

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)
held at 2.30 pm on Thursday, 21 July 2022

Present:

Members: Councillor J Innes (Chair)
Councillor J Blundell
Councillor S Keough
Councillor A Masih
Councillor CE Thomas
Councillor A Tucker

Co-Opted Members: Mrs S Hanson

Invited: Mr G Vohra

Employees (by Directorate):

Children's Services J Gregg (Director), A Whitrick
Education and Skills A Coles, J Essex, R Sugars
Law and Governance G Holmes, A West

Apologies: Councillor F Abbott
Councillor P Akhtar

Councillor Gittins (Deputy Cabinet Member for Children and Young People)
Councillor Sandhu (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills)

Public Business

1. Declarations of Interests

There were no disclosable interests.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 March 2022 were agreed.

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator confirmed that the recommendations made at the meeting regarding the promoting to neighbouring authorities the priority that Coventry gives to essential safeguarding training regarding criminal and sexual exploitation for taxi drivers were supported by the Cabinet Member and Chair of the Licensing and Regulatory Committee. The Chair of the Licensing and Regulatory Committee stated that the Committee welcomes comments from the Scrutiny Board given that taxis carry children.

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator also confirmed that members of the Committee who have been co-opted in relation to education can only vote on education matters. This is set out in legislation (although this does not define exactly what education

matters are). They are, however, able to speak, ask questions and contribute on any issue and the Chair confirmed that Members of the board have always welcomed the contributions of co-opted members on any matter under consideration by the Board.

3. **Overview of Education and Children's Services**

John Gregg, Rachael Sugars, Jeanette Essex and Adrian Coles introduced the presentation that had been circulated with the agenda. The combined presentation reflected the close working arrangements and focussed on shared outcomes between the two services areas.

Members asked questions and were given responses in the following areas:

- How the Council had supported schools to prepare for the heatwave, using DfE guidance and learning from the pandemic
- Members heard that most schools remained open recognising that vulnerable children were safer in school. Decisions were made based on health and safety assessments.
- How schools manage staff shortages and that each school is responsible for staffing, the Council would offer support wherever possible.
- The work being done locally as part of discussion about academisation of schools, to ensure a meaningful and informed dialogue about the implications of the Schools White Paper. Local MATs and the Regional Schools Commissioner will be part of that conversation but there will be more momentum in September
- Schools, children and young people are part of the engagement process for the One Coventry Plan, which includes climate change. This had already been identified as a key issue for children and young people. Climate changes was also considered as part of the capital programme as well as at a curriculum level.
- Identification of ethnic minority families with drug and/or alcohol issues will come from the children's workforce through referral. Officers were confident that once a referral comes in, the response is appropriate. The Family Drug and Alcohol Court would only get involved once the threshold for removal of children had been reached.
- The register of children electively home educated would come into force in September, the local authority's approach is supportive. Unregistered schools can be reported to Ofsted by anyone. The DfE was looking to identify a more prescriptive definition of an unregistered school. However, there was no recent memory of this having happened in Coventry.
- SEND was a terms which had been in general use since 1981. Currently there is a social threshold rather than a medical diagnosis. Coventry had responded to the government consultation to review barriers to learning as opposed to labelling children.
- The increased costs of the external market for placements and that until the market is reformed these costs will continue to rise.
- Services were focussed on children most in need – those children who are at the sharp end of an unequal society. The Schools White Paper would enable targeted work and Coventry would be in an Education Investment area.

- The challenges of school readiness and the work being done with early years settings to improve quality would warrant the board looking at the area in more detail at a future meeting
- The importance of outdoor education in the curriculum and what Coventry offered beyond Plas Dol-y-moch.

The Board also requested information on the impact of Early Help in prevention families needing a higher level of intervention at a later date.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board:

Add the following to the work programme:

- **School readiness and steps taken by the Early Years team to support settings**
- **Outdoor education service**

The Board also requested information on the impact of Early Help in prevention families needing a higher level of intervention at a later date.

4. Work Programme and Outstanding Issues

The Work Programme was noted and Members requested items on:

- Library service
- Support to schools with Requires Improvement or Inadequate Ofsted judgements.
- School exclusions

RESOLVED that the work programme be updated and supported the establishment of a T&F group on Autism in Schools and identified the following members:

- **Blundell**
- **Masih**
- **Hanson**
- **Innes**

5. Any Other Business

The Board noted meetings on the schedule that clashed with Planning Committee.

RESOLVED that the meeting on the 15 September move to 22 September, and the meeting on the 2 February will move to the 9 February. It was also agreed that the meeting on 22 September would start at 3pm.

(Meeting closed: 4.30pm)