

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)
held at 10.00 am on Thursday, 11 March 2021

Present:

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

Co-Opted Members: Mrs S Hanson

Other Members: Councillor P Seaman

Employees (by Directorate):

J Gregg, People Directorate
G Holmes, Place Directorate
N MacDonald, People Directorate
M Rose, Resources Directorate
S Watson, People Directorate

Apologies: Councillor J Blundell, B Gittins, B Kaur and L Kelly

Public Business

19. Declarations of Interests

There were no disclosable interests.

20. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 28 January, 2021 were agreed and signed as a true record.

There were no matters arising.

21. Children's Services Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic - Vulnerability and Disadvantage

The Scrutiny Board considered a report of the Director of Children's Services which provided a progress update of the current situation and impact of COVID-19 pandemic on Children's Services and partners since October 2020.

Members of the Board asked questions and received the following information:

- There had been no issues acquiring sufficient PPE for staff.

- Demand for Children’s Services had been manageable with the service in a better position to deal with spikes in demand. There had recently been a return to “normal” levels of demand, however there was an expectation that this would rise again once children return to school.
- Use of technology had offered certain opportunities to enhance services for families. There was a mandate to protect children, which would require face to face service delivery, but in some circumstances virtual contact was a good approach, such as with Foster Carers. These improvement would be continued and would continue to be an enhancement to the services offered.
- Partnership working had continued and was the best way forward.
- Schools hadn’t been closed during lockdown but had continued to provide education for vulnerable children and those of key workers
- Agency staff had made a valuable contribution and the service had taken a pragmatic approach, but it would be a priority to create a stable workforce, on which progress had made.
- Feedback from families had been recorded and there had been an increase in appreciation for services, possibly down to the continuation of services when so much had closed or gone virtual
- Virtual Children Protection conferences were not satisfactory and would be hybrid as soon as possible.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board:

- 1) Note the current situation, progress and impact of COVID-19 pandemic on Children’s Services and partners**
- 2) Request that an item on the use of technology in Children’s Services be added to the Work Programme for 2021-22**

22. Children's Services Continuous Improvement Progress

The Scrutiny Board considered a report of the Director of Childrens Services which informed the Education and Children’s Services Scrutiny Board (2) of the progress with Children’s Services improvement reported to the Continuous Improvement Executive Group on 10 February 2021.

Members of the Board asked questions and received the following information:

- A visit from Ofsted is expected in April, sooner rather than later

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board:

- 1) Note the current progress**
- 2) Agree to receive an annual report reflecting progress against the actions and priorities in the Children and Young People’s Plan**

23. Strengthening Families - Family Valued Programme

The Scrutiny Board considered a report of the Director of Childrens Services which had been considered by Cabinet at their meeting on 9 March, 2021 (their Minute 89 /21 refers) and which indicated that Family Valued is a Leeds City Council

system change programme designed to spread restorative practice across children's services..

There were 2 core strands to the programme;

- Awareness raising and deep dive training to embed restorative practice across social work, Children's Services and the wider workforce for children, families and communities.
- Expansion of Family Group Conferencing to more families, including those affected by domestic violence and with a new model prior to Initial Child Protection Conferences.

An evaluation was undertaken 16 months into the Leeds programme which found that almost all of the Family Valued outcomes had been achieved.

Other outcomes were also identified at the time of the evaluation such as improvements in school attendance, number of children leaving care and returning to their families, and rates of re-referrals for domestic violence.

The Coventry approach would encourage workers to establish a relationship-based method to working with children and families. As a Signs of Safety local authority social workers were already working to a strength based and restorative framework. Existing approaches would need to be developed further to take account of the Leeds Family Valued model.

Coventry was on a journey to good or better and was committed to achieving this. Working with and alongside Leeds Local Authority this proposal would enhance the pace of change and further improve outcomes for children in Coventry.

The Scrutiny Board asked questions and received the following information:

- The bidding process was extensive, requiring six stages which flexed and stretched resources within the service
- Families would not be identified as those who are easiest to support in order to reach targets; social work practice was based on a model of social justice and fighting inequality. The project would operate on a basis of risk. There would be no discrimination on race, ethnicity or language barriers.
- The model had proved successful in Leeds and ensured children stay with families.

It was noted that the report would be considered by Council at their meeting to be held on 16 March, 2021.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board:

- 1) Support the acceptance of the grant funding of £4,062,295 from the Department for Education for the two-year period to support the change programme to spread restorative practice across Children's Services.**
- 2) Receive a briefing on the Family Valued Programme and further reports on progress of the project.**

24. **Work Programme**

The Scrutiny Board considered and noted their Work Programme for the 2020/21 Municipal Year.

25. **Any Other Business**

There were no other items of urgent public business.

(Meeting closed at 11.05 am)