

**Coventry City Council**  
**Minutes of the Meeting of Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)**  
**held at 10.00 am on Thursday, 10 July 2025**

Present:

Members: Councillor L Kelly (Chair)  
Councillor J Birdi  
Councillor J Gardiner  
Councillor S Gray (substitute)  
Councillor S Jobbar  
Councillor R Lancaster (substitute)  
Councillor M Mutton  
Councillor S Nazir  
Councillor R Thay

Co-Opted Members: Mrs Sybil Hanson, Mr David Jackson and Mr Ghulam Vohra

Other Members: Councillors P Seaman (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People), K Sandhu (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills), and B Christopher (Deputy Cabinet Member for Children and Young People)

Employees (by Service Area):

Children and Education C Heeley, J Jones, R Sugars, A Whitrick

Law and Governance G Holmes, T Robinson

Apologies: Councillors E Reeves and A Tucker

## **Public Business**

### **1. Declarations of Interests**

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests.

### **2. Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on the 10th of April 2025 were agreed and signed as a true record.

There were no matters arising.

### **3. Cabinet Members' Priorities and Work Programme 2025/26**

The Board considered a Briefing Note and presentation of the children and education service area to identify areas for further scrutiny to add to the work programme – attached to the report at Appendix 2. Officers presented their vision

for the service area, a detailed overview of each department, the key priorities for 2025-26 and those of the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Councillor P Seaman, and the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, Councillor K Sandhu – the presentation was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

In considering the briefing note and presentation, the Board questioned officers, received responses, and discussed matters as summarised below:

- Ways to reduce the burden on the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) – the development and implementation of the Effective Support document that promotes partnership working to reduce the demand on the service whilst improving conversion rates of first contact to referrals and ensure the right support is identified for families.
- Coventry's MASH performance in comparison to other local authorities.
- Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) and the reasons why some fail.
- The provision of secure accommodation in the West Midlands for care leavers in custody and young offenders and the future development of a secure care facility in the West Midlands.
- The funding arrangements for the Family Group Conferencing service.
- Communication and data sharing arrangements for multi-agency working.
- The Woodlands School Site planned opening in September 2026.
- Coventry's response to the national increase of home education and ensuring every child is properly educated.
- Truancy and its effects on different demographics – utilising research to understand contexts and policy approaches.
- Approaches to bulge classes throughout the education lifecycle – ensuring there is provision when there is a bulge and managing the over-provision in times of no bulge.
- The Alternative Provision Academy replacing the Extended Learning Centre for excluded children.

The Cabinet Members further outlined their priorities following the update from the service area. Councillor Seaman highlighted that with the introduction of the care reforms and Coventry already being well placed to enact these, there would still be some significant changes to children's services over the next year. Additionally, the service would continue to expand and invest alongside building upon the work of MASH, the Kinship Strategy, and Lifelong Links to find better outcomes for children and their families.

Adding to these sentiments, Councillor Sandhu, highlighted how key education projects would add value over the next municipal year. Mainly, the service area would focus on sufficiency of school places, managing SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) and its budget, implementing a smart phone campaign in schools, and continuing the successful work of the Holiday and Activities Programme (HAF).

These priorities prompted further questions on the following matters from the Board:

- Foster friendly employers and the national drive amongst local authorities to attract foster carers in their areas.

- The success of the Kinship Strategy in working to prevent children from going into care.
- The increasing difficulty of the SEND budget in schools.
- The costs of transport for schools – both for SEND pupils and for school sports trips.
- That schools still have playing fields and the rules in place to prevent the sale of the land.
- The workforce strategy for social workers and its impact on vacancies and retention.

**RESOLVED that the Education and Children’s Services Scrutiny Board (2):**

**1) Identifies the following further items to be considered for the Work Programme 2025-26:**

- A progress report and update on MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub).
- Children absent from education – including truancy, alternative provision and elective home education.
- Recruitment and retention for children social care staff.
- Family Hubs and the overlap with MASH.
- The sufficiency of homes for children.
- The Kinship Strategy and work undertaken before children come into care.

**4. Any Other Business**

There were no items of public business.

(Meeting closed at 11.50 am)