

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)
held at 10.00 am on Thursday, 3 December 2020
(This meeting was held remotely)

Present:

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

Co-Opted Members: Mrs S Hanson
Mrs K Jones

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

By invitation: Dean Gordon, West Midlands Police
Sharon Mikhael, CCG

Employees (by Directorate):

Children's Services R Eaves, J Gregg, L Pardy-McLaughlin

Law and Governance G Holmes, M Salmon

Apologies: Councillor K Maton (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills)
– By Invitation

Public Business

The Director of Children's Services informed Members that, Lee Pardy-McLaughlin, Principle Social Worker (Children and Families), was leaving the Council to take up the post of Principle Social Worker at Stoke on Trent Council. The Board congratulated Lee on his new appointment, thanked him for his work for the Authority and wished him well in his future role.

6. Declarations of Interests

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests.

7. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 15th October 2020 were agreed as a true record. There were no matters arising.

8. Partnership Working in Children's Services Task and Finish Group

The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) received a Briefing Note of the Director of Law and Governance that informed the Board of the recommendations identified by the Partnership Working in Children Services Task and Finish Group and sought agreement that the recommendations being made to the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and Coventry Safeguarding Children's Partnership.

At the meeting of the Board on 20th June 2019, Members received an introductory session covering both Education and Children's Services. The purpose of this was to introduce the Board to the key priorities for the services and for the Board to identify areas for the Work Programme. As part of this process, the MASH, Early Help and Partnership Working were identified as potential areas for scrutiny to focus on. Officers were concerned that MASH resources were diverted from work on referrals into the Neighbourhood Teams, by inappropriate referrals which required no further action. A scoping document was prepared (attached as Appendix 1 to the Briefing Note) the Partnership Working in Children's Services Task and Finish Group was established.

The Group, Chaired by the Chair of the Scrutiny Board, identified a range of questions as their key lines of enquiry (set out in Appendix 2 to the Briefing Note), which they used to identify and interview a range of partners: Coventry Safeguarding Partnership; MASH; Police; Health; Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership Trust; UHCW (submission attached as Appendix 4 to the Briefing Note); South Warwickshire Partnership Trust; Church of England Diocese (as a representative from the voluntary/charity sector); and Education. The strategic and operational leads responsible for the MASH in Children's Services, presented a snapshot of data during their interview with the Task and Finish Group (the snapshot was provided in Appendix 3 to the Briefing Note).

The Task and Finish Group met on seven occasions to progress the work including 2 Scoping meetings, 3 meetings of 6 interviewing sessions, and 2 meetings to analyse findings. Key themes and findings, the outcomes of interviews with partners, and the response to recommendations from Children's Services were detailed in the Briefing Note.

The Board questioned officers, received responses, and discussed the following issues:

- The strong commitment to partnership working across the City.
- 1,000 cases open to Early Help Services at any one time.
- Referrals for children reported at serious risk of harm
- Legislation governing intervention
- The increase on demand for Children's Services due to Covid-19
- Empowering families to support each other and reach out for help
- Continued support provided to families where issues have been identified, e.g. absence from school, concerns raised by Health Visitor.
- Consideration of ways to improve partnership working across the Early Help offer

RESOLVED that the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2):

1) Recommends to the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People that:

- i) To enable better analysis and understanding of patterns of referrals (contacts), data collection categories are amended as follows:
 - a) That the different health partners, education partners, voluntary sector and charities that contact the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) are categorised separately in the data analysis.**
 - b) That contacts that would currently be logged as NFA are re-allocated to record the valuable signposting, advice and record keeping that these contacts provide to the MASH and partners.****
- ii) That partners are made aware that the MASH has access to schools' information during school holiday periods.**
- iii) The MASH makes every effort to improve the timeliness of responses to partners who make referrals, once the referral has been assessed**

2) Recommends to the Coventry Safeguarding Children's' Partnership that:

- i) The Right Help Right Time guidance is updated to include Contextual Safeguarding.**
- ii) Right Help Right Time is amended to include a glossary of terms to ensure consistency of definition and use of terminology across partners.**
- iii) The Safeguarding Partnership provide further information on data sharing and GDPR to all partners.**
- iv) The Safeguarding Partnership consider ways to improve partnership working across the Early Help offer.**

9. Coventry Safeguarding Children's Partnership Annual Report 2019-2020

The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) received a Briefing note of the Director of Children's Services that presented the Coventry Safeguarding Children's Partnership Annual Report in relation to activity of the Partnership for September 2019 to March 2020.

Working Together 2018 stated that, 'In order to bring transparency for children, families and all practitioners about the activity undertaken, the safeguarding partners must publish a report at least once in every 12-month period. The report must set out what they have done as a result of the arrangements, including on child safeguarding practice reviews, and how effective these arrangements have been in practice'. Safeguarding partners should make report widely available, and the published safeguarding arrangements should set out where the reports would be published. A copy of all published reports should be sent to the Child

Safeguarding Practice Review Panel and the What Works Centre for Children's Social Care within seven days of being published.

The Partnership had three priorities for 2019-2022: neglect; making the system work; and contextual safeguarding.

The highlights of the Annual Report were:

- A Contextual safeguarding conference took place in February 2020. This was well attended from agencies across the partnership and included local, regional and national speakers.
- Coventry continued to roll out Signs of safety and Right help, right time supporting a consistency of language and approach across the partnership.
- The Graded care profile 2, an evidence based practical assessment tool that supported practitioners in measuring the quality of care provided to a child, had been implemented and rolled out.
- The new arrangements had implemented a new Safeguarding Together Action Group made up of 40+ frontline practitioners ensuring that key messages got to the frontline.
- 'Your Voice Matters', a new young people's group, supported children and young people to have a voice. Work had been undertaken to ensure that their views were acted upon.
- Working Together 2018 brought in a requirement for Safeguarding Partners to undertake a Rapid Review when a Serious Incident Notification was made. Rapid reviews undertaken by the CSCP had received full partnership support and had all been completed within timeframe.
- The Early help strategy had been launched across the partnership highlighting the need to intervene at the earliest opportunity to provide effective support to children, young people and their families.

The Board questioned officers, received responses, and discussed the following issues:

- The response to Covid and planned approach to emerging issues.
- Newsletters focussed on research and learning for practitioners
- Early help measures
- 1,580 followers across Twitter
- Good engagement with schools – virtual training had indicated an improvement in engagement
- Definition of the three priorities
- The inclusion of case studies in the Annual Report
- HORIZON – work expanding to include both sexual and criminal exploitation. All genders included in work. Aware of gender in terms of contextual safeguarding
- Commitment from all agencies to work in partnership to keep children safe and well – new arrangements working well
- Child Protection Training for Elected Members

RESOLVED that, having considered the contents of the Coventry Safeguarding Children's Partnership Annual Report, the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2):

- 1) **Endorses the contents of the Annual Report, attached as Appendix 1 to the Briefing Note.**
- 2) **Recognises the work done by the Coventry Safeguarding Children's Partnership 2019-2020.**
- 3) **Requests that Child Protection Training be arranged for all Elected Members.**

10. **Recruitment and Retention of Children and Families Social Workers**

The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) received a Briefing Note of the Director of Children's Services that informed Members of the current progress in the recruitment of Newly Qualified Social Workers and the challenges of recruiting and retaining Experienced Children and Families Social Workers during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

The recruitment and retention of experienced frontline Children and Families Social Workers was a challenge facing all local authorities across the country. The most recent DFE Social Workforce Data 2019 indicated an acute shortage of Experienced Children and Families Social Workers, particularly those three years post qualified. The operating environment for the recruitment of experienced social workers had become increasingly challenging since the pandemic.

Children's Services had worked extensively to ensure that the recruitment and retention of Children and Families Social Workers was a key strategic and operational priority. This was driven by a comprehensive Children's Services Workforce Development Strategy 2020/21, overseen by the Director of Children's Services. The Strategy supported and improved the recruitment and retention of social workers, and children's services practitioners by developing the training and development offer, focusing on improving the capability of staff to engage children, young people and families by enabling them to assess, make judgements, decisions and 'hold risk' whilst creating solutions with families and multi-agency partners, and had delivered a number of key initiatives.

The Briefing Note provided details of the Impact of Covid-19 on Recruitment and Retention of Social Workers, the Recruitment Campaign to Recruit Experienced Social Workers, the Coventry Social Work Academy, Children's Services Social Work Progression and Career Pathway, Children's Services 'Grow our own Social Work Schemes', and Retention.

The service was experiencing significant pressure with the increase in demand as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and remained a very challenging operating environment. The service was reaching a level of work that was becoming very challenging, with caseloads increasing, a shortage of social workers and a high level of vacancies, which had resulted in increased numbers of agency staff, with an agency market that was shrinking. The system was under extreme pressure and all of this was leading to a budget pressure.

The Board questioned officers, received responses, and discussed the following issues:

- Recruitment Campaigns to promote Coventry City Council Childrens Services as a first-choice destination for Social Workers to practice.
- Social Work Academy - 58 Newly Qualified Social Workers commencing the Academy since July 2018. Propose to expand Academy.
- A Social Work Progression and Career Pathway Framework
- The 'Grow our own Social Work Scheme'
- Government campaign - supporting the current COVID-19 pandemic enabling social workers who had retired in the last two years to be fast tracked to apply to return to practice.
- A learning and development offer that supported practitioners to continuously improve the services provided.
- The impact of COVID on Children's Services and the increase in caseload for Social Workers, including covering caseloads for isolating colleagues
- Recruitment of Students through Early Helps Teams
- Exit Interviews – monitor reasons for leaving the Service in Coventry to identify any emerging patterns
- Social Work Degree Apprenticeships – 4 new Social Workers join the workforce in January 2021, 8 more in September 2021 and a further 10 would be qualified in 2022. Of 58 that entered the Scheme, 54 have remained in their role in Coventry.
- The Hackney Model – not adopted by Local Authorities due to its lack of success at Stoke on Trent Council.
- Future research to assess the full impact of the COVID pandemic on young people

RESOLVED that the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) notes the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on Children's Services recruitment and retention of experienced Children and Families Social Workers.

11. **Work Programme**

RESOLVED that the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2):

- 1) **Notes the Board's Work Programme for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2020/2021.**
- 2) **Requests that 'Children Missing Education' be covered on the agenda for the 28th January 2021 meeting of the Board.**

12. **Any Other Business**

There were no other items of public business.

(Meeting closed at 11.50 am)