

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)
held at 10.30 am on Thursday, 17 March 2022

Present:

Members: Councillor J Innes (Chair)
Councillor P Akhtar
Councillor J Blundell
Councillor S Keough
Councillor R Simpson
Councillor CE Thomas
Councillor A Tucker

Co-Opted Members: Mrs S Hanson
Mrs K Jones

Invited: D Benson - Independent Chair of the Coventry Safeguarding
Children Partnership

R Sprotson - General Manager for Family Health at South
Warwickshire NHS Foundation Trust (SWFT)

Employees (by Directorate):

Children's Services	J Gregg (Director) R Eaves, P Smith, S Watson
Law and Governance	G Holmes, M Rose
Public Health	H Nagra

Apologies: Councillor F Abbott and R Thay
Councillor P Seaman (Cabinet Member for Children and
Young People)
Councillor Gittins (Deputy Cabinet Member for Children and
Young People)

Public Business

25. Declarations of Interests

There were no disclosable interests.

26. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9th December, 2021 were agreed and signed as a true record.

Further to Minute 21/21 the Board were thankful that the Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF) Funding had been extended and would be available over the Easter school holidays.

27. **Coventry Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2020-2021**

The Scrutiny Board considered a briefing note and Annual Report of the Coventry Safeguarding Children Partnership (CSCP) 2020-2021. The Board welcomed the Independent Chair of the Partnership, Mr Benson and the Partnership Business Manager, Rebekah Eaves.

The briefing note recognised that Working Together 2018 stated ‘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 information on child safeguarding practice reviews, and how effective these arrangements have been in practice.

Mr Benson noted in the report that it had been a unique year, with the challenges of the pandemic adding to what was already a very demanding safeguarding agenda. Partner agencies had seen an increase in need for their services and in many cases, there had also been heightened levels of complexity. The Safeguarding Partners; Police, Health and the Local Authority had worked well, liaising with other agencies to respond quickly and effectively to an evolving situation. He had witnessed timely information sharing, co-ordinated responses and decisive leadership. The report provided updates on the work of the CSCP, progress against priorities and areas where more work was needed. It also highlighted where learning had been identified and implemented and whether that emerged from the audit programme or from reviews. He recognised that 2021/22 would continue to present challenges as the effects of the pandemic were still relevant, but the partnership in Coventry would work effectively together to help safeguard and protect the children and young people of the city.

The report detailed:

- Local context
- About Coventry Safeguarding Children’s Partnership
- Progress against priorities
- Child Exploitation Indicator tool
- Neglect conference
- Local Authority Designated Officer
- Signs of Safety
- Right help right time
- Quality Assurance
- Learning from Reviews
- Training
- Safeguarding Together Action Group
- Voice of the child

The Board questioned those present, received responses, and discussed the following:

- The next Safeguarding Children’s Partnership Annual Report 2021-2022
- The benefits of a glossary in future reports
- The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub function review and partners systems sharing information

- Strengthening safeguarding and increasing awareness across the community including training Taxi Drivers, Hotel Staff and Housing Providers operating in the City
- The Child Exploitation Project Manager infographics in relation to Cuckooing
- Praise for all those who continued the commitment to improve during challenging times

The Board also recorded thanks and best wishes to Paul Smith the Strategic Lead for Looked After Children on hearing about his retirement.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board:

- 1) **note the content of the report and thank the officers and the Safeguarding Partnership Chair**
- 2) **request that**
 - a. **a glossary be added to the 2021-22 report and this be circulated to members**
 - b. **that the officers and relevant elected Members promote the priority Coventry give to essential safeguarding training regarding criminal and sexual exploitation for taxi drivers to neighbouring authorities.**

28. Family Health and Lifestyle Services Annual Report 2020-2021

The Scrutiny Board considered a joint briefing note and Annual Report of the Family Health and Lifestyle Services 2020-2021. The Family Health and Lifestyles Service was commissioned by Coventry City Council and was provided by South Warwickshire NHS Foundation Trust (SWFT). The Board welcomed Rachel Sprotson, General Manager for Family Health at SWFT, who joined officers for the discussion.

The following services were integrated on 1st September 2018; Health Visiting, School Nursing, Be Active Be Healthy, Family Nurse Partnership, Stop Smoking in Pregnancy, Infant Feeding and MAMTA (offering support to BAME families ante-natally and postnatally). The third year had focused on continuing to deliver an excellent service to children and families in an adapted way, due to the challenges of COVID. The service had also continued to take the opportunity to innovate, particularly through launching an increased digital offer to families and adapt to the changing needs of communities. The report detailed key achievements in 2020/21 and priorities for 2021/22. The service aimed to give every child the best start in life ensuring there was an even greater focus on service provision to those with more health inequalities in Coventry.

The Board questioned those present, received responses, and discussed the following:

- The National Child Measurement Programme and the 'Map Me' research project
- Levels of breastfeeding across the city and national comparisons.
- Promoting breastfeeding at hospitality venues in the City and links with partners to enable this to happen.

- Work being done to support new fathers and how dads are being targeted by health partners with key parenting messages
- Improvements in the availability of health inequality data to enable targeting on a ward level

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board:

- 1) note the content of the report and thanked the officers and partners delivering the Services**
- 2) support links between the Family Health and Lifestyle Service, Trading Standards and Environmental Health regarding suitable areas to breastfeed in the City**
- 3) request a report next year on the health inequalities data and ‘Map Me’ research project**

29. Children's Services Continuous Improvement Progress

The Scrutiny Board considered a report of the Director of Children’s Services which detailed the progress with the Children’s Services Improvement Journey over the last twelve months.

Ofsted re-inspected Children’s Services on 6th - 30th March 2017, the outcome of the inspection was published on 13th June 2017, Children’s Services were judged as “requires improvement to be good”. The Board had received reports regularly since this time detailing the continuous progress. Children’s Services Continuous Improvement was transferred to Coventry Safeguarding Children’s Partnership as approved by the Children’s Services Continuous Improvement Executive Group on 28th October 2020. The new arrangements were effective from 1st April 2021, the governance in place would ensure that Children’s Services continuous improvement remained a political priority. Board members would continue to receive reports on Children’s Services continuous improvement and progress on an annual basis.

In March 2020, Ofsted paused inspections due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Children’s Services was anticipating a standard Inspection by September 2020. Ofsted published their interim plans to reflect the COVID-19 context for a phased return to routine inspections which commenced from September 2020. The interim visits were paused again during the November 2020 lockdown. On 5 January 2021 a further national lockdown was announced. Ofsted confirmed that interim assurance focused visits would be undertaken during the national lockdown period commencing from February 2021. The interim focused visit, (COVID-19 assurance) was undertaken on 12 and 13 May 2021. Interim focused visits differed from the usual focused visits in that they had a broader scope with a particular focus on the quality of decision making for children. The letter confirming the outcome was published on 25th June 2021. Three areas were identified for improvement. Children’s Services was likely to be re-inspected by Ofsted (Standard ILACS) Inspection in 2022.

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 Children's Services Strategic Plan and Journey to Excellence September 2019- September 2022, outlined the improvement journey and the significant progress achieved by working with partners to improve practice, sustain the workforce, reduce reliance on agency staff, in delivering service changes. The service continued to work closely with its partners to focus on achieving good outcomes for children. The overarching strategic priorities included a sustainable workforce, improving the quality of front-line practice and partnership working. The Children's Services Strategic Plan would be refreshed in April 2022, embedding Coventry Family Valued relational restorative work with children and families and highlighting the significant progress against continuous improvement /transformation service changes and the aspirations for the future.

The report also detailed:

- Children's Services COVID-19 Journey
- Workforce update
- The Coventry House Project
- Coventry Family Valued Programme
- Ofsted Areas for Improvement Action Plan

The report explained that Coventry had a positive story to tell, the Director of Children's Services was passionate about improving services for children; with strong, timely and effective political and corporate support; with a strong leadership team working with partners to drive improvements and work with families to embed Coventry Family Valued in Coventry. Coventry wanted all children and young people in the city to achieve the best possible outcomes. The pressure of numbers of children looked after, and lack of local placement availability, had made it challenging to the service. Embedding Coventry Family Valued was significant to improvements, and the impact and opportunities it brought would strengthen Children's Services. In the lead up to the Ofsted Inspection, the Children's Services Leadership team and extended Leadership team continued to work together to drive forward practice improvements and services changes. There was explicit intention to ensure that Children's Services reached a position where it was continuously achieving good outcomes for the Children of Coventry.

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

- Increased demand on the workforce and the need to recruit agency staff
- The involvement of schools in the Family Valued Programme
- The process for Family Group Conferencing and the effectiveness of the intervention
- The funding to continue the success of the House Project in future years
- Social Worker caseloads compared over time, with other local authorities and whether they were at an acceptable level
- Children's Homes in Coventry

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board:

- 1) note the current progress**

- 2) request the Annual Report on Family Group Conferencing be shared with Members
- 3) An Update on the Coventry Family Valued Programme and the House Project be added to the work programme

30. **Co-opted Members of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)**

The Scrutiny Board considered a briefing note of the Scrutiny Co-ordinator regarding Co-opted Membership and proposed changes to the Constitution being considered at Council on 22nd March 2022.

The report noted that Kellie Jones had been a co-opted member of the Scrutiny Board responsible for Education matters since 3rd July 2012. In December she resigned from the Board having been an active member since her appointment.

The constitution provided detail on the co-opted members of the scrutiny board that considered education matters. Part 2D and in particular, paragraph 6 was concerned with education representatives as detailed below:

“6. Education Representatives

6.1 The Scrutiny Board responsible for Education matters will include the following:-

- (a) One person nominated by the Church of England.
- (b) One person nominated by the Roman Catholic Church.
- (c) One parent governor elected by the parent governors in the City in respect of the Primary phase of education.
- (d) One parent governor elected by the parent governors in the City in respect of the Secondary phase of education.
- (e) One representative from other faith groups in the City

6.2 Such appointees, with the exception for the time being of the representative appointed under 6.1(e) above, may speak and vote on education issues only, but may speak on other issues.

6.3 They will also be invited to attend the meetings of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee (if it is considering a call-in on an educational matter) and of other Scrutiny Boards (if education matters are to be considered at those meetings) and may speak, but not vote upon those matters.”

The Parent Governor Representatives (England) Regulations 2001 set out detailed provisions for Parent Governor Representatives (PGR's) including that they had voting rights, their term of office must be a minimum of 2 years and a maximum of 4 years and we must appoint at least 2 and a maximum of 5 PGRs. Where a PGR ceased to be a parent governor because their term of office at the school had expired, they were not disqualified from continuing as a PGR but this would only be for the term of their appointment as a PGR.

Part 2D of the Constitution, in particular, paragraph 6 regarding education representatives and the Constitution divided the PGRs into primary and secondary

representatives. There was also nothing in the Constitution about what the term of office was which was required under the legislation. There were now no maintained secondary schools left in the city and the number of maintained primary schools was also greatly reduced. The most up-to-date version of this legislation had been checked and it was confirmed that the position remained the same and reference was only made to maintained schools but there was no stipulation that there must be a separate primary and secondary school PGR. As the number of maintained schools reduced and especially as there were now no maintained secondary schools left in Coventry, it was proposed that changes to the Constitution be made to remove the requirement for there to be a separate primary and secondary school PGR, in addition to the insertion of a four-year term of office. The proposal had been discussed by the Constitutional Advisory Group and would be presented to the Cabinet Member for Policing and Equalities prior to Council considering a recommendation to this effect at its meeting on 22nd March 2022.

In keeping with the legislation in this area and to reflect the fact that Coventry now had no maintained secondary schools, under Part 2D – Functions of Scrutiny, paragraph 6: Education Representatives the proposed changes to the parent governor representatives (PGR's) were:

- i. a four year term of office; and
- ii. removal of the requirement for a parent governor representative from both a maintained primary and secondary school in the city (instead introducing a requirement for a generic parent governor who could technically be from any maintained school)

In order to address the current vacancies, the scrutiny team would be liaising with colleagues in Education Services to recruit school governors, as well as groups and networks that could identify suitable representatives for the Board.

The Board discussed:

- the legislation
- changes to the current membership
- the great value Co-opted members bring to the Board including Education insight and a consistent commitment to challenge and support the Children's Services improvement journey
- concern about the regulation which restricted Co-opted Members from voting on non-education issues, due to the way Education matters were intrinsically linked to Children's Services matters.
- the appreciation for the valuable contributions made by Kellie Jones over a number of years, who's insight and expertise at meetings of the Board and Task and Finish Groups was outstanding.

RESOLVED that the Board:

- 1) note the proposed changes to the Constitution**
- 2) thank their Co-opted Member, Kellie Jones, for her valuable contribution to the work of the Board over the last 10 years.**
- 3) document concern about the regulation which restricted Co-opted Members from voting on non-education issues due to the way education matters were intrinsically linked to Children's Services matters.**

31. **Work Programme**

The Work Programme was noted and Members requested an item on the new Education White Paper be added to the work programme.

RESOLVED that the work programme be updated

32. **Any Other Business**

Vote of Thanks

Councillor Blundell on behalf of the Board thanked Councillor Innes for Chairing the Board for this Municipal Year.

(Meeting closed at 12.50 pm)