



Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)

Time and Date

10.00 am on Thursday, 28th November, 2024

Place

Diamond Room 2 - Council House

Public Business**1. Apologies and Substitutions****2. Declarations of Interests****3. Exclusion of Press and Public**

To consider whether to exclude the press and public for the item(s) of private business for the reasons shown in the report.

4. Minutes (Pages 3 - 12)

- a) To agree the minutes of the meeting held on 17th October 2024.
- b) Matters Arising

5. Coventry Holiday Activities and Food Programme (Pages 13 - 18)

Briefing Note of the Director of Children and Education

6. Social Worker Recruitment and Retention - Workforce Update (Pages 19 - 26)

Briefing Note of the Director of Children and Education

7. Homes for Children in Care - Update Report (Pages 27 - 32)

Briefing Note of the Director of Children and Education

8. Work Programme (Pages 33 - 36)

Briefing Note of the Director of Law and Governance

9. Any Other Business

Any other items of business which the Chair decides to take as matters of urgency because of the special circumstances involved.

Private Business

10. Homes for Children in Care - Update Report (Pages 37 - 54)

Briefing Note of the Director of Children and Education

Julie Newman, Chief Legal Officer, Council House, Coventry

Wednesday, 20 November 2024

Note: The person to contact about the agenda and documents for this meeting is Tom Robinson Email: tom.robinson@coventry.gov.uk

Membership: Councillors J Birdi, B Christopher, J Gardiner, Mrs S Hanson (Co-opted Member), Mr D Jackson (Co-opted Member), R Lancaster, S Nazir, E M Reeves, R Thay, CE Thomas (Chair), A Tucker and Mr G Vohra (Co-opted Member)

By invitation: Councillors K Sandhu (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills) and P Seaman (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People)

Public Access

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Tom Robinson

Email: tom.robinson@coventry.gov.uk

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)
held at 10.00 am on Thursday, 17 October 2024

Present:

Members: Councillor CE Thomas (Chair)
Councillor J Birdi
Councillor B Christopher
Councillor R Lancaster
Councillor J Lepoidevin (Substitute for Councillor Gardiner)
Councillor S Nazir
Councillor E M Reeves
Councillor R Thay

Co-Opted Members: S Hanson, D Jackson and G Vohra

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

Employees (by Service Area):

Children's Services: H Bedford, M Clayton, N Stirling

Law and Governance: S Bennett, G Holmes, A Veness

Apologies: Councillors J Gardiner and A Tucker

Public Business

43. Declarations of Interests

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests.

Further to Minute 46 below, the Scrutiny Board noted that Mr Vohra is a member of the Safe Spaces Stakeholder Group.

44. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 11 July, 2024 were agreed and signed as a true record.

The Scrutiny Board noted that information requested at the last meeting in relation to dental health had been circulated.

45. Family Valued and Reunification Project

The Scrutiny Board consider a Briefing Note of the Director of Children and Education, together with a presentation at the meeting, which provided an update on the impact of Coventry Family Valued, including the Reunification Project, and outlined proposed next steps.

The Briefing Note indicated that Family Valued was introduced in Coventry Children's Services on 1st April 2021 as part of the national Strengthening Families, Protecting Children (SFPC) Programme; a 5-year programme funded by the Department for Education (DfE), focussing on safely reducing the number of children entering care, through introducing restorative practices and services. Coventry City Council received grant funding of £4,204,141 over a 2.5-year period (April 2021 – September 2023). The grant funded 36 full-time equivalent (FTE) additional posts in Children's Services to support the implementation of Coventry Family Valued. These posts saw the significant expansion of the Family Group Conference (FGC) Service, additional capacity within the Connected Persons Team and Participation Team, the implementation of a Reunification Project and the creation of a Restorative Practice Team.

Over the funded period, the Coventry Family Valued Programme delivered against a challenging backdrop, with national issues in relation to social work recruitment and retention, rising numbers of children in care nationally, and a placement market which is untenable. Despite these challenges, culture and practice in Coventry shifted; becoming more relational and restorative, and this was reflected in the improved outcomes for children and young people, with a safe reduction in the number of children who were in care, year-on-year, over the funded period, as well as practice improvements and improved outcomes for children, young people and their families being recognised by Ofsted (inspection dates 20th June – 1st July 2023), with Coventry Children's Services receiving a 'good' grading in all areas of judgement, with the report recognising that 'relational social work and restorative practice are embedded across services'.

The SFPC Programme has now ended, but Children and Education Services remains committed to Coventry Family Valued, having seen the impact this has had for children, young people and their families, with Coventry Family Valued now being seen as the practice approach 'with' children, young people and families, rather than a programme.

It was envisaged that the posts created through SFPC funding would financially sustain themselves, post funding, due to the projected financial savings which would be made through to the safe reduction of children in care. However, while a safe reduction of children in care was achieved year-on-year, over the same period, the placements market spiralled, thus the projected financial savings were not achieved. This resulted in the difficult decision to delete numerous Family Valued posts, as these could not be funded through the core Children and Education Services budget. The Scrutiny Board noted that, while financial savings were not achieved, if Coventry Family Valued had not been introduced, it is likely that there would have been increased pressures on Coventry City Council's budgets, due to the number of children likely to have been in care, without this change in approach.

Due to significant financial pressures, post-funding, the Family Group Conference (FGC) Service and the number of Restorative Practice leads were reduced and the service restructured, details of which were contained in the Briefing Note. Further developmental work has taken place in FGC, supported by Leeds Relational Practice Centre, to deepen FGC practice. In addition to this developmental work, the referral criteria for FGC have been modified, both

reflecting the reduced capacity within the FGC Service, and to ensure that FGCs are taking place 'with' families where the greatest impact can be achieved. The current referral criteria for FGC was outlined in the Briefing Note.

The number of families who have benefitted from an Initial FGC has increased year on-year since Coventry Family Valued was introduced and this was evidenced in the Briefing Note. Examples of the difference that FGC has made to children and their families is included within the Coventry Family Valued Impact Report and Next Steps (April 2021 – March 2024) which was appended to the Briefing Note. The success of FGCs is measured 12 months following the FGC process ending based on the reason for the referral, and if the FGC process achieved this. The data from 2023/2024 shows positive outcomes for children and families where the FGC process had been completed 12-months prior (2022/2023) and the rates of success were outlined in the Briefing Note.

The Briefing Note also provided details about the Reunification Project, which commenced in May 2021 and which was developed with the aim to reunify children in care into the care of their family, where it is safe and appropriate to do so. The Project provides intensive support to children and families which includes out of hours and at the weekend. The support is intensive, responsive and consistent. Due to the success of this Project, both in relation to improved outcomes for children and young people, as well as placement cost avoidance, the team was further expanded in July 2022, funded through Children's Services core budget). There continues to be success for children, young people and their families through this project, with 44 children and young people having returned home from care to live with their families as a result. The Coventry Family Valued Impact Report and Next Steps (April 2021 – March 2024) contains examples of the impact that this Project has had to the lives of children and their families. As well as the improved outcomes for children and young people, the Project has made considerable savings due to placement cost avoidance, details of which were contained in the Briefing Note.

The Briefing Note also detailed work being undertaken by Family Valued Practice Leads, including driving the implementation of Rethink Formulation, as a tool to support practitioners to slow-down their thinking, to rethink their practice, and to support family-led solutions wherever possible.

The Briefing Note concluded that, since the launch of Coventry Family Valued, the number of children in care has safely reduced year-on-year, with more children living at home safely with their families. There has been a recent spike in the number of children in care, and this is being explored internally to gain a better understanding of the reasons for this, so that appropriate actions can be put in place, to support the continuation of the improved outcomes for children and their families which have been achieved to date. The increasing number of children in care, does correlate with the FGC Service and Family Valued Practice Lead team being scaled back, and further exploration is needed in relation to if this has contributed to the recent rise in numbers of looked after children.

The number of children who require a Child Protection Plan continues to require a specific focus, and improvement activity is taking place in this area, to support a safe reduction. These numbers have started to reduce, and it is envisaged that through the focussed improvement work in this area, that this will continue.

The Scrutiny Board asked questions, received answers, sought assurance and made comments on a number of issues including:-

- The average weekly placements costs children in care and the significant cost savings of providing placements in house. It was noted that more information in relation to the costs of placements would be considered at the next meeting
- The impact of the reduction of staff following the end of the funding on both the service and the remaining staff
- Reassurance regarding the significant checks and monitoring in place both before and after a child has been reunited with their family
- Good practice share with the Leeds Relational Practice Centre on the Reunification Project
- Action that would be undertaken, including working with other Local Authorities, if a family that had been reunited left the City
- Staff acceptance of the change in practice and how training has supported and enabled this
- Work undertaken to ensure that the diversity of the City is understood and dealt with appropriately and how staff are trained to ensure that a child of any age is able to have a voice and have the opportunity to be heard independently from family members. It was noted that this was dealt with in an age appropriate manner, for example play therapy for younger children
- The extensive work undertaken to ensure that families are understood
- Information regarding costs of intervention
- Safeguarding work undertaken with schools and the successful partnership working undertaken in this regard
- The impact on the service of children changing schools following successful school appeals and then the service having to build new relationships with professionals at the new school
- Court costs
- How the Reunification Project is initiated and how the child's need are always put first
- Staff welfare, particularly for those Teams that have reduced in number

Officers were thanked for their informative presentation and commended for all of the work undertaken in this regard.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board:-

- 1) Notes the Briefing Note in conjunction with the “Coventry Family Valued Impact Report and Next-Steps”.**
- 2) Notes, welcomes and supports the current progress and impact for children, young people and their families.**
- 3) Notes the challenges highlighted in relation to financial sustainability post funding and how this has been addressed.**

- 4) **Requests that the following information be circulated to the Scrutiny Board:-**
 - **The ethnic profile of children involved in the Reunification Project**
 - **Costs of different levels of intervention per child if not included in the Peer Challenge report**
 - **Information in relation to the impact on the service of children changing schools following successful school appeals and the service then having to build new relationships with professionals at the new school**
- 5) **Requests that sickness levels of staff be included when the Scrutiny Board considers Social Worker Recruitment and Retention at a future meeting.**
- 6) **Requests that the Scrutiny Board's thanks and appreciation for all of the work in this regard be forward to all appropriate officers via a letter to the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People.**

46. **Child Friendly Cov**

The Scrutiny Board considered a Briefing Note of the Director of Children and Education which provided an update on the activity and impact of Child Friendly Cov which was introduced as part of Coventry Family Valued. It is a partnership approach, between Coventry City Council, partners and local businesses, to make Coventry the best city in the UK for children and young people to live and grow-up in.

The Briefing Note indicated that Child Friendly Cov is co-produced with children and young people across Coventry, with Children and Education Services Participation Team being key to driving this forward, and co-ordinating young people, partner and business involvement. It was launched in February 2023, and since this time there has been considerable progress made. Some of the impact that Child Friendly Cov has made in its first year can be found in the Child Friendly Cov Impact Report 2023/2024, which was appended to the Briefing Note.

Initially there were four Child Friendly Cov pledges, with a fifth pledge added following the first year. The Child Friendly Cov pledges are that all children and young people in Coventry will:

- Be and feel safe
- Be and feel loved
- Be and feel healthy
- Be and feel valued
- Have opportunities

All of the priorities for Child Friendly Cov sit underneath one or more of these five pledges.

The One Big Voice Survey took place in 2024, with plans for this to be a bi-annual survey. The purpose of One Big Voice was to give children and young people

across Coventry the opportunity to help to shape the direction of services for children and young people in the city. The survey looked to seek the views of what Coventry's children and young people consider to be their priorities, and the results were analysed to influence the priority areas for Child Friendly Cov for 2024/2025. There were 3660 One Big Voice Surveys sent to schools, and 2797 surveys were completed. 30 schools in Coventry took part in the survey, 26 primary schools and 4 secondary schools. The results of the One Big Voice Survey are outlined in the Child Friendly Cov Impact Report 2023/2024.

The One Big Voice Survey results helped to shape the priorities for Child Friendly Cov for 2024/2025. These priorities are as followings:

- Promoting a healthy city
- Continuing to empower youth voice
- Addressing climate change
- A city for all
- Providing recreational opportunities
- Prioritising safety
- Fostering pride in Coventry

The Briefing Note highlighted some of the activities which have taken place under the different priorities:-

‘Promoting a healthy city’

- CAMHS Commissioning Service have created a website for children and young people outlining the different mental health and wellbeing services in the city.
- Coventry Rugby Club Development Team hosted 4 schools for sports day sessions on the day of Pupil Parliament.
- Sky Blues in the Community are running a Street Soccer Academy for care experienced young people.

‘Continuing to empower youth voice’:

- The second Pupil Parliament was hosted at the University of Warwick in June 2024. 18 primary schools from across the city were represented, with over 90 young people in attendance.
- A Young Person Accountability Group has been set up to feed into the partner led Child Friendly Cov Steering Group.
- The Participation Team and My Tomorrow (West Midlands Violence Reduction Partnership) are co-hosting quarterly sessions with key decision makers in the city. The first session took place with senior representatives from West Midlands Police and Coventry's Youth Justice Service, and the Police and Crime Commissioner for the West Midlands.
- The Herbert Art Gallery has hosted ‘The Unspoken Word of Art Exhibition’, featuring artwork created by children in care.

‘Address climate change:’

- The ‘Running Out of Time’ Relay Team visited Coventry on their journey from Ben Nevis to Big Ben, and the team ran a session focussing on climate change with young people as part of Pupil Parliament.

‘A city for all:’

- Consultation is taking place with young people around the provision for young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) to review the local offer and identify any gaps in service provision.
- The Care to Dance project has commenced, with performances planned for the Care Leavers Awards (November 2024) and Children in Care Awards (February 2025).

In addition to the above, the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme continues to ‘provide recreational opportunities’ for children and young people during the school holidays.

‘Prioritising safety:’

- The Safe Spaces initiative has been launched alongside West Midlands Police, providing safe spaces across the city for young people who need support.

‘Foster pride in Coventry:’

- One of the hosts of Pupil Parliament was an inspirational person from Coventry, who has gone on to be educated at Harvard. Coventry Live published a spotlight on his achievements.

The Briefing Note indicated that the key to Child Friendly Cov is the partnership approach across the city as a whole. While Child Friendly Cov is largely driven from within Children and Education Services, there are aspirations for Child Friendly Cov to be viewed not only as a Coventry City Council initiative but an opportunity for the whole city to come together for Coventry’s children and young people. To drive this partnership approach further, the Child Friendly Cov Steering Group has been restructured, with representatives from across the partnership, voluntary and business sectors, with the Young Person Accountability Group, feeding into this group and holding members to account. There are also plans in place for partners to lead on workstreams, under each of the Child Friendly Cov pledges, in order to drive the work of Child Friendly Cov forward, from both inside Coventry City Council, and wider, with stakeholder events planned with a focus on the pledges.

The Scrutiny Board asked questions, received answers, sought assurances and made comments on a number of issues including:-

- The location of Safe Spaces in the City, noting that the location in certain fast food outlets has been a result of close partnership working, and the possibility of extending those locations.
- The possibility of including licensed premises as Safe Spaces
- Information regarding the survey undertaken and responses received and how particularly secondary schools might be encouraged and incentivised to participate in future surveys. It was noted that every school had been afforded the opportunity to participate and that the results of the survey had prompted interest in schools for their inclusion in future surveys.
- The need to include those children not in school and electively home educated in future activity

- The work undertaken by the Child Friendly Cov Stakeholders Group and the membership of that Group
- The possibility of using the Child Friendly Cov logo as a “Kitemark” in schools
- Engagement with Primary and Secondary Heads
- Involvement in Local Democracy Week

The Scrutiny Board requested:-

- That all Members be offered Child Friendly Cov badges and stickers
- That the link to the new Child Friendly Cov video be circulated to all Members and co-opted Members of the Scrutiny Board when its available
- That the Chair of the Scrutiny Board be invited to future Safe Spaces Stakeholders meetings
- That the link with details of all of the Safe Spaces be circulated to Members of the Scrutiny Board

The Scrutiny Board thanked the officers for their presentation and commended all the work undertaken in this regard.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board:-

- 1) Notes the Briefing Note in conjunction with the “Child Friendly Cov Impact Report 2023/24” and welcomes and supports the current progress and impact for children and young people**
- 2) Requests that the following Recommendations be forward to the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People :-**
 - **That consideration be given to other types of food outlets, including food hubs, and community centres and libraries being included in Safe Spaces**
 - **That Home Educators be included and involved in all future work in this regard, particularly the survey**
 - **That Secondary schools be further encouraged to participate in future survey and consideration be given to providing incentives to participate**
 - **That consideration be given to licensed premises being included in Safe Spaces**
 - **That the possibility of using the Child Friendly Cov logo as a “Kitemark” in schools be investigated**
 - **That the engagement with Primary and Secondary Heads be welcomed and continued**
 - **That consideration be given to participation in Local Democracy Week particularly visiting Parliament by members of the Pupil Parliament.**
- 3) That the Scrutiny Board’s thanks and appreciation for all of the work undertaken in this regard be forward to all appropriate**

officers via a letter to the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People.

47. Work Programme

The Scrutiny Board noted a report of the Director of Law and Governance appended to which was the Work Programme for the remainder of the municipal year.

48. Any Other Items of Public Business

There were no items of urgent public business.

(Meeting closed at 12.20pm)

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Coventry City Council

Briefing note

To: Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)

Date: 28th November 2024

Subject: Coventry Holiday Activities and Food programme

1 Purpose of the Note

- 1.1 This note provides an update on the Coventry Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) are recommended:
- 1) To note the information in the report about the Coventry Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme.
 - 2) To promote the Coventry HAF programme and to support the national case for continued HAF funding post-March 2025.

3 Overview of the Holiday Activities and Food Programme

- 3.1 The Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme is a national initiative, aimed at addressing holiday inequalities through a blend of free positive activities and experiences coupled with healthy food and support to families.
- 3.2 The national aims of the programme are to ensure a high-quality experience that will result in children:
- receiving healthy and nutritious meals
 - maintaining a healthy level of physical activity
 - being happy, having fun and meeting new friends
 - developing a greater understanding of food, nutrition and other health related issues
 - taking part in fun and engaging activities that support their development and well-being
 - feeling safe and secure
 - getting access to the right support services
 - returning to school feeling engaged and ready to learn

Families should also be able to benefit from this support, and this could be through:

- providing opportunities to get involved in sessions, for example cookery classes
- ensuring they are signposted towards other sources of information and support, such as health services or employment and education opportunities

- 3.3 Coventry City Council is in receipt of an annual Department for Education grant (£1,587,840 for 2024/25 with a further investment of £50,000 from Coventry Building Society) and leads a multi-agency partnership to deliver activities in the Easter, Summer and Christmas school holiday periods.
- 3.4 The core eligibility criteria is statutory school-age children (reception to year 11) who are entitled to benefits-related free school meals. Local Authority areas have discretion to broaden eligibility and Coventry have extended this to include children assessed through a Children and Families assessment, undertaken by Children's Services, as in need, on a child protection plan, in care, assessed to be in financial hardship (through an early help assessment), or referred via the Migration and Resettlement teams. Children and young people in years 12-13 are eligible if they are in receipt of benefits-related free school meals (FSM) and have an Education and Healthcare Plan (EHCP) or are receiving special educational need (SEN) support at their place of education. There is also discretion for parents to refer appropriate children.
- 3.5 The national roll-out of HAF took place in 2021, with the first Coventry face-to-face delivery taking place in the 2021 summer holiday. This has included wider support through in person events in the build up to going live for the Summer 2024 HAF Programme, including a live cooking demonstration, support to the resettlement team event and in person booking support for families across the city.
- 3.6 HAF funding is in place until 31 March 2025, with Christmas 2024 currently being the last funded holiday. Coventry City Council is part of the national HAF network which is focusing on building the case for funding to be continued post-2025 in the context of increasing needs (e.g. Cost of living).
- 3.7 Further information on the national programme is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/holiday-activities-and-food-programme>
- 3.8 Further information on the Coventry HAF offer is available at <https://www.coventry.gov.uk/haf>.

4 Summer 2024 delivery

- 4.1 The 2024 school summer holiday programme was the most recent and most successful Coventry HAF holiday programme delivered. The following key statistics from the summer programme illustrate this:
- c.4,200 eligible children and young people benefitted (including c.1,400 children with SEND) plus thousands of other family members;
 - c.22,500 meals were provided;
 - c.22,500 sessions were delivered (an increase of 26% compared to summer 2023);
 - 120 different activities/clubs were delivered;
 - 43 providers were directly funded (see Appendix 1) with a further 50 sub-providers/partner organisations;

- 87% of funded places provided, were attended (up from 78% in summer 2023); and
- Families gave a 4.4/5-star feedback rating on the activities

4.2 Other key highlights from our Summer 2024 programme included:

- Use of a wide range of venues and locations including 20 primary schools, 8 secondary schools, 5 special schools, 1 university, 12 community centres, 10 leisure centres/sports facilities, 7 arts venues, 3 parks, 15 other locations/venues (see Appendix 2);
- An increase in the diversity of activities in line with our principle of “something for everyone” with the inclusion of plumbing skills, trauma therapy etc. (see Appendix 3 for the range of activities provided);
- Stronger partnership working with family hubs including family cooking sessions, and a SEND-specific activity bus at Families for All, Park Edge and Moat House Family Hubs;
- Improvements in the quality of food provided through partnership working and the support of our HAF Project Support Officer food nutritionist. Family feedback on our food offer was 4/5-star feedback rating; and
- Holy Family Larks and Owls Club (One of our Coventry HAF providers won Best HAF Provision in the Club Central Out-of-School Club Awards 2024)

4.3 Coventry HAF has a strong focus on inclusion and on children with SEND. Approximately one third of those who participate in the programme have SEND. This has been achieved in the following ways:

- Training and up-skilling of HAF providers;
- Communication with parents/carers and providers - ensuring the specific needs of individual children are shared through an “All about me” focus;
- Additional funding for providers for staffing to increase ratios;
- SEND family experiences – benefitting 382 families with 8 different experience providers; and
- SEND special school initiative – funded by Coventry Building Society for a second summer and working with 5 of our Coventry Special Schools – benefitting 128 eligible children plus family members.

4.4 Providers are assessed according to a range of standards including their activities, provision of healthy food, nutritional education, safeguarding, health and safety, and information shared with families. This assessment is both prior to awarding grant funding and post-delivery (based on delivery performance, visits, feedback from parents/carers and children).

4.5 There was significant promotion of the summer programme through provider and programme marketing including: brochures and letters to eligible households, promotion through schools, social media, texts, promo-videos and other means.

4.6 A video capturing the HAF summer 2024 programme has been produced – please see the link <https://vimeo.com/1028618184/2447db9978> to view this.

5 Winter 2025 programme

- 5.1 The Coventry HAF winter programme will have opened for bookings on the 18th November. This will offer children and their families a wide range of activities over the school Christmas holiday period, building on our previous Christmas holiday programmes.

6 Areas of focus for Coventry HAF 25/26

- 6.1 Coventry HAF is a well-developed programme, with very positive feedback. Subject to a continuation of funding for HAF, the programme will continue to develop and build on its strong foundations, with a continued focus on our youth offer (in partnership with secondary schools, the Coventry Youth Partnership, Universities and others). There will also be a continued focus on the development of our offer to children and young people with SEND, food (including nutritional education), and increasing the take-up / reach of the offer.

7 Health Inequalities Impact

- 7.1 Addressing inequalities is a key part of the HAF programme and the programme has a positive impact on health inequalities through positive activities, healthy food, and food education. The Summer 24 programme has had a focus on food quality as highlighted above.

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Summer Holiday Providers

Appendix 2: Locations and Venues

Appendix 3: Types of Activities Included in the Summer Programme

Name of Author: Adrian Coles

Job Title: Education Programme Manager

Organisation: Coventry City Council

Contact details: Adrian.Coles@coventry.gov.uk

Appendix 1: Summer holiday providers

The following providers were directly funded:

Aptitude, Arts a Riot, Ascension Dance Company, Baginton Fields School, Barr's Hill School, Cardinal Newman Catholic School, Canley Community Centre, Coventry Boys and Girls Club, Coventry Music, Coventry Outdoors, Coventry Rugby, Coventry SDA, Cre8fun, Creative Optimistic Visions, CV Life/Culture Coventry, Edgewick Primary, Empow-U/Energ!se, Epic Academy/SCCU, Feeding Coventry, Guardian Ballers, Guiding Young Minds, Highly Sprung, Holbrooks Community Care Association, Holy Family Primary School (Larks and Owls club), Jam Coding, Kingsbury Academy, My Activities, Onside Coaching Plumb Learning, Project Number 5, Razzamataz Theatre Schools, Rising Stars, Riverbank School, SDH Academy, Sport Works, Sprint Active Education, Sky Blues in the Community, Staffordshire Winter Sports Club (Planet Ice), Tiverton School, Tribe: Cheer, Dance and Fitness, University of Warwick Holiday Scheme, Vanny Radio, WATCH/Hillz FM, and Woodfield School.

Appendix 2: Locations and venues

Activities took place in the following locations:

- **Primary schools:** Aldermans Green, Allesley Hall, Charter, Edgewick, Frederick Bird, Gosford Park, Grangehurst, Henley Green, Holy Family, John Gulson, Keresley Grange, Leigh C of E, Manor Park, Our Lady, Ravensdale, Sidney Stringer Primary, Stoke Heath, Stretton, Southfields, Walsgrave C of E
- **Secondary schools:** Barrs Hill, Cardinal Newman, Cardinal Wiseman, Finham Park 2, Grace Academy, Lyng Hall, President Kennedy, Sidney Stringer
- **Special schools:** Bagington Fields, Kingsbury, Riverbank, Tiverton, Woodfield
- **Community Centres/facilities:** Bethel Church, Broad Horizon Enterprise Centre, Canley Community Centre, Coventry Boys and Girls Club, Coventry Central SDA church, Eastern Green Village Hall, Foleshill Community Centre, Holbrooks Community Centre, Holbrooks Community Care Association, Stoke Park Youth Centre, The Crez (Jubilee Crescent Community Centre), WATCH
- **Leisure Centres/sports Facilities:** The Wave, Alan Higgs, AT7 Centre, Coventry Rugby (Butts Park Arena), Moat House Neighbourhood and Leisure Centre, Planet Ice, XCEL Leisure Centre, Coombe Abbey Go-Ape! Tamworth Snowdome, Warwickshire Shopping Park (Tribe RLS Elite – Dance)
- **Arts:** The Albany Theatre, Coventry Transport Museum, Daimler Powerhouse, FarGo, Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Lunt Roman Fort, Macready Theatre, Warwick Arts Centre
- **Parks:** Coombe Abbey Country Park, Edgewick Park, Gosford Green, Holbrooks Park
- **University:** University of Warwick
- **Other locations:** Aqualand, Ash End House Children's Farm, Aztec Adventure, Cadbury World, Cliff Lakes Aqua Park, Electric Wharf (Plumb Learning), Drayton Manor Theme Park, Hatton Farm/Adventure World, National Space Centre, Perkisound Recreational Centre, Sealife Centre, Red Kangaroo Trampoline Park, Skegness, Spencer's Retreat SEND Care Farm, Ten-pin bowling, Twycross Zoo, Western-Super-Mare, York Railway

Appendix 3: Types of activities included in the summer programme

The following are examples of the types of activities included in the programme:

Animation, archery, art master classes (creative journaling, floral water-colours, illustration skills, oil painting, street art murals) Aqualand, Aztec adventure, BBQ, badminton, basketball, bouncy castles, breakfasts, broadcasting, bushcraft and survival, chef academy, cheerleading, choreography, coding, circus skills, climbing, combat archery, cooking, crafts (tie dye, quilling, origami, gemtastic jewellery and fabric), creative journaling, cricket, dancing, drama, drawing, DJ-ing, fitness, football, forest school, fun days, giant board games, go- karting, gadgets, gaming, gardening, gymnastics, horse riding lessons, ice-skating lessons, inflatable air track, inflatable bungee, karaoke, inflatable assault course, lacrosse, laser tag, lego building, lava lamp making, MicLab (sustainable stations, stop motion animation, stitch in time, connections and innovations), movies, movie making, multi-activity clubs (crafts, sports, arts etc.), music workshops, netball, ninja warrior, paintballing, performance (parkour, free running and contemporary dance), performing arts, photography, physical theatre, picnics, podcasting, plumbing lessons, pool, pottery, radio, rap, robotics, roller skating, rounders, rugby, singing, science, SEND sensory corner, skateboarding lessons, stable management, sports day, stop-motion animation, swimming lessons, team building, tennis, trampolining, tree-top adventure, tug-of-war, The Wave, trips (Western Super Mare, Drayton Manor, Go-Ape, Hatton Park, Red Kangaroo, Cliff Lake Aqua Park, Tamworth Snowdome, Warwick Arts Centre, York Railway, Skegness, London, West Midlands Safari, National Space Centre, Lunt Roman Fort, Ash End Farm), ultimate frisbee, videography, water sports, water-colour/ink painting, zip wire and much more...



Coventry City Council

Briefing note

To: Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)

Date: 28 November 2024

Subject: Social Worker Recruitment and Retention – Workforce Update

1 Purpose of the Note

- 1.1 To inform the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) of the Social Worker Recruitment and Retention implementation and impact to date.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Education and Children's Scrutiny Board (2) are recommended to:

- 1) To note the current progress.
- 2) Identify any items to look at in more detail on the work programme 2024-5.
- 3) Identify any recommendations for the appropriate Cabinet Member.

3 Information/Background

- 3.1 Recruitment and retention of social workers continues to be a national problem and accepted in the government's response to the Independent Review of Social Care. The workforce profile over the past few years has led to Children and Education Services supporting a "grow our own" approach, with a key focus on enabling social workers into the profession and developing into experienced social workers with high quality practice standards.
- 3.2 The local picture in Coventry in many ways mirrors the regional and national picture. Coventry has continued to face challenges to recruitment and retention of social workers, which has impacted the stability of the workforce, and the number of agency staff required to cover vacancies. Coventry is based within the West Midlands but also within commuter distance to East Midlands. It is therefore in an area where there are several local authorities all competing for the same pool of social workers, which makes it a competitive market for social workers.
- 3.3 In 2023/2024 investment was approved for Children and Education Services to support the recruitment and retention of social workers. This was in response to a challenging period, where a mix of high case levels, difficulty recruiting

experienced social workers and a limited supply of suitable agency staff meant that children's social worker vacancies were significantly high.

- 3.4 Coventry Children and Education Services vision for the Social Work workforce is to secure a stable, permanent, highly skilled and capable workforce. Coventry's practice approach has evolved since the launch of Coventry Family Valued, as Coventry Children and Education Services has become more relational and restorative, and more recently, Rethink Formulation has been introduced as a tool to support practitioners to rethink practice 'with' children and families further, and to support the growing relational and restorative culture in Children and Education Services and across the partnership.
- 3.5 A stable and permanent workforce can more effectively work with children, young people and families in a way which supports to improve outcomes.
- 3.6 In November 2023, a report on Social Worker Recruitment and Retention initiatives was presented to Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board members. This report provides an update to reflect the impact over the last twelve-month period.
- 3.7 The summary below highlights the key recruitment and retention initiatives implemented:
 - In 2023/24, a retention payment was paid to experienced social workers, advanced social workers and senior practitioners who remained in post for a period of twelve months up to 31 March 2024.
 - A Progression Pathway for experienced social workers launched in April 2024 to provide experienced social workers the opportunity to progress to Advanced Social Workers.
 - A Progression Pathway for newly qualified social workers launched in September 2024 to provide newly qualified social workers the opportunity to progress six months earlier subject to meeting ASYE and competences.
 - A review of the Social Work Academy has been completed to embed a structure to support delivering the workforce to meet service demand and the needs of our children, families and communities.
 - The Social Work Academy continues to deliver with 48 newly qualified social workers coming through the Academy this year to reduce the number of vacancies and reliance on agency staff and spend.
 - A total of 25 Apprentices are undertaking a Social Work Apprenticeship (5 commenced in in September 2024; 6 Apprentices complete in June 2025, and 14 complete in June 2026).
 - 9 Social Work Students commenced in September 2024 as part of the fast-track programmes (6 Step up students), and (3 Frontline students)
 - The service is looking to develop a Social Care Academy initially for residential staff to recognise the skills and expertise of other staff within children's social care, that are not social workers to integrate knowledge, skills and training and develop staff.
 - The Clinical supervision offer extended for 2024/5 following the success of the pilot in 2023.

- Flexible Working 9-day fortnight has been piloted and rolled out to the wider service area to support staff/social workers with maintaining a work life balance.
- A successful wellbeing offer for all staff continues to be offered to support wellbeing and retention of staff.
- Regular Social Worker Recruitment open evenings, held jointly with Adults Social Care to increase the number of social workers.
- Staying Interviews are held with staff to highlight the benefits of working in Coventry and responding to areas of development.
- Children and Education Services have launched a Relational Social Work Podcast available on all major podcast platforms or via this link: [The Relational Social Work Podcast](#) to support practitioners thinking and provide reflective practice.
- A further retention payment to existing Advanced Social Workers and Senior Practitioners with no replacement progression offer who remain in post until 31 March 2025.

4 Recruitment and Retention

4.1 To build stability within the workforce and reduce the number of social workers leaving, experienced social workers received a retention payment in 2023/24. The retention payment of £3,000 was payable to social workers who had completed 12 months service from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, paid in their March salary. New Social Workers appointed after 1 April 2023, received the retention payment on completing 12 months service from their start date, this was replaced by a Progression pathway for experienced social workers to provide the opportunity to progress to Advanced Social Workers through a panel process implemented from 1 April 2024.

4.2 Data has indicated that the retention payments have made some positive impact on retention rates with a reduction in social workers leaving the service. In 2023/24 (**40**) social workers left compared with (**68**) in the previous year 2022/23. (The term social workers refer to Social Workers, Advanced Social Workers and Senior Practitioners job roles who received the retention payment). The table below provides a comparison over two years as of 31st March 2024, to highlight the impact after 12 months showing an increase in the retention rate from 44% to 58% and a reduction in the number of agency social workers providing cover from 47 to 37.

Grade	Starters		Leavers		% Retained		Agency SWs (as on 31/03/2024)	
	22-23	23-24	22-23	23-24	22-23	23-24	22-23	23-24
G6 (No retention payment) Social Worker	56	48	26	22	30%	26%	n/a	n/a
G7 Social Worker	20	20	18	9	2%	11%	23	22
G8 Advanced Social Worker	17	17	14	3	3%	14%	19	13
G8 Senior Practitioner	19	13	10	6	9%	7%	5	2
TOTAL	112	98	68	40	44%	58%	47	37

- 4.3 In April 2024, neighbouring local authorities launched retention schemes, at the time Coventry's retention payment was ending. This was a potential risk for the service for Advanced Social Workers and Senior Practitioners considering moving away from Coventry. For Social Workers this was deemed less of a risk with a new progression scheme implemented from 1 April 2024 replacing the retention payment. There was no replacement progression offer for Advanced Social Workers and Senior Practitioners.
- 4.4 In response to the risk of losing Advanced Social Workers and Senior Practitioners a retention payment of £1,800 was approved and will be paid on completion of 12 months service on 31 March 2025.
- 4.5 The service continues to hold regular recruitment Open Evening events throughout the year. An event was held in March and November this year jointly with Adults Social Care. Recruitment events are marketed as an informal networking opportunity, offering attendees the chance to engage with the team, explore career opportunities, and participate in on-the-spot interviews for permanent Social Worker positions.

5 Progression pathway for Social Workers to Advanced Social Workers

- 5.1 The retention payment offer was put in place as an interim measure from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, to be replaced by a progression pathway for experienced social workers implemented on 1 April 2024.
- 5.2 The previous progression framework required social workers to wait for a vacant Advanced Social Worker position to become available prior to applying. The progression panel process provides social workers the opportunity to apply for progression by evidencing their competency at an Advanced Social Worker Progression Panel. As part of the application process, social workers can state a preference for an existing vacancy or state a preference to progress within a team where there are less than two Advanced Social Workers in a team.
- 5.3 An Advanced Social Worker is highly skilled and will take responsibility for the more complex, or high-risk work with children and families, with a high degree of personal accountability and autonomy. The role also includes supporting team members through mentoring, coaching and advancing the expertise and professional competence and confidence of others.
- 5.4 The Advanced Progression Panels are held three times a year (March/July/November), social workers applying for progression are asked to provide feedback to help improve and streamline the process.
- 5.5 The opportunity of a progression pathway has supported eight social workers to progress supporting the retention of experienced social workers who want to live and work in Coventry, reducing the reliance on agency social workers.

6 Progression Pathway for Newly Qualified Social Workers to Social Worker

- 6.1 The Social Work Academy supports Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) to grow and develop their skills, capabilities and competencies. It has enabled staggered cohorts of Newly Qualified Social Workers into the service, as a strategy to build a permanent, stable workforce whilst reducing spend on agency social workers across a medium-term strategy. This financial Year

2024/5 will bring 48 qualified social workers into children services at 4 entry points, with two support teams to safely adopt this approach.

- 6.2 Under the current social worker academy model, NQSW's progress to a social worker role after two years of service including their ASYE – Assessed and Supported Year in Employment, and through a panel progression process subject to meeting the competences required to progress to a social worker.
- 6.3 Data shows that this progression approach means that NQSW's in Coventry are paid less in their first year than those who train through other Local Authorities. In 2022/3 26 NQSW's left, with 22 leaving in 2023/24. The current Social Work Academy retention rate is 70% based on the last three years.
- 6.4 In response to the risk of NQSW's leaving, the progression pathway has been reviewed, ceasing the progression panel at year two. The new panel process is led by the service teams to support progression of those practitioners who meet the criteria to progress earlier, as each practitioner is ready at varying points with varying capabilities. The revised progression pathway commenced in September 2024, with the first panels to be held in December 2024. This will help to retain newly qualified social workers and the risk of leaving early.

7 The Clinical Supervision Offer

- 7.1 The Clinical Supervision was introduced as a six-month pilot in February 2023 to support Social Workers and address key challenges, including retention, sickness rates, and reliance on agency staff. It was extended beyond September 2023, as it offered clear benefits in reducing work-related stress and improving overall wellbeing.
- 7.2 During the pilot phase there was a total of 11 referrals, with a further 17 referrals between September 2023- March 2024. The offer continues to be provided with a further 11 referrals in the first part of the financial year. Feedback received confirms improvement in wellbeing following clinical supervision sessions, reinforcing the service's positive impact on stress management and resilience. Initial results are encouraging, the service is focusing efforts on promotion and data collection to ensure the full potential of the offer is accessed by staff.
- 7.3 The service believe good quality clinical supervision is having a positive impact on staff retention and lowering sickness rates as the Clinical Supervision is embedded and promoted further.
- 7.4 Children and Education Services continues to offer Wellbeing weeks twice a year, this includes monthly wellbeing activities. Feedback from staff is positive, *staff stating: 'inclusive and welcoming' 'real range of events' 'offer is amazing' 'don't stop all the good work with wellbeing'*. To ensure wellbeing is accessible to all staff multiple locations are offered. The service continues to improve the wellbeing offer to ensure more inclusive, flexible and accessible to all to help support retention of staff.

8 Flexible Working

- 8.1 The compressed working hours (9-day fortnight) was piloted in three service areas within Children and Education Services between October 2023 and February 2024. The pilot areas included: the Fostering service, the South Area Teams and the Professional Support service. The 12-week pilot explored the

implications of a wider roll out of the opportunity to work 74 hours over 9 days giving an additional free day per fortnight.

- 8.2 As a result of the success of the pilot, the 9-day-fortnight was rolled out and promoted further across Children and Education Services on 4 September 2024. To date 119 employees are working a 9-day fortnight. Feedback is positive providing employees with a better work life balance and support in managing family and children.

9 Overall impact – Workforce Stability

- 9.1 Children and Education Services experience significant workforce pressures, with the high turnover of social worker staff and high level of vacancies and difficulty in recruiting agency staff to cover vacancies.
- 9.2 To attract, recruit and retain a stable permanent workforce and to remain competitive in the market, the recruitment and retention initiatives are helping to support and stabilise the workforce pressures.
- 9.3 The impact of the retention payment and delivery of 48 newly qualified social workers through the Social Work Academy is supporting the reduction in the number of vacancies and reliance on agency staff. The service continues to promote the benefits of working within the service, encouraging Agency workers to apply for vacancies.
- 9.4 The impact of the recruitment and retention initiatives over the last two years are highlighted below:

	Vacancies as of October 2022	Agency staff covering vacancies as at October 2022	Vacancies as of October 2023	Agency staff covering vacancies as of October 2023	Vacancies as of October 2024	Agency Staff covering vacancies as of October 2024
Social Worker	22	12	8.5	10	9	3
Advanced Social Worker	17	12	12	10	1	5
Senior Practitioner	8	2	1	1	2	0
Team Manager	5	3	1	1	1	1
Total	52	28	22.5	22	13	9

10 Next Steps

- 10.1 The service will continue to promote Children and Education Services as a good place to practice social work and offer incentives and benefits to recruit and retain more experienced social workers to secure a stable, permanent, highly skilled and capable workforce.
- 10.2 As a Good authority, the service is proud that Ofsted recognised the achievements in supporting good outcomes for children and young people in Coventry, creating an environment where good social work practice can flourish.
- 10.3 The Children and Education Services Workforce Development Strategy is aligned to the Corporate People Plan, it outlines strategies to support and improves the recruitment and retention of children's services practitioners, including through the training and development offer.

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Coventry City Council

Briefing note

To: Education & Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)

Date: 28 November 2024

Subject: Homes for children in care - update report

1 Purpose of the Note

- 1.1 The purpose of this note is to update the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) with an update on the complexities of finding homes for children in care- update report following an initial report at the meeting 23 November 2023.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board are recommended to:
- 1) Continue to support the Residential Strategy 2023-2026.
 - 2) Note the two additional homes for our children with the most complex needs
 - 3) Support the work being undertaken in relation to sufficiency, addressing high-cost placements and improving outcomes for our children in care.
 - 4) Identify any recommendations for the appropriate Cabinet Member

3 Background and Information

- 3.1 In the last 2-3 years there has been a marked increase in the number of children and young people in care that local authorities have struggled to find appropriate homes for. This is a widely reported national issue and is a consequence of several interlinked factors, which were highlighted in Competition and Market's Authority report of March 2022, the Independent Review of Children's Social care of May 2022 and the Government's consultation response to this review – Stable Homes, Built on Love (February 2023). There is national recognition that the children's placement market is broken.
- 3.2 Pro Bono Economics reported on the national challenges in October 2024: *The number of children in residential care has more than doubled (102% increase) since 2011 with spending on these placements jumping by 90% (an increase of £1.1billion). Almost half of this increase has come in the last two years.*
- 3.3 The Coventry practice model 'Family Valued' works on the premise of keeping children and families together when it is safe to do so. This approach seeks to enable families to find the solutions to challenges they face. Families are supported through Family Network Meetings and Family Group Conferences (FGC) and additional support to identify family led solutions.

- 3.4 Family led solutions include kinship arrangements (connected fostering) which are sought, when a child is unable to remain safely with their parent/s. This area has seen significant growth in Coventry, with around 120 children now being placed in a kinship arrangement and 40 children being supported to achieve permanence through a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) last year.
- 3.5 The number of children in care decreased earlier this year, with 668 children being in care as of April 2024. However, in line with an annual trend of more children entering care over the summer period, this increased to 720 by September 2024.
- 3.6 There are currently 69 children living in a residential children's home (end of September 2024), placed by Coventry Children's Services, an increase of 10 children from April.
- 3.7 When children enter care urgently or need to move at short notice, finding the right home for a child in the current market can be challenging, providers may request funding for additional resources particularly if a child is moving from one children's home to another. In addition, the impact on the child having to move can further perpetuate their sense of rejection, self-worth & subsequent trauma. A report by the County Councils Network & IMPOWER published in November 2024 states: *Councils are faced with unenviable choices when needing to place a child taken into care at short notice – they cannot just be left homeless until a suitable price can be negotiated for their care.*
- 3.8 The new 'Short Stay, Same Day' children's home which is due to open imminently, seeks to address some of these challenges by enabling a planned move, supporting a robust search for the right home, at the right time, in the right place.

4 Financial Context

- 4.1 The challenge for Coventry is that the average unit cost of placements has been sharply increasing from year to year. An exercise undertaken by the Regional Commissioning Hub in December 2023, identified that high cost placements featured across the region, confirming demand outstripped availability of the right home in the right place to meet children's needs.
- 4.2 Although there are residential homes within the local market and Coventry is seeking to extend to 12 homes in the future, it still remains extremely difficult to find homes for our most complex children who exhibit significant trauma linked behaviours.
- 4.3 External Residential (excluding Block) costs have more than doubled over the last 5 years.

5 Mitigating activity

- 5.1 The Sufficiency Steering Group, alongside the Children's Commissioning Team carry out needs analysis into the issues to inform potential commissioning solutions, which has led to several actions/ workstreams.
- 5.2 **Placement mix projections:** The placement mix is tracked throughout the year and reported monthly, on a finance scorecard. To project future movements in the placement mix, input is gathered from across children's services.
- 5.3 Once compiled, the placement mix is modelled across the next financial year along with the anticipated unit costs to create expected budgets.
- 5.4 Actuals versus projections are reviewed regularly including at the monthly Sufficiency Steering Group Meeting. In addition, expected delivery against budgets

Services Leadership Team monthly business meeting and regular meetings between colleagues from finance and children's services.

- 5.5 **Fostering excellence program** seeks to build upon the growth of the number of carers caring for Coventry's children, be this through a connected, mainstream or next steps arrangement and enhance the support offered to carers to ensure stability and permanence wherever possible. The service has successfully grown the number of emergency foster carers, who are now on a rota and able to provide care for children entering care in an emergency and support children while appropriate homes are found for them on a longer-term basis.
- 5.6 An independent review via the DfE, undertaken by Fosterlink in March this year identified areas of strength in our recruitment and has created an action plan for further opportunities to strengthen this. This includes targeted recruitment activity to reflect the range of 'placement types' being sought, e.g. Parent and child, to increase the diversity of our foster carers and targeted postcode recruitment where larger properties exist that may be able to support the recruitment of carers for sibling groups.
- 5.7 **The Residential strategy (2023-2026)** sets out a plan to open a further 5 further children's homes, bringing the total to 10, run by Coventry City Council. A short stay/ same day and the first purpose-built home for children in care with a disability, are due to open in November 2024. 1 child has already been matched to our CWD home who would otherwise need to be placed in an external children's home and early discussions are currently taking place to facilitate a move for another young person currently placed in an external residential home.
- 5.8 There have been challenges in finding suitable properties in the city, alongside the timeliness of renovations of purchased properties to ensure they meet the required building/ fire/ H&S regulations, alongside meeting the safeguarding requirements assessed by Ofsted to achieve registration. To address this, an interim 6-month project manager post from the Education Capital Team has been established to drive forward current and future projects.
- 5.9 In addition to this a further 2 children's homes have been agreed as part of the medium-term financial strategy bringing the total to 12. These 2 additional homes will care for our most complex children, who subsequently are in the highest cost provision. Some are subject of a Deprivation of Liberty Safeguarding order (DoLS) and have been discharged from hospital following significant concerns regarding their mental health. An opportunity has recently arisen to apply for a DfE grant to support 50% of the capital funding of these homes and consideration will be given to submit a bid on behalf of the Council.
- 5.10 **House Project & Staying Close**, plans are in place to increase the number of cohorts, with Cohort 5 due to commence later this year, following 42 young people now having successfully been supported by the project.
- 5.11 Several children from children's homes have successfully moved onto their own home through the House Project and will receive ongoing support through "Staying Close", from their former carers and through Lifelong links networks.
- 5.12 **Next Step foster carers.** The Next Steps fostering scheme has seen significant growth in this area over the last 12 months. These fostering placements offer a supportive, safe, and nurturing family environment. Eleven households are currently part of the scheme, with thirteen young people living in a family home. These children have either moved from residential or would have been placed in a residential home. Five of the children are long-term matched with their carers. This

continues to show success in significantly improving outcomes for the children placed with Next Steps carers alongside delivering tangible cost saving/avoidance.

- 5.13 **Reunification project:** Since the launch of the Reunification Project in June 2021, 38 children have returned to the care of their parents(s) through this project, with a further 19 children, young people and their families working towards reunification. 24 children who were previously in a residential setting have returned home, resulting in a significant level of cost avoidance against the placement budget.
- 5.14 **Regional contracts.** Working in partnership with the Commissioning Hub and local authorities across the West Midlands a new regional framework was implemented in September 2024 to address some of the challenges linked to securing homes for children through Independent Fostering Agencies. 58 agencies have signed up to the contract, supporting us to work with them on improving quality and fixed costs. In addition, a new regional residential framework is being developed, with the aim to address the challenges of working with providers through 'Spot' purchasing, enabling fixed contract costs, regional quality assurance and access to more homes closer to Coventry. It is anticipated that this will be implemented in April 2025.
- 5.15 **Strategic Lead oversight** is in place which includes weekly Resource & Placement Stability Panel and bi-monthly residential review. A bi-monthly review is undertaken of all children living in residential care, to consider their plans to move on, in line with their care plan. Alongside this, children in residential care with additional packages of support are reviewed weekly. This meeting actively tracks each package with additional support and works with social workers and providers to reduce the package in line with need. It is of note that the last 3 children that have moved into our internal children's homes were previously in a commissioned placement at a higher cost outside of Coventry.
- 5.16 **Peer review-** An LGA Peer Review took place over 3 days in October 2024 to consider Efficiencies and Resources within Children's Services. In preparation for the peer review, a Position Statement was produced and several documents were shared in advance to support focused discussions. On day 3 of the review, initial feedback was shared, identifying areas of strength, alongside areas of suggested development. The full report has yet to be received, however an initial draft action plan has been developed to expedite some actions across the Council and by the Children's Service Leadership Team.
- 5.17 In addition to the Peer Review, we are also taking part in National Support Work for forecasting, commissioning, and market shaping, through Mutual Ventures (via DfE), with further scoping work planned for the winter of 2024/25.
- 5.18 **Joint working with Health.** Joint Health funding is provided for those children who are discharged from hospital, having been sectioned under S2 of the Mental Health Act, under s.117 and for some children with complex needs.

6 Health Inequalities Impact

- 6.1 There is significant work being undertaken with the ICB in relation to meeting the needs of children with complex mental health, Autism and/ or a learning disability that require bespoke residential care. Children with one or more of these diagnoses and who are in an external residential home that supports their health need, are reviewed in a monthly joint meeting with Health colleagues.
- 6.2 For some children being discharged from a Tier 4 hospital, where there is a need for a registered provision, challenges persist where there are few or no providers who are willing/or able to care for them.

- 6.3 Joint work is being undertaken to enhance preventative services and reduce the number of children who access hospital due to their mental health needs.
- 6.4 Working in partnership with Warwickshire County Council and the ICB, a review of all policies, procedures and packages of care linked to children accessing Continuing Healthcare is in progress and we are cautiously awaiting the outcome of this review which we anticipate will be favourable to both Coventry and Warwickshire.

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Agenda Item 8

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) Work Programme 2024-25

Last updated 20th November 2024

Please see page 2 onwards for background to items

11th July 24
Early Years Strategy
12th September 24 - cancelled
17th October 24
Family Valued and Reunification Project Child-friendly Cov
28th November 24
Cost of Children's Placements (Update Report) HAF Update Social Worker Recruitment and Retention
16th January 25
Safeguarding Board Annual Report Children's LGA Peer Challenge
13th February 25
School Performance Attendance – changes to statutory guidance
13th March 25 PM (moved from 27th March 25)
SEND Strategy Sufficiency – Early Years, Mainstream and SEND
17th April 2025
Items for 2024-25
Family Health and Lifestyles Service – health inequalities Youth Provision in Coventry Health and Wellbeing in Schools Early Help
Items for 2025-26
Early Years Strategy
Items taken for information
Adoption Service Annual Reports – November Fostering Annual Report - November

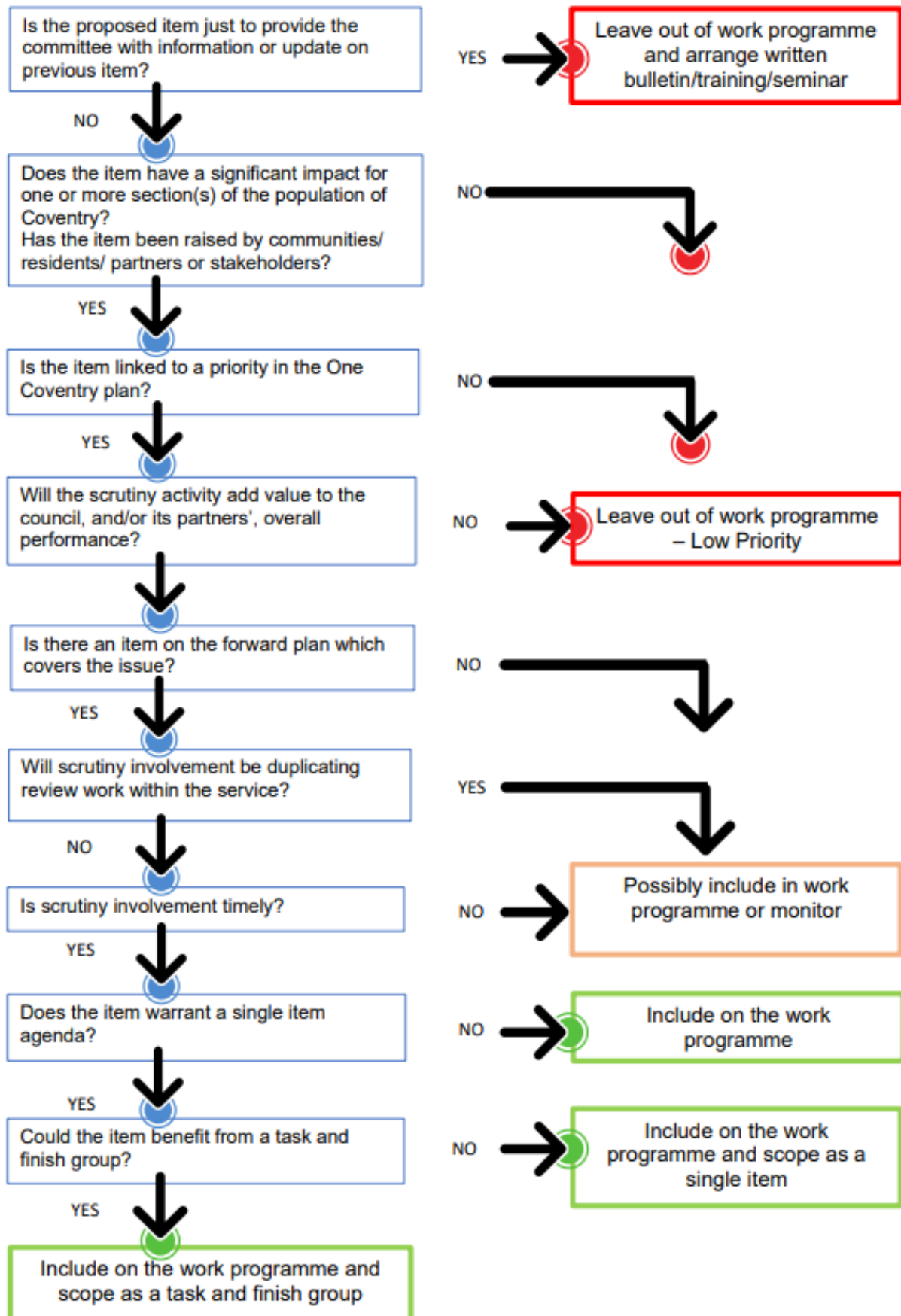
Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) Work Programme 2024-25

Date	Title	Detail	Cabinet Member/ Lead Officer
11th July 24	Early Years Strategy	Following a report on the Early Years Strategy, Members requested a further item including progress on and more detail on the Saplings Programme, as well as strategies to support reading in the early years. To invite Chair of SB5	Rachael Sugars Cllr Sandhu
12th September 24 - cancelled			
17th October 24	Family Valued and Reunification Project	A progress and impact report	Cllr Seaman Sukriti Sen
	Child-friendly Cov	A progress and impact report on the Child Friendly Coventry project	Cllr Seaman Sukriti Sen
28th November 24	Cost of Children's Placements (Update Report)	At their meeting on 23 rd November 2023, Member requested an update item to report on progress in addressing the cost of placements	Sukriti Sen Cllr Seaman
	HAF Update	To consider progress on delivering the HAF programme	Adrian Coles Cllr Sandhu
	Social Worker Recruitment and Retention	A progress update following the previous item in November 2024 – to consider how the use of agency staff has been reduced. To also include work being done to reduce sickness and support the well-being of staff.	Sukriti Sen Cllr Seaman
16th January 25	Safeguarding Board Annual Report		
	Children's LGA Peer Challenge	To consider the recommendations from the LGA Peer Challenge on Children's Services	Cllr Seaman Sukriti Sen
13th February 25	School Performance		
	Attendance – changes to statutory guidance		Rachael Sugars Cllr Sandhu
13th March 25 PM (moved from 27th March 25)	SEND Strategy	Following on from an item on 18 th April 2024 the Board requested an update to be circulated to the Board	Cllr Sandhu Jeannette Essex

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) Work Programme 2024-25

Date	Title	Detail	Cabinet Member/ Lead Officer
	Sufficiency – Early Years, Mainstream and SEND	To tie in with the Cabinet Report due in February. To provide previous report as background from 18/4/24	Rachael Sugars Cllr Sandhu
17th April 2025			
Items for 2024-25	Family Health and Lifestyles Service – health inequalities	To looking in more detail at how the service is tackling health inequalities and targeting services at those in need on a localised basis. School nurse provision.	Harbir Nagra Cllr Caan
	Youth Provision in Coventry	How and where we work with outside partners (and specifically the third sector) to deliver it	Sukriti Sen Cllr Seaman
	Health and Wellbeing in Schools	To look at what is being done to promote health and well-being in schools and universities – including the school nursing service	
	Early Help	To include workforce plans and placements for apprenticeships etc	Sukriti Sen Cllr Seaman
Items for 2025-26	Early Years Strategy	To come in 2025 and to include progress on actions requested on 17/7/24 re: oral and dental health	R Sugars Cllr Sandhu
Items taken for information	Adoption Service Annual Reports – November	Annual report – including information about the diversity of the adoption panel and adopters as well as support to birth mothers after their children have been adopted	Cllr Seaman
	Fostering Annual Report - November	For Members to consider whether a full item is required	Cllr Seaman

Work Programme Decision Flow Chart



By virtue of paragraph(s) 1, 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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