

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)
held at 3.00 pm on Thursday, 20 October 2022

Present:

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

Co-Opted Members: Mrs S Hanson

Invited: Mr G Vohra

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

Employees (by Directorate):

Children's Services S Bhambra, M Clayton, J Gregg (Director), C Heeley, N
Education and Skills Macdonald, A Whitrick

Law and Governance G Holmes, C Taylor

Apologies: Councillor F Abbott
Councillor Gittins (Deputy Cabinet Member for Children and Young People)
Councillor A Masih
Cllr Sandhu (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills)

Public Business

6. Declarations of Interests

There were no disclosable interests.

7. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 July 2022 were agreed.

8. Co-option of Other Faiths Representatives to the Scrutiny Board

The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) received a Briefing Note of the Scrutiny Co-ordinator regarding the Co-option of Other Faiths Representative to the Board.

At the Council meeting held on 19 May 2022, it was agreed to delegate the approval of the outstanding co-opted Members for Education matters

appointments for the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee and the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) to that Committee and Scrutiny Board.

Part 2D, Section 6 of the Council Constitution, Education Representatives states:

"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) A maximum of two parent governors elected by the parent governors in the City in respect of either the Primary or 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.

6.4 Such appointees shall serve a minimum term of two years and a maximum term of four years."

The Board noted that the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee had approved the co-option at their meeting held on 28 September 2022.

RESOLVED unanimously that:

- **The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) approves the co-option of Mr Ghulam Vohra as a non-voting co-optee to the Board under Part 2D, Section 6.1 (e) of the constitution.**

The Chair welcomed Mr Ghulam Vohra to the Committee.

9. **Children's Services Ofsted Outcome**

The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) received a Briefing Note of the Director of Children's Services regarding the re-inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers and Self-Assessment.

Children's Services were re-inspected by Ofsted from on 13 June – 1 July 2022 with a shift in focus from the last inspection to a strength-based approach. The inspection focused on social workers and social work practice. The outcome of Children's Services in Coventry had been rated by Ofsted as 'Good'.

The full inspection report, a copy of which had been appended, could also be found at: www.reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/44/80456.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Councillor P Seaman introduced the report, commending officers on the fantastic achievement and the years of effort which had gone into changing the culture of Children's Services and which would continue into the future.

The Chair echoed the Cabinet Members comments, adding that the transformation was making a real difference to children's lives in the city.

The inspection report identified four areas that required further improvement:

- The focus on children's views and carers capacity to meet children's needs in private fostering arrangements.
- The response to children aged 16 and 17 who are homeless.
- The mental and emotional wellbeing provision for care leavers.
- The quality of team managers supervision provided to social workers.

The report also advised that the next steps would be:

- A Children's Services Development Plan would be developed in response to the Ofsted recommendations and areas for development.
- The Development Plan would be presented to a future Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) and submitted to Ofsted by November 2022.
- The Development Plan would be shared with staff and partners and progress against the plan reported on a regular basis.

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

- Progress was being made in the four areas identified by Ofsted as follows:
 - An Action Plan to meet children's needs in private fostering arrangements had been compiled and was making good progress.
 - More funding from Council and the Integrated Care Board had been put in place. Re-commissioning LAC CAMHS services was under way and these new services would be available in May 2023 with tier 2 services operational from December 2022 which would include anyone up to the age of 25 and would include care leavers. The Integrated Health Care Board would be monitored and challenged to ensure services identified were being delivered. Training in mental health for personal providers would be rolled out.
 - There was a more integrated and considered approach to young people presenting as homeless. Training social workers on consistency of responsibilities and assessments was being rolled out. Joining up with youth work to ensure the right young people are provided with accommodation if needed or they stay with their families.
 - A robust quality assurance framework was in place to feed back on supervision provided to social workers. Development was taking place regarding recording discussions. New manager recognition/growing our own and investing in managers to undertake training was happening.

- Mental health services for care leavers aged 18-25 was very good and performance data for these care leavers was very high.
- The service was fragile due to the ability to train, retrain and build an experienced workforce, the shortage of social workers, the high demand for services and lack of funding.
- £12m of the £80m children's services budget was made up of short and medium term grants which were essential to keeping the service going.
- There were a significant number of social worker vacancies which agency staff were covering and challenges in attracting good social workers.
- Social worker case loads ranged from between 4 – 8 for an employee in the academy to 18-24 for an experienced social worker. Case loads were monitored on a regular basis. There were currently 3,500 open cases.
- Retention of social workers was challenging due to higher pay available through agencies.
- Many newly qualified social workers were finding employment through agencies however, in Coventry, employees were provided with training and development through the Academy and the retention rate was approximately 3 years.
- Council operated a separate relocation package for employees. There were challenges around using cars and the cost of fuel however, recent discussions had taken place regarding improving retention of social workers.
- There were strong links with the Migration Service and other bodies in relation to unaccompanied young asylum seekers and the voluntary sector also assisted. The pace of Home Office decisions often left young people in a state of legal limbo although the speed of decision making was improving. Officers liaised with the State Migration Partnership on a regular basis.
- Interpreters were in good supply for the range of languages spoken.
- Should unaccompanied young asylum seekers obtain the Right to Remain, they tended to go on to higher education.
- Since the pandemic, there had been a significant increase in the number of children home educated which in some cases posed safeguarding risks.

The Board also requested information on the following:

- The process/consequences of bidding for short term funding.
- Up to date Census figures.
- Services to support care leavers at risk of becoming homeless.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board:

- 1. Consider the recommendations highlighted in the Inspection report and requested a further report on progress implementation.**
- 2. Receives the Development Plan at a future meeting in response to the Inspection report.**
- 3. It was unanimously agreed to write to the Children's Services team to congratulate them on the recent Ofsted result.**

10. **Work Programme and Outstanding Issues**

The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) noted the work programme 2022-2023 and asked for the inclusion of the following items:

- The impact of the Child Sexual Abuse Inquiry on Council's work to protect children.
- Social Worker recruitment and retention – financial incentives.

RESOLVED that the work programme be updated.

11. **Any Other Business**

There were no other items of business.

(Meeting closed at 4:30pm)