for certain areas including Spon End at the Radford Hub and Wyken at the Moat Hub
- Analysis of use of hubs and amendments to the map/ allocated hubs
- Consideration of using public transport to access allocated hub
- Data
- Benchmarking

- Awareness in communities of support available for 19-24 year olds with SEN, for example Hereward College
- Awareness of Looked after Children leaving care about support available at the hub
- Case studies of support provided and partnership working

Officers reported that residents could use any hub and were not restricted to the designated area, also the hubs were developing spokes in communities where access issues had been identified. Outreach work also took place for example at parent's evenings in schools. As hub locations were providing a voluntary service and people chose to access services, there was generally less criticism than was received regarding statutory services which were not usually a choice. Over time Children's Services would like to see more money invested in Early Help and less needed in Statutory Services.

#### **RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board**

- 1) recognise the challenges faced and the importance of the work in Early Years and thank officers.**
- 2) request that the next update contain further detail regarding data, a better understanding of 19-24 year olds access to services for SEN, more information on partnership working and outreach and case studies to demonstrate successful outcomes for children and families.**

#### **34. Children's Services Improvement**

Further to minute 25/19 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 19<sup>th</sup> December, 2019. The next Continuous Improvement Executive Group would be held on 25<sup>th</sup> February, 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 and oversight transferred to Coventry Safeguarding Children's Partnership and monitored as business as usual.

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 achieved positive outcomes.

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

The Continuous Improvement plan was reviewed by Executive Group board members on 19 December 2019, overall good progress was being made against actions in the plan.

The report noted progress with the following:

- Performance Board review of critical performance indicators. Executive Group members were reassured that work was being undertaken to address performance issues and critical performance indicators were highlighting improvement.
- A workforce update including a data summary with the following information:  
There had been an increase in Social Workers and there had been a decrease in agency staff, a decrease in vacancies and a decrease in average caseloads, however sickness absence had increased.
- The Childrens Services Conference had included news, updates, reflection, learning from a Serious Case Review, the launch of the Strategic plan and updated vision, Ofsted planning and celebration of successes
- Ofsted preparations including the completion of the self-assessment mid January, 2020.

The Board commented on the positive reduction in reliance on agency staff and thanked the Cabinet Member and Director of Children's Services for the useful visit they had arranged for Board Members to meet Social Workers.

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

- Increase in sickness absence and concern about staff having increased pressures
- Benchmarking sickness
- Critical performance indicators
- Self-assessment preparation for Ofsted

Officers responded that they were proud of the work of the Academy and were monitoring the sickness absence. Benchmarking was undertaken comparing other service areas and data was reported to the Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board (1). Officers were also looking at ways to support staff through career pathways. The Self- Assessment was an important preparation that officers were in the process of completing and this would be reported to Members.

**RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board acknowledged the progress in the improvement report and thanked officers for the visit that had been arranged to Broadgate House to talk to social workers**

### 35. **Work Programme**

The Scrutiny Board noted the work programme including the change of meeting from 19th to 11th March, 2020.

### 36. **Any Other Business**

There were no other items of business.

(Meeting closed at 12.20 pm)