



### **Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)**

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**Time and Date**

10.00 am on Thursday, 16th October, 2025

**Place**

Diamond Rooms 1 and 2 - Council House

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**Public Business**

1. **Apologies and Substitutions**
2. **Declarations of Interests**
3. **Minutes** (Pages 3 - 8)
  - a) To agree the minutes of the meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> of September 2025.
  - b) Matters Arising.
4. **Children's Services Annual Adoption Report 2024/2025** (Pages 9 - 20)

Report of the Director of Children's and Education Services.
5. **Children's Services Annual Fostering Report 2024/2025** (Pages 21 - 46)

Report of the Director of Children's and Education Services.
6. **Children's Services Resources and Efficiency Peer Challenge Progress Against the Recommendations** (Pages 47 - 52)

Briefing Note of the Director of Children's and Education Services.
7. **Work Programme** (Pages 53 - 58)

Briefing Note of the Scrutiny Co-ordinator.
8. **Any Other Business**

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

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Julie Newman, Director of Law and Governance, Council House, Coventry

Wednesday, 8 October 2025

Note: The person to contact about the agenda and documents for this meeting is Asher Veness Email: [asher.veness@coventry.gov.uk](mailto:asher.veness@coventry.gov.uk)

Membership: Councillors J Birdi, B Christopher (By Invitation), J Gardiner, S Hanson, Jackson (Co-opted Member), S Jobbar, L Kelly (Chair), M Mutton, S Nazir, E M Reeves, K Sandhu (By Invitation), P Seaman (By Invitation), R Thay, A Tucker and Vohra (Co-opted Member)

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**Asher Veness**

**Email: [asher.veness@coventry.gov.uk](mailto:asher.veness@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, 11 September 2025**

Present:

Members:                                   Councillor L Kelly (Chair)  
  Councillor J Birdi  
  Councillor J Gardiner  
  Councillor M Mutton  
  Councillor S Nazir  
  Councillor E M Reeves  
  Councillor K Sandhu (by invitation)  
  Councillor P Seaman (by invitation)  
  Councillor R Thay

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

Employees (by Service  
Area):

Education and Children           F Parlken, R Sugars, S Sen, A Whitrick

Law and Governance               G Holmes, A Veness

Apologies:                               Councillors B Christopher, S Jobbar and A Tucker

## **Public Business**

### **5.       Declarations of Interests**

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests.

### **6.       Exclusion of Press and Public**

**RESOLVED** that the Board agrees to exclude the press and public under Sections 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 relating to the private report in Minute 12 below headed 'Homes for Children in Care – Update Report' on the grounds that the report involves the likely disclosure of information as defined in Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. The grounds for privacy are that it refers to information relating to an individual and the financial or business affairs of an organisation and the amount of expenditure proposed to be incurred by the Council under a particular contract for the supply of goods or services. The public interest in maintaining the exemption under Schedule 12A outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

### **7.       Minutes**

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

There were no matters arising.

## 8. **An Overview of Coventry Outdoor Education Service (Coventry Outdoors)**

The Board considered a briefing note of the Director of Children and Education that provided an overview of the Coventry Outdoor Education Service including future developments and plans for celebrating 60 years of Dol-Y-Moch.

Coventry Outdoors delivered a diverse programme of educational and personal development experiences for children, young people, and adults through outdoor learning and activity. The service operated at Coombe Abbey Country Park and the outdoor residential centre, Plas Dol-y-Moch situated in North Wales (Eryri National Park).

From 1966 – 2021 Coventry had operated an Outdoor Education service comprising Plas Dol-y-Moch, and in more recent years an Educational Visits Advice and Guidance service, and some Duke of Edinburgh provision.

Coventry's outdoor education had traditionally centred on Plas Dol-y-Moch. Whilst these were highly valued experiences this one-off experience approach did not promote children's access to sustained and broader outdoor learning. The concern was that this disproportionately impacted disadvantaged children who may already face significant barriers to accessing green space.

In 2021, following consultation with schools and partners, the City Council committed to expanding the service. This led to the launch of the In-City Outdoor Education Service at Coombe, aimed at providing more children and young people with regular local access to high-quality outdoor learning with the aim of providing wide-ranging benefits for health, wellbeing, and education. There was also an outreach service into schools.

Coventry Outdoors operated as a traded hybrid model of educational provision and commercial delivery to ensure a financially viable service met the City Council's expectation that traded services operated on a full cost recovery basis.

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

- Accessibility was afforded to low-income families, particularly those with limited access to green spaces, with many schools funding the majority of costs, with some splitting costs between students, to ensure trips were the best value possible for the lowest cost.
- Efforts were being taken to support low-income families, including using Coombe Abbey for further in-city trips and encouraging sustained and intergenerational connection with and use of available resources such as allotments for example.
- Although other companies claimed to offer lower upfront prices, the Council's holistic approach included transport and food, indicating that the Council did offer competitive rates.

- The profile of the programme had been raised using the use of HAF and family hubs leading to over 700 students accessing the programme in the city last year alone.
- The programme was financially self-sustainable in a traditionally difficult market through extensive effort and effective planning with further expansion being planned.
- Working alongside the Duke of Edinburgh award and the King's Trust had led to numerous success stories, with details given of two previously NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) young people using the support of the programme to become more confident, better trained and employed with one put forward for a Pride of Britain award.
- The 75 apprentices on the course were undertaking level 5 apprenticeships, equivalent to a foundation degree, and all were already employed. This would support the creation of outdoor education specialists who would, through CPDs, become qualified teachers in 2 years' time.
- Out of 122 schools only 20 didn't use the service as, although there was increasing take-up, use of the service was optional, and they could choose alternates.
- Due to the protected nature of the floodplains surrounding Dol-Y-Moch, there were significant limitations on any building or expansion on site.
- There was some collaboration with international partners but there were currently no plans for liaising with American scout groups due to constraints over booking availability and remaining financially self-sufficient.
- Efforts were being made to encourage more diverse participation in the programme e.g. protective helmets for activities that worked with different types of religious/cultural headwear, and through liaising with key agencies who promote similar inclusive programs.
- Due to school led bookings it was difficult to ensure specific age groups attended. Most students currently attended during year 6, an important transitional time and therefore a valuable time to build a connection with nature.
- Some home educated students stayed a Dol-Y-Moch with their families and efforts were being made to increase inclusion at in-city provision.
- Joint teambuilding exercises were being done at Coombe Abbey with the Army Cadets.

The Board requested that Plas Dol-Y-Moch took into account cultural and religious considerations in future developments, and further requested they be kept informed of Dol-Y-Moch 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations.

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

- 1) Notes the information provided in the Briefing Note.**
- 2) Agrees that an additional meeting be added to the Work Programme to be held at Coombe Abbey to enable the Board to visit the outdoor education facilities and further discuss the city-based aspect of the Coventry Outdoor Education Service.**

**9. The complexities involved in finding homes for children in care and associated costs**

The Board considered a briefing note of the Director of Children and Education outlining ongoing challenges in the children's social care market, recent national developments, and local authority responses.

A corresponding private briefing note detailing confidential matters relating to individuals was also submitted for consideration (Minute 12 below refers).

In the last 4 years there had been a marked increase in the number of children and young people in care that local authorities had struggled to find appropriate homes for. This continued to be a widely reported national issue and was a consequence of several interlinked factors, which were highlighted in the Competition and Market's Authority report of March 2022, the Independent Review of Children's Social Care of May 2022, and the Government's response to this review – Stable Homes, Built on Love (February 2023).

There was national recognition that the children's 'placement' market was broken. Recent research published by the LGA in May 2025 considered the 'Costs and complexity in care. The real drivers of high-cost placements for children in care'.

Nationally, there had been a reduction in the number of mainstream foster carers of 9.6% since 2021, alongside a significant growth in new children's homes of 15% in the last year, with 84% of all homes being run by private organisations. However, it is important to note that the size of a mainstream children's homes (how many children are cared for) continues to reduce with the average new home now caring for only 3 children, compared to 4 in 2023/2024.

Research had identified that these problems broke down into two main areas and the Government had started to consider ways in which these could be addressed, alongside wider Social Care and Education reforms. As reported to the Scrutiny Board in November 2024, the two main areas were identified as:

1. A lack of placements of the right kind in the right place, thereby increasing risk of unregulated placements with providers making materially higher profits and charging significantly higher prices than if the market were functioning effectively.
2. A concern of the high level of debt some providers have and the impact if they exited the market as this would further exacerbate sufficiency and the ability of local authorities to meet the needs of these children.

The effectiveness of the fostering excellence programme, which supported a wide range of children including those with health issues or in complex needs homes, were specifically outlined.

In considering the Briefing Note, the Scrutiny Board asked questions, received responses and discussed a number of matters as summarised below.

- The Board acknowledged the overspend on children's placements, which was primarily the result of a broken placements market. Steps were being taken locally as well as nationally to address the issues, but there was

recognition that children were not always placed in their home local authority and there were children from other authorities placed in Coventry.

- The 14 local authorities included authorities from the wider West Midlands area and not just West Midlands Combined Authority members.
- There was a broad national reduction in the number of public and private foster carers, although there were attempts to conduct local and national recruitment campaigns.
- Family group conferences were not self-funded but could be very effective at reducing the numbers of children coming into the care system.
- Efforts were being made to ensure recruitment of foster carers was as efficient and easy as possible without compromising the high standards of foster carers. The council frequently worked with potential foster carers to resolve issues such as lack of spare rooms.
- Whether standards, which were largely set at the national level, could be reviewed for foster carers to make recruitment more accessible. It was noted that any reduction in standards could put children's wellbeing at risk and that the Council needed to be completely assured in relation to placing its vulnerable children in the care of others.
- Where possible, the aim was to keep children with their families, and the Council would support family led solutions in any way it could.
- The Council put child safety as its highest priority and took standards of care very seriously.
- Short stay homes were valuable for keeping children with sudden changes in situation safe, whilst at the same time saving the Council significant money that would have been spend on alternative external placements.

The Board resolved to update the Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board (1) with their responses to referred questions.

**RESOLVED that, subject to the consideration of the additional confidential information contained in the corresponding private report (Minute 12 below refers), the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2):**

- 1) Notes the information provided in the Briefing Note.**
- 2) Formally acknowledges Coventry City Councils support of the 14 local authorities in the West Midlands by managing the West Midlands Commissioning Hub and leading on the Regional Frameworks for both Fostering and Residential homes.**

10. **Work Programme**

**RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board's Work Programme for 2025/26 be noted.**

11. **Any Other Business**

There were no items of public business.

12. **The complexities involved in finding homes for children in care and associated costs**

Further to Minute 9 above, the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) considered a private briefing note of the Director of Children and Education that contained confidential information relating to individuals.

**RESOLVED that further to Minute 9 above relating to the public aspects of the briefing note the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2):**

- 1) Notes the information provided in the private Briefing Note.**
- 2) Agrees that an additional meeting be added to the Work Programme to reconsider this item at the end of the municipal year to scrutinise the regional aspects of the West Midlands Commissioning Hub, the Safe Centre and any proposed legislative changes.**

(Meeting closed at 12.20 pm)





Coventry City Council

## Briefing note

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

**16 October 2025**

**Subject: Children's Services Annual Adoption Report 2024/2025**

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### **1 Purpose of the Note**

- 1.1 To inform the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) of adoption activity and performance in 2024/2025. (Appendix 1)

### **2 Recommendations**

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

- 1) To note the outcome and progress in 2024/2025
- 2) Identify any recommendations for the appropriate Cabinet Member.

### **3 Information/Background**

- 3.1 Each local authority is required by regulation to publish an annual adoption report. The Annual Adoption Report (Appendix 1) provides an overview of adoption activity and performance for the year 2024-2025.
- 3.2 Coventry Children's Services delivers adoption services in partnership with the Regional Adoption Agency – Adoption Central England (ACE), which has been operational since 1<sup>st</sup> February 2018. This is in accordance with national policy that all local authority adoption services were required to be part of a Regional Adoption Agency by 2020.
- 3.3 ACE provides a number of services as a local authority shared services arrangement hosted by Warwickshire County Council. Details of the services provided by ACE are included in the Annual report.

### **4 Local authority adoption activity and performance update**

- 4.1 The review of adoption activity and performance data is outlined in the Annual Adoption report attached. (Appendix 1).

## 5 Summary and priorities for the next 12 months

5.1 In partnership with ACE the local authority plans to improve and develop its adoption practise in the following key areas:

- Continue to develop collaborative working across Children's Services to for effective pre-birth, pre-proceedings and care proceedings to ensure timely permanence is achieved for all children.
- Continue to ensure fostering for adopt / early permanence is considered for every child where appropriate and a rationale for decision is recorded.
- Continue to collaborate with ACE on an operational and strategic level (via the ACE Executive board) regarding sufficiency challenges in ACE to minimise delay for children being matched with adoptive families.
- All social workers who are working with children who have a plan / potential plan of adoption will undertake permanency planning training offered by ACE to continue to promote good practice in this area.
- All social workers will undertake training on life story work, life story books offered by ACE to continue to promote good practice in this area.
- Coventry to have an established framework for assessing and supporting post adoption relationship maintenance between Adoptive families and Birth families.

### Appendix 1: Adoption Annual Report 2024/25

#### Authors:

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# Coventry Children's Services Annual Adoption Report 2024-2025



Children's and Education Services

We believe children and young people in Coventry should always...

- be and feel valued
- be and feel safe
- have opportunities
- be and feel healthy
- be and feel loved

## Coventry Children's Services Annual Adoption Report 2024-2025

### Contents

1. Introduction
2. Local Authority Update, including review of Service Plan 2024-2025
3. Service Activity
4. Service Performance
5. Service Plan 2025-2026

### 1. Introduction

Each local authority is required by regulation to publish an annual adoption report. This provides an overview of adoption activity and performance for the year 2024-2025.

Coventry Children's Services delivers adoption services in partnership with the Regional Adoption Agency – Adoption Central England (ACE), which has been operational since 01<sup>st</sup> February 2018. This accords with national policy that all local authority adoption services were required to be part of a Regional Adoption Agency by 2020.

ACE provides the following services as a local authority shared services arrangement hosted by Warwickshire County Council:

- Recruitment, preparation, and assessment of adoptive parents
- Family finding and specific recruitment.
- Matching support and post order support to adoptive families for 12 months
- Non agency adoption - the provision of information assessments and court reports
- Assessment of need for adoption support including requests to the Adoption Support Fund
- Direct support to adoptive families including therapeutic interventions.
- Training for adopters and support groups
- Independent birth parent support services - Family Connexions
- Training for social workers
- Duty and advice service
- Co-ordination of Adoption Panels across the sub-region.
- Individual and couple counselling service

- Space2Talk – adoptive parents wellbeing.

This arrangement with ACE allows for a greater strategic approach to adopter recruitment, widening the potential pool of adopters for children. Adoption support services have been enhanced including the provision of therapeutic interventions, counselling and wellbeing services that are delivered and coordinated more consistently and effectively across the region.

Coventry's engagement with ACE is underpinned by a Hosting and Partnership Agreement and through the governance arrangements and partnership working there is an opportunity to ensure that the best possible outcomes are secured for children in a timely way and that adoptive families receive high quality support when they need it. In January 2021 ACE became the first adoption service to be DDP certified.

## **2. Local authority update**

Over the last 12 months, staffing has continued to be stable, and overall good progress has been made towards permanence for children who had a care plan of adoption.

### Review of Service Plan 2024 – 2025

In partnership with ACE the local authority plans to improve and develop its adoption practise in the following key areas:

Continue to develop collaborative working across Children's Services for effective pre-birth, pre-proceedings and care proceedings to ensure timely permanence is achieved for all children.

Following the 2023 relaunch of the Public Law Outline and implementation of the tracker supporting timely assessments within Care Proceedings there has been positive collaborative working in this area.

A pre-birth pathway is well established (from 23-24) and has continued to strengthen the effectiveness of care planning for unborn babies and with the Pre-Proceedings strengthened over the last 12 months has ensured that families are supported effectively and timely.

For the financial year 2024 / 2025, there has continued to be a marked improvement in the number of children entering pre-proceedings following a threshold discussion at the initial Legal Planning Meeting (LPM) stage, with 87% of families entering pre-proceedings and only 13% requiring immediate issue. For the families who proceeded straight into care proceedings rather than pre-proceedings, the rationale for this was entirely appropriate in that the risks for these families were either of a potential Non-Accidental Injury (NAI) nature or concerns around capacity of parents to consent to Section 20 accommodation or safety planning due to acute mental health illness at the presenting time.

This data indicates that at the point of the initial LPM, and where safe to do so, families are being given the opportunity to work through a pre-proceedings process, engage in support, intervention and assessment with the primary aim to divert from the court process, and where not able to, the Local Authority upon any care application being made are doing so with completed assessments and well informed permanency plans for children.

For this financial year there has been an increase in the number of families diverted from care proceedings at the conclusion of pre-proceedings rising to 44% compared to 34% in the previous year.

The number of families subject to pre-proceedings prior to the issuing of any care application to Court was 79% at year end, which has remained consistent with the figure for the previous year. This means that for a high proportion of families where care proceedings are issued, we are doing so with assessments undertaken and care plans for children well informed, including examples of filing final care plans at point of issue.

With regards to care proceedings, the improvements made in the previous year have been embedded into practice for the current year. For Coventry, the annual average case duration for the year decreased by 3 weeks to 31 weeks compared to 34 weeks for year 2023/2024, and 50 weeks for year 2022/2023. In the last 2 years we have reduced our average case duration by 19 weeks', and we currently sit 9<sup>th</sup> in the national league table (out of 43).

For the year 2024/2025, 40% of proceedings concluded within 26 weeks which is the same as the previous year's figure and we have seen a continued improvement in the number of proceedings concluding at IRH rising to 76% compared to 73% for previous year.

The consistency in the performance of effective Issues Resolution Hearing's (IRH) has been pivotal in reducing the average case duration for care proceedings. Concluding at IRH prevents the need for listing a contested final hearing, which in turn extends the proceedings further. Where a final hearing is needed to be listed, having an effective IRH means that remaining issues are narrowed, and witness templates are scrutinised so that the time estimates for proposed final hearings are kept to a minimum. Shorter final hearings can be listed much quicker than multiple day hearings. The culture embedded into the need for effective IRH for care proceedings in Coventry Court is key to ensuring we secure timely outcomes for children and families.

More recently, this good practice has been showcased at a National level, with the President of the Family Division taking a keen interest in how Coventry has been able to make such progress in this area, and with support of the DFJ for Coventry and Warwickshire (who has utilised the data set monitored by Case progression officer), has shared such practice with DFJ areas around the Country.

Continue to ensure fostering for adopt / early permanence is considered for every child where appropriate and a rationale for decision is recorded.

Coventry implemented an early permanence tracking system (2023-2024) to ensure early discussion of children who are subject of pre proceedings who may require permanence to be sought outside of the family. ACE colleagues attend this meeting to consider any foster for adopt carers at the earliest opportunity.

During the 2024 – 2025, 3 children were placed on a foster for adopt basis. Coventry made referrals for 6 children during the 2024 – 2025 period.

Foster for Adoption was not progressed for 2 of the children for two reasons: one child had identified adopters, however they later withdrew due to the recommendation for post adoption direct contact with birth parents and one child the care plan changed to one of connected carers. The third child was placed foster for adoption with the sibling' adopters in the next

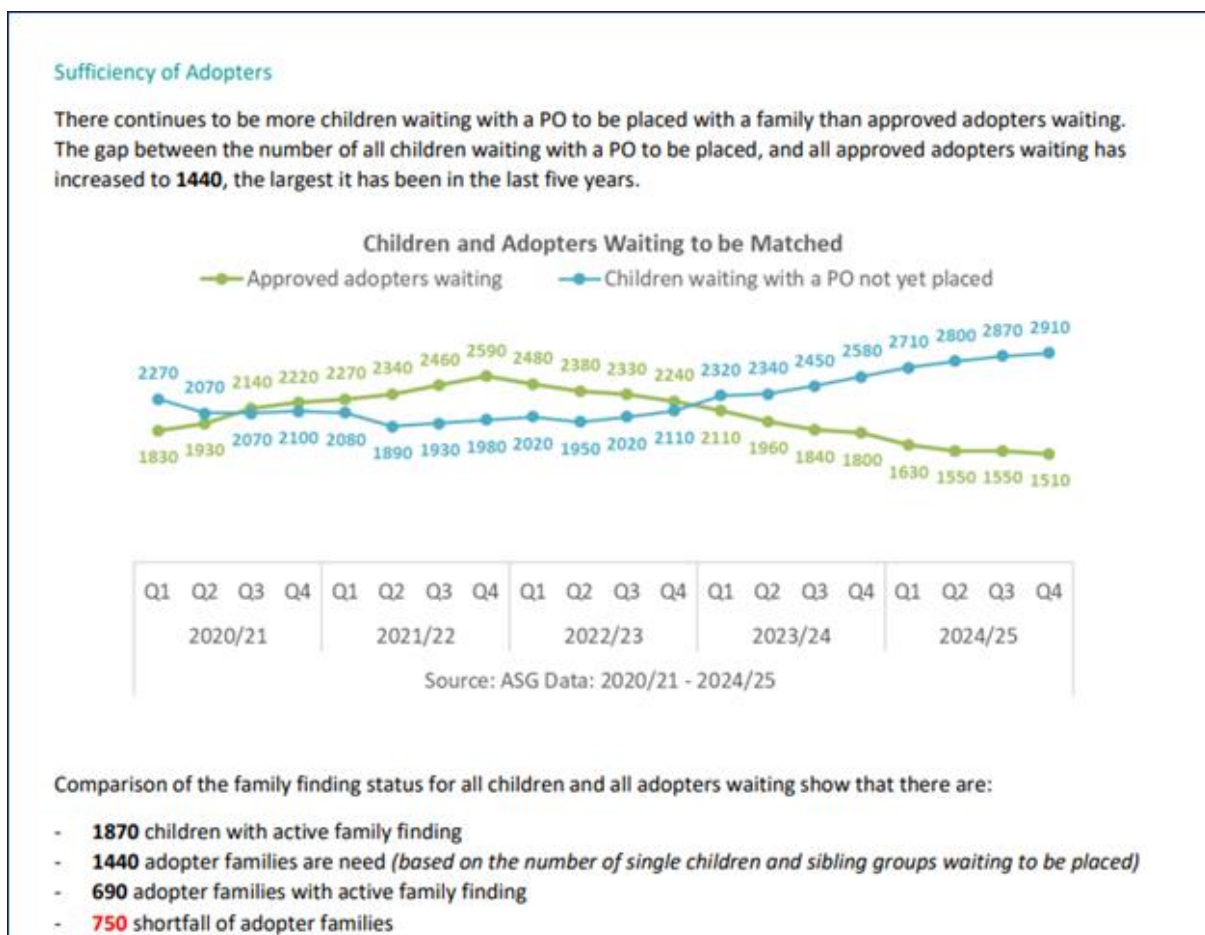
quarter falling into the 2025-2026 year and is therefore not represented within the 'placed' data for this reporting year.

The application for the Early Permanence Quality Mark has been submitted within the 2024-2025 period through collective evidence gathered by Adoption Central England and the consortium of Local Authorities.

Continue to collaborate with ACE on an operational and strategic level (via the ACE Executive board) regarding sufficiency challenges in ACE to minimise delay for children being matched with adoptive families.

Sufficiency remains a national problem with fewer adopters approved to adopt. Ultimately this means that our children are often waiting longer to be matched. There continues to be quarterly managers meetings between the ACE consortium, made up of the respective local authorities and ACE partners. Discussions take place around the ways in which ACE are addressing this and what strategies are happening to promote adoption.

For context, the recent publication by the ASGLB (2024/2025) highlights the sufficiency matters nationally.



All social workers who are working with children who have a plan / potential plan of adoption will undertake permanency planning training offered by ACE to continue to promote good practice in this area.

All practitioners in Coventry continue to be encouraged and supported to attend relevant training via ACE. ACE have a comprehensive training offer which covers all elements of adoption planning. ACE colleagues also attend meetings to share learning and disseminate practice development matters. Coventry registered 26 places on training with ACE during 2024/2025. Further work is being completed to ensure take up is good across children's services.

All social workers will undertake training on life story work, life story books offered by ACE to continue to promote good practice in this area.

As part of both coventry City council and ACE's training offer, practitioners are encouraged to attend training that will support the completion of life story work and life story books.

Practice exemplar's using the Joy Rees model are available to staff to further support this area of work.

Coventry continues to embed the Richard Rose model of life story work, this is enhanced through regular workshops / training internally delivered.

Coventry and ACE to consider collectively the full Best Practice Report upon its publication and work together to plan for promoting a more open approach to post adoption contact.

Coventry is working closely with CAFCASS, who will be part of recommending and endorsing post adoption contact within the court arena. We held a joint training event with CAFCASS on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2024 with the contribution of ACE. Coventry remains committed to working with change and wherever safe to do so, consideration will be given to an open adoption approach where we can achieve the best for our children and families, post adoption.

Coventry is working on its practice approach to more open adoption arrangements; the guidance and practice pack is currently in development. Coventry has been careful to ensure that the recommendations and practice falls in line with Coventry Family Valued. In order to do this, we have considered the views and recommended tools by both ACE and Coram BAAF and completed consultation with social work practitioners who undertake Adoption work within Coventry.

It is anticipated that the final proposal will be before the extended leadership team in September 2025 for their sign off.

### **3. Service activity**

Adoption recruitment activity is reported by ACE.

Overall Children's Services performance:

	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
ADM decisions that a child should be placed for adoption	50	48	36



Placement orders granted by the court	50	42	29
Matched with prospective adopters	40	35	20
Number of children placed with adopters	34	36	23
Adoption applications submitted	38	45	24
Number of children adopted	32	56	18
Children placed with adopters at period end	25	9	17
Number of children with placement order awaiting match	33	37	36
Number of children subject to an adoption plan change	6	10	10
Number of adoptive placement disruptions	0	0	0

In summary, the number of children with an ADM endorsed care plan for adoption has reduced by twelve in 2024-2025 when compared with 2023-2024. There has been a decrease from 42 to 29 Placement Orders granted from the period 2023 - 2024 and 2024 - 2025. This is likely to be attributed to the increased work Coventry is doing within its family valued framework and connected persons placements.

There remain more children needing adoptive families than adopters approved to be matched with children. Fewer potential adopters are expressing an interest in being assessed to adopt. This continues to be a national problem and not bespoke to ACE. This is likely to be the contributing factor to the decrease in number of children matched in this period comparable to the year previous.

The number of children where permanency was achieved via adoption has decreased from 56 in the period of 2023 - 2024 to 18 in the period of 2024 – 2025. This falls in line with a decrease in the number of children with plans of adoption and the sufficiency matters related to adoptive families.

Coventry is the second highest for the number of children matched with families within the ACE region. Attendance of social workers and the family finder at bi-monthly adoption clinics and bimonthly adoption “catch ups” ensures that all children where there is a plan of adoption are kept under review to avoid any drift and delay.

Securing early permanence via foster for adopt, has remained a priority, ensuring where possible that children secure permanency at the earliest opportunity – 3 children were successfully placed on this basis.

There have been no adoption disruptions.

#### 4. Service Performance

National Performance Indicators	Government Target	Coventry performance	Coventry performance	Coventry performance
		2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
<b>A2</b> - Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (days)	122 days	172 days	222 days	216 days
<b>A3</b> - Children who wait less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (number and %)	14 months	35% (39 of 112)	34% (38 of 112)	38% (31 of 82)
<b>A10</b> - Average time in days between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family adjusted for foster carer applications		508 days	574 days	460 days
<b>A20</b> - Average time in days between entering care and placement order		333 days	376 days	234 days

The average wait of 216 days against the A2 indicator is above the government target (122) however indicates a small improvement from the previous year (222 days).

Coventry remains committed and aspirational in achieving permanence via adoption for our children with complex needs and those considered harder to place. 7 children (38%) of granted adoption orders were for children considered harder to place.

The average time children waited between entering care (A10) and moving in with their adoptive families has decreased by 114 days indicating the impact of timely care proceedings and matching when adoptive families are identified. The A20 indicator has also decreased by 142 days over the last year, this again providing evidence of the impact of timely care proceedings.

It is important to note that positive collaborative working relationships with ACE continue. Where possible there remains early identification of potential adopters, meaning that adopters can be identified for some children prior to the placement order. Notwithstanding the national sufficiency picture in respect of adopter availability, where we have been able to identify matches these have progressed.

The following are some good examples of permanence being achieved for children during the last year.

This year has seen two instances of adoption for children of an older age;

An 11-year-old girl whose Placement Order was granted back in 2018 but revoked in 2021 achieved permanence with her foster carers via adoption in September 2024.

A 14-year-old girl was adopted by her foster carers with the adoption order being granted on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2024.

Whilst this is the private avenue of adoption, this demonstrates the commitment that Coventry has to achieving permanence via adoption where appropriate to do so throughout a child's looked after journey.

A 5-year-old little boy whose Care and Placement Order's were granted on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2022, found his right family and moved in with them on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2024 with successful transitions, despite a lengthy time in foster care.

## **5. Coventry City Council Service Plan 2025-2026**

In partnership with ACE the local authority plans to improve and develop its adoption practise in the following key areas:

- Continue to develop collaborative working across Children's Services to for effective pre-birth, pre-proceedings and care proceedings to ensure timely permanence is achieved for all children.
- Continue to ensure fostering for adopt / early permanence is considered for every child where appropriate and a rationale for decision is recorded.
- Continue to collaborate with ACE on an operational and strategic level (via the ACE Executive board) regarding sufficiency challenges in ACE to minimise delay for children being matched with adoptive families.
- All social workers who are working with children who have a plan / potential plan of adoption will undertake permanency planning training offered by ACE to continue to promote good practice in this area.

- All social workers will undertake training on life story work, life story books offered by ACE to continue to promote good practice in this area.
- Coventry to have an established framework for assessing and supporting post adoption relationship maintenance between Adoptive families and Birth families.

**Chantelle Davies**

**Adoption Lead**

**Children in Care Team**

**08<sup>th</sup> August 2025**



Coventry City Council

## Briefing note

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

**16 October 2025**

**Subject: Children's Services Annual Fostering Report 2024/2025**

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### **1 Purpose of the Note**

- 1.1 To inform the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) of fostering activity and performance in 2024/2025. (Appendix 1)

### **2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 The Education and Children's Scrutiny Board (2) are recommended to:
  - 1) To note the outcome and progress in 2024/2025
  - 2) Identify any recommendations for the appropriate Cabinet Member.

### **3 Information/Background**

- 3.1 Foster care is subject to legislative and regulatory guidance through The Children Act 1989, The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the Fostering Services: National minimum standards 2011. It is further regulated through the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations published in 2010 and the Assessment and Approval of Foster carers guidance 2013.
- 3.2 The regulatory framework for fostering sets out the minimum standards expected to ensure that the care provided by foster carers is adequate to ensure that those children placed within fostering homes are well cared for and achieve good outcomes.
- 3.3 The requirement for fostering agencies to produce an annual report is primarily set out by Ofsted and governed by the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, specifically Regulation 35, along with the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services, particularly Standard 25.7. This can be found at Appendix 1.

## **4 Fostering Service activity and performance update**

- 4.1 The purpose of the annual report is to evaluate the effectiveness of the fostering service; to identify areas for improvement and development; to ensure compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements; to inform stakeholders, about the service outcomes and future plans. The review of the Fostering service activity and performance data is outlined in the Annual Fostering Service report attached. (Appendix 1).

## **5 Summary and priorities for the next 12 months**

- 5.1 The Fostering Service plan to improve and develop the following key areas in 2025/2026:

- Continue to drive the Fostering Excellence Project to enable increased capacity and resilience of internal mainstream fostering households
- Continue to develop recruitment of carers from a range of diverse backgrounds to more closely match the backgrounds of children in care
- Identify reasons for drop out between enquiry, expression of interest and approval, to improve conversion rate
- Finalising and launch Coventry's Kinship strategy and offer
- Continue to develop Kinship fostering in line with the Kinship strategy and our Kinship offer and aim to increase permanence through special guardianship arrangements
- Ongoing growth of the Next steps fostering scheme
- Relaunch parent and child and out of hours schemes
- Launch a short stay provision to support families in need to prevent children coming into care
- Continue to ensure foster carers are consulted about all changes that affect their role
- Widen mentoring offer for connected persons carers and offer to applicants during the assessment process
- Review support available to children of foster carers and newly approved foster carers during their induction period
- Embed DDP principles and continue to upskill all workforce caring for children

Appendix 1: Fostering Annual Report 2024-25

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# Fostering Annual report. 2024-2025



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## 1. Introduction:

Foster care is subject to legislative and regulatory guidance through The Children Act 1989, The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the Fostering Services: National minimum standards 2011. It is further regulated through the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations published in 2010 and the Assessment and Approval of Foster carers guidance 2013.

The regulatory framework for fostering sets out the minimum standards expected to ensure that the care provided by foster carers is adequate to ensure that those children placed within fostering homes are well cared for and achieve good outcomes.

The requirement for fostering agencies to produce an annual report is primarily set out by Ofsted and governed by the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, specifically Regulation 35, along with the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services, particularly Standard 25.7.

### Who Requires the Annual Report?

- **Ofsted:** As the regulatory body, Ofsted collects annual data from both local authority fostering services and independent fostering agencies. This data collection provides a national overview of fostering services and performance.
- 
- **Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011:**
  - **Regulation 35** states that fostering agencies must prepare a written report on the management and outcomes of the service and submit it to the executive side of the local authority or agency board.
  -
- **National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services:**
  - **Standard 25.7** reinforces the requirement for agencies to review and report on their performance, ensuring transparency and accountability.

## 2. Purpose of the Annual Report:

- To evaluate the effectiveness of the fostering service.
- To identify areas for improvement and development.
- To ensure compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements.
- To inform stakeholders, about service outcomes and future plans.

This report presents a comprehensive review of the achievements and progress made by Coventry's Fostering Service over the past year. It reflects our ongoing commitment to ensuring that children across the city are nurtured in safe, loving environments and supported through strong family and community connections.

At Coventry City Council, we believe that children thrive best when cared for by those who know and love them. Our strategic approach prioritises supporting families so that, wherever possible, children can remain safely with their birth parents or within their wider family network. Where this is not achievable, we act with compassion and

purpose to ensure children are welcomed into nurturing family environments that reflect the values of our Coventry Family Valued approach.

A key part of this vision is our dedication for children to remain with Connected Persons carers (Kinship) – individuals who already share meaningful relationships with the child. This relational approach not only promotes stability and belonging but also preserves the child's identity and connections.

The performance of Coventry's Fostering Service is central to delivering this vision. Through targeted recruitment, robust support and retention of high-quality foster carers from within our community, we continue to provide children in care with safe, loving homes that meet their diverse needs and keep them close to the people and places that matter most.

As of 31 March 2025, 76.9% of Coventry's children in foster care arrangements were living in Coventry fostering households, a testament to the strength of our local fostering community and the deep commitment to keeping children connected to their roots.

### **3. The Fostering Service Structure and Service Delivery**

The Fostering Service sits within Children's Services as part of Corporate Parenting & Sufficiency. The Fostering Services comprise of 7 teams and into two specific teams: recruitment, assessment and support to mainstream foster carers and the assessment and support of connected persons carers and special guardians.

Foster care arrangements are referred to as either mainstream or connected persons.

- Connected persons fostering refers to those households who offer to provide care to a child known to them, usually a relative.
- Mainstream refers to a range of households who apply to become foster carers for children not known to them. Mainstream foster carers include those offering out of hours and long-term foster care and those providing short stays. Mainstream carers can be approved to care for between 1 and 3 children at a time and can care for children throughout the age range.

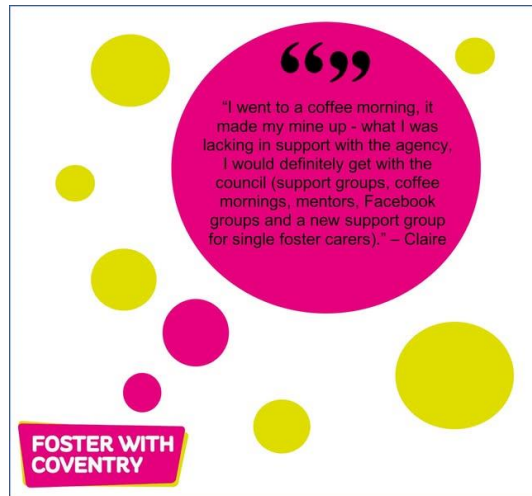
In addition to the social work teams there is a Panel Advisor and a Fostering Service Development Coordinator both of whom report to the Operational Lead.

#### **3.1 Marketing, Recruitment and Mainstream Approvals**

During the period of this report, recruitment of foster carers has continued to take place both face to face and virtually. The team have hosted a stall at the Godiva festival alongside smaller drop in and meet the team sessions at local libraries, JobShop, supermarkets, parks over the summer and at coffee shops.



.... Got some lovely feedback from a participant



The Team supported Move4Fun in War Memorial Park as well as an event by a comedian who is a foster carer.

The team have continued to work closely with the communications team to broaden the use of council sites to market for foster carers. This has included regular use of electronic screens in council buildings and bus stops, promotional flags and promoting the fostering recruitment film.



There has been some 'targeted recruitment' during #FCF24 where we were celebrating #FosteringMoments, with an event at the Jobshop and at the Coventry Transport Museum.



The service continues to use digital marketing to support fostering recruitment. However, the effectiveness of this has reduced in recent years as most enquiries have either come from foster carer referrals or from events that have been attended. It is evident that marketing for foster carers in the future will need to continue to be more innovative and wide reaching as the period of digital marketing success appears to be tailing off for both Coventry and other fostering agencies. We are partnering with Coventry Rocks and in the process of having a presence on the Families Portal in Coventry as well as building stronger links with the Chamber of Commerce and Child Friendly Cov stakeholders.

The team continue to participate in both the West Midlands and East Midlands regional fostering recruitment forums and a national fostering recruitment social media network group in order to share ideas and best practice in recruiting foster carers. The service continues to be part of a national benchmarking forum for local authority services to consider where areas of success are and learn from these. However, this data does not provide sufficient clarity on any learning from regional and statistical neighbours

as it is anonymised data and not directly relating to comparative neighbours or other Local Authorities.

It is hoped that with the creation of a regional recruitment hub, more influential statistics will be shared and consider.

Coventry participated again with the collaborative recruitment film which was launched in October 2024. Over 100 Local Authorities are now using these short films as part of their overall recruitment strategy. The latest fostering film, 'Everything', can be seen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2MqKGFrJjlc>

Following recommendations from a Fosterlink visit in March 2024, the Fostering Service has updated its outward facing website to make information more interesting and accessible. Foster carer testimonials and case studies are used throughout marketing to recruit more carers and contents are regularly reviewed.

The marketing strategy for 2025 – 2027 provides more in-depth information.

The following table provides statistics in relation to the recruitment of mainstream foster carers:

Mainstream carers	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Number of initial enquiries	552	504	709	372	511
Expressions of interest following enquiry (EOI)	156	52	48	42	42
Assessments started at stage 1	83	42	37	27	35
Assessments commencing to stage 2	64	42	35	27	33
Number of households approved	23	20	16	17	20
Conversion rate - enquiry to full assessment	12% (any contact) 41% (expression of interest)	8% (any contact) 81% (expression of interest)	5% (any contact) 73% (expression of interest)	5% (any contact) 64% (expression of interest)	6.5% (any contact) 78.5% (expression of interests)
Conversion rate – stage	36%	48%	43%	63%	60.6%

2 assessment to approval					
Conversion rate enquiry to approval	4.2% (contact)  14.7% (EOI)	4% (contact)  38% (EOI)	2% (contact)  33% (EOI)	5% (contact)  40% (EOI)	4% (contact)  47.6%

The recruitment and retention of foster carers remain a significant challenge, with a noticeable reduction in the number of enquiries. However, despite these hurdles, approvals continue to show a steady growth with 194 households.

Unfortunately, the departure of several long-standing foster carers has led to a decline in numbers, and as of the end of March 2025, Coventry experienced an overall reduction in foster carers within the Service.

In response, we are actively exploring new avenues to enhance recruitment efforts and improve retention strategies. Strengthening collaboration with key stakeholders, both within the Council and externally, remains a priority as we work to broaden awareness and increase the number of foster carers to meet growing demands. In addition, we continue to learn from regional recruitment collaborative and explore options for Coventry with neighbouring authorities.

Nationally there have been a decline in mainstream households and recruitment continues to be a challenge, however, there has been a rise in connected persons growth.

## **3.2 Mainstream Fostering Sufficiency**

### **3.2.1 Occupancy of Mainstream Placements**

Coventry's mainstream foster carers continue to provide an average of 1.4 approved care arrangements per household. The total number of approved mainstream care arrangements on 31/3/25 was 379, provided by 191 fostering households. The occupancy rate of approved placements decreased slightly from 76% on 31/3/24 to 65%.

Analysis of those care arrangements which are unoccupied shows that around 23.7% are unavailable, as carers do not currently want to consider further children or because further children cannot be placed due to matching difficulties. Others are unoccupied for a variety of reasons including those foster carers who are in the process of introducing a new child to their household, carers who provide short stay foster care and those foster carers who are in the process of reducing their approval numbers. Some carers are unable to take further care arrangements whilst they are subject to the allegations process. Around 11.3% of unavailable arrangements were on hold or blocked. However, the service retains close oversight of occupancy and regularly

reviews support on offer to foster carers to enable them to develop and grow the range of care arrangements they can provide.

### 3.2.2 Retention of Mainstream Foster Carers

In 2024/25, 22 mainstream fostering households ceased to foster, 6 more than the previous year. In addition, 2 foster carers who had been part of a fostering household ceased to foster when they separated from their partners. There has been a considerable rise in the number of foster carers leaving the service, however according to accredited official statistics, there has been a 5% decrease in the number of mainstream Local Authority households for the year 2023/2024 and over the last few years, this number continues to decrease. There is a regular review of the reasons for carers ceasing to foster and all those who choose to move on are offered an exit interview with a manager in the service.

Reason for leaving	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Permanence plan for child (including Staying Put)	0	1	0	3	3
Transfer to another LA fostering service / children's trust (IFA)	1	0	0	0	0
Transfer to an independent fostering agency	1	1	1	1	1
Personal circumstances e.g. separation, bereavement, retirement	4	7	6	8	12
Decided fostering not for them	5	3	3	1	4
Dissatisfied with quality of service	1	0	1	0	0
Safeguarding (termination)	0	0	2	3	0
Resigned prior to quality of care and safeguarding issues	1	2	1	0	2
Other – including death	1	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>22</b>

Very few carers choose to transfer to either another local authority or an independent fostering agency. For the household who transferred to an IFA this year, the choice to move to another agency was based upon their hope to be better matched based on their change of circumstances at that time.

Internal fostering continues to be one of the most cost-effective care arrangements for children in care, on a unit cost basis, as well as providing quality outcomes for Coventry children.

### 3.2.3 Specialist Schemes

#### a) Next Steps

The Next Steps fostering scheme was launched to provide intensively supported fostering arrangements to children who would benefit from stepping down or avoiding residential care. These fostering arrangements provide a supportive, safe, and nurturing family environment.

**Eleven fostering households** supported **eleven young people** through the Next Steps scheme at the end of March 2025, offering them the stability of a family home.

- **Seven children** have been successfully long-term matched with their carers, providing them with consistent, nurturing environments.
- **Two fostering households** have guided **three young people** into adulthood, continuing to offer support beyond their transition to independence.

These outcomes highlight the ongoing success of the Next Steps programme in improving the long-term stability, emotional well-being, and future prospects of young people.

- **Two fostering** households concluded their care. One child was not suited to a family environment at the time and required a higher level of care and support. While the other experienced significant trauma linked behaviour and 'dysregulation' as they became older, and concerns for their and their carers' safety were raised.

This has emphasised the importance of carefully matching and assessing both the child and the carer before moving children. Planning should adopt a holistic approach, considering both present circumstances and future outcomes. Additionally, it highlights the need to provide therapeutic support to children transitioning from residential care to a family setting.

Recruitment to the Next Steps scheme remains active. It welcomes both new foster carers and experienced carers transferring from other fostering arrangements.

- **Two families** have already welcomed a **second Next Steps child** into their homes, demonstrating their continued commitment and capacity to provide stable, nurturing care.
- **An additional two households** are currently exploring the possibility of supporting a second child, reflecting their growing confidence.

This ongoing growth highlights the strengths and adaptability of the Next Steps Carers.

All prospective Next Steps carers attend a two-day 'understanding trauma and challenging behaviour' training course, which is also open to mainstream foster carers and staff. They are provided with specialist support and ongoing training that can be tailored to the individual needs of the children they support.

The scheme works closely with the children's social work teams so that carers gain insight into the child they will care for, and positive matching is achieved. This is



followed by a robust transition period to support the child in developing relationships, safety, and security with their new family.

**b) Out of Hours emergency carers**

The Fostering Service continues to run its successful Out of Hours scheme. These foster carers support children in emergency situations outside of the usual working hours, as they often work full time and offer their home as a safe warm place for children to stay overnight. Children are then collected in the morning.

Between April 2024 and March 2025 Coventry approved 6 new households onto the Out of Hours scheme and lost one carer due to them wanting to change their approval to become short term only. Having these carers, contributed to overall sufficiency and the ability to ensure children are safely placed whilst a suitable longer-term arrangement is found or children return to their families.

Moving forward, we are looking to increase our numbers of Out of Hours foster carers, to be able to continue to provide children and young people a place of safety when needed in the most urgent of times.

**c) Parent and Child fostering**

The Fostering Service currently operates a dedicated scheme for foster carers who provide parent and child fostering arrangements. At present, two carers are approved to support this provision, receiving tailored support to meet the unique needs of parents and their children. This scheme is undergoing a comprehensive review, with plans to relaunch it in the coming year. As part of this initiative, the service aims to recruit additional carers capable of offering nurturing and community-based fostering households that support both parents and fathers enabling families to remain together.

**d) Short stay fostering**

Short stay fostering is a type of fostering for a child or children and can either be to support an existing fostering arrangement or to provide a short break to a child who is living at home within the context of section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

In both cases, the intention of this short stay arrangement is to support the child's main living arrangement, supporting the stability of a fostering arrangement or supporting families to maintain care of their child so that do not need to come into care.

By providing some time away from the child's home it is hoped that carers and parents will have time to recharge or attend to needs of other family members. It can also be required where carers are significantly unwell.

Short stays can either be on a one off or regular basis. Each short stay can last for one night up to 2 weeks.

We have recruited a number of foster carers who wish to offer this type of fostering, and as a Service we are in the process of exploring within the wider Service how we can support family led decision making and expand our provision most effectively to support children living with their family in the community.

### **3.3 Connected Persons Fostering (Kinship)**

There has been a continuing growth in the number of connected persons assessments being started prior to children entering care proceedings. This is a positive progression as it enables more timely family led decision making.

Over the past 12 months, the team has received 249 requests for initial assessments, a rise from 238 in 2023/2024. These resulted in 149 positives recommendations however only 138 proceeded to a full assessment. Due to the growing number of referrals, a significant number had to be outsourced and the impact of this is under regular review.

The number of children cared for in a connected persons fostering arrangement was significantly higher than the two previous years, at 132.

Special guardians and connected persons foster carers can access training in an equivalent way to mainstream foster carers. The fostering service also runs a bespoke pre-approval training course titled 'skills to care' and a bespoke training course for special guardians was also launched, which runs 3 times a year.

### **3.4 Progressing permanence for fostered children**

A significant feature of the work of the Fostering Service is promoting permanence for children in care. During the year, 27 children who had been fostered achieved permanence through a special guardianship order and 13 children had their fostering placement confirmed as their long-term home with in-house foster carers.

With the support of a dedicated staff member, we have seen an increase in Adoption & Special Guardianship applications to support more families and avoid SGO disruptions.

### **3.5 Fostering Panel**

The Fostering Panel annual report provides a summary of the performance, progress and activity of Coventry's Fostering panel during the past year. Please see report attached.



Annual Foster Panel  
report 2024 - 2025 .d

## **4. Support and Training to approved carers and guardians**

### **4.1 Support to foster carers and guardians**

The Service has continued to focus on the quality of support given to foster carers through ensuring consistency of the supervisory relationship, regular visiting patterns and that annual reviews of the foster carers' take place.

The Service produces a monthly newsletter for all foster carers and a bi-monthly newsletter specifically for connected persons carers and special guardians. These

include contributions from a range of sources including colleagues in health and education.

#### 4.1.1 Events

Our annual Carers' Conference which took place in person on the 21st May 2024 at the University of Warwick, centred on "The Impact of Trauma" for children in care. The conference accommodated 150 attendees, including carers, staff and stall holders. Nick Barwick, who has care experience, gave an acclaimed keynote address on trauma, supplemented by fostering service leads and network representatives.

Workshops covered topics such as menopause, self-care, trauma experiences, health, and trauma in higher education, receiving positive feedback. While attendees valued the event's environment, some requested more trauma-related training, extended keynotes, improved workshop scheduling, and greater inclusion of young people's perspectives. The menopause session sparked suggestions for expanded occupational health support for carers.

The Summer Celebration 2024, organized by the Fostering Service and wider Children's Services, took place on the 2<sup>nd</sup> September at AT7 centre, providing a safe and spacious venue for 171 children and their carers or special guardians. The event featured diverse activities such as pebble decorating, silent disco and a splash park, alongside food options like pizza and ice cream. Attendees praised the event's organization, variety of activities, and staff support, while suggesting improvements like enhanced signage and more activities for older children, with many expressing interests in future similar events.



These events were followed by an appreciation event held on the 10th October 2024 at Coventry Rugby Club during Kinship Care Week. The event was relaxed and peer-focused, featuring food and self-care activities. Entertainment for preschool children included a teddy bears picnic and soft play. The event was attended by 234 people, including carers, senior leaders and the Lady Mayoress. The feedback was positive, highlighting the informal setting and the interaction with staff.



In addition, a 'winter event' was hosted by the Participation Team, in collaboration with the Fostering Service. It was held over 2 sessions at the end of November at the Coventry Rugby Club and attended by nearly 500 people. Activities included seasonal crafts, Santa's Grotto and a carvery lunch provided for everyone.

#### **4.1.2 Other support available**

The Service provides an 'out of hours' telephone support for foster carers outside office hours through the fostering service on call rota.

The Service runs a monthly support group for connected persons foster carers and arranged park walks and bi-monthly virtual session with guest speakers. The special guardian peer support is also promoted through a bi-monthly newsletter.

In addition, the Service helps to facilitate two monthly support groups for mainstream foster carers. One for all foster carers and another for carers that foster alone (see below). We also support the development of foster carer led support groups around in and around the city.

The single foster carers' support group (SFCSG) was created as a gap in the service was identified. From working alongside many single foster carers, it was evident how more challenging and difficult their role was simply by them fostering alone in comparison with carers who are a couple.

This group is held monthly and hosted by members of the Service and a foster carer. Speakers from various agencies have attended to share information, i.e. healthy lifestyles and the advice and mediation worker from The Fostering Network, to share her role, support etc. They have also celebrated different festivals i.e. Easter and Ramadan, with a Muslim carer sharing her own lived experience of the religious celebration.

Another aspect of this support group is for the single carers to expand their support network, to enable them to call upon one another when needed. This has already been seen by carers offering support to each other by caring for their foster children whilst needing to attend training.

Following feedback from foster carers, the Service has worked hard to ensure that information, policies and procedures are more readily available to foster carers. A series of one-minute guides have been produced to bring clarity to areas where foster carers felt that guidance and decision making could be inconsistent. The Service continues to work with foster carers through the foster carer association (FCA) to identify additions or alterations which are needed to ensure the Handbook provides them with clear and comprehensive guidance.

All foster carers approved by Coventry City Council are provided with membership of The Fostering Network and New Family Social, a charity that supports and connects members from the LGBTQ+ community who wish to foster or adopt. The membership with TFN includes access to the Fostering Network's independent Advice and Mediation service.

## **4.2 Mentoring scheme**

The Mainstream Foster Carers Mentoring Scheme was launched in June 2020 with five experienced foster carers supporting two Mentoring Co-ordinators to design the scheme. Since then, there has been ongoing recruitment, and the scheme currently has 20 mentors. All new foster carers are offered the opportunity to have a foster carer mentor. Not all new carers wish to have a mentor, for example, if they already have connections with other foster carers amongst their own family and friends. Some mentors also help more experienced foster carers who require specific support. For example, three to four months support with areas of fostering – including advice around supporting children with disabilities or neurodiversity, the impact of fostering on birth children, supporting transition to adoption, and dealing with an allegation.

During the last twelve months, there have been 16 new mentoring matches arranged, three of which were connected with specific issues for established carers. A mentor is usually offered for the first six months, but this is sometimes extended if needed and the mentoring relationship can become a friendship or source of advice.

Other forms of mentoring exist outside of the main mentoring scheme. The Next Steps Co-Ordinator match their newly approved carers with existing Next Steps carers.

The Foster Service Development Coordinator is working with the current Mentoring Scheme Co-ordinators and members of the Connected Person's team to strengthen the support already provided by the existing mentors and recruit a more diverse range of foster carers to provide mentors to all groups of carers including connected carer and special guardians, plus more bespoke support to any type of carer who is taking on new challenges and experiences.

## **4.3 Support from and summary of the work undertaken by the Edge of Care Service**

Edge of Care (EOC) continues to provide 12-week intensive support when crisis arises to reduce conflict and tension within fostering families. The aim is to strengthen family relationships, build resilience and empower families with skills which enable them to find their solutions in the future through a restorative lens. The aim is to support children's permanence and stability, to prevent children in care experiencing repeated care arrangement breakdowns which may impact their sense of stability.

This intervention is delivered by a Therapeutic Practitioner specialising in Fostering Stability. Their role is to support children and young people (aged 8-17) residing in foster care where the care arrangement is at risk of a breakdown. EOC offer a whole family approach to family's experiencing crisis and when difficulties begin to escalate and relationships becoming stressful and tense. The therapeutic practitioner uses an integrative therapeutic approach which is attachment and trauma informed and delivers both direct work with young people and therapeutic support for foster carers and their family.

## **Referrals & Outcomes**

From April 2024 to March 2025, 23 referrals were received, requesting fostering, SGO and adoption stability. 15 families have been stabilised through intensive therapeutic support.

There has been a decrease in referrals from the previous year, and possible reasons for this will need to be explored further by the Fostering Service and Edge of C.

## **Key Themes Impacting Carers**

A key element of their work with foster carers has been building on their understanding of the impact of traumatic and abusive lived experiences on presenting behaviours and ways of coping for children and young people. The team observed foster carers becoming emotionally triggered by challenging behaviours reflecting how their own history and lived experiences impact their responses and relationships with young people in their care.

They also observed intensified stress among single carers, who reported exhaustion, heightened vulnerability, and greater risk of care arrangement breakdown when managing complex behaviours.

## **Children and Young People**

Over the past year, a shift has been noted from young people presenting with externalised behaviours such as aggression and violence to young people struggling with emotional expression. This has meant that young people may often emotionally withdrawn or become distant leaving foster carers uncertain about how best to help. A focus of this work was using play-based approaches to support emotional expression and trust-building.

## **Therapeutic Interventions**

There has been increased work addressing conflict and tension between children in care and foster carers' children and families. The complexity of risk has required strong collaboration with supervising social workers: joint consultations on CSA, safer caring plans, de-escalation and safety planning. The purpose of this has been to strengthen confidence amongst carers in managing risk at home. This reflective therapeutic parenting work supports carers to notice and manage their emotional triggers, understand patterns of worry, and co-create strategies for emotional containment so

they can care from a grounded, mindfully regulated place. They also introduced more drama and play therapy-informed techniques, and increased family sessions to foster better communication, rebuilding trust between all members of the household.

Practice has consistently balanced authority with empathy, ensuring that children, families, and professionals are fully involved in assessments, planning, reviews, and decisions. Interactions have remained respectful and professionally confident, demonstrating persistence and determination in managing complex family dynamics. The views, wishes, and feelings of children and families have been actively listened to and responded to, including interpreting non-verbal communication and behaviour as a means of understanding. Additionally, children and families have been supported through key transitions—including placement changes, reunifications, and adoptions—ensuring continuity, sensitivity, and a child-centred approach at every stage.

### **Next Steps**

- Strengthen links with the Fostering Service to increase referrals.
- Edge of Care to remain present and visible at Fostering Service's events.
- To identify and support children and young people within the Global Majority to ensure they are offered the same opportunities for stable relationships with their carers.

## **4.4 Training and Development of foster carers**

Foster carer training is coordinated and run jointly between the Service and the Children's Services Development Team. Training is offered in a variety of methods including face to face, virtual and E-learning. Foster carers are also signposted to research and written materials where relevant to the particular children they are caring for. To maximise the training offer to foster carers, wherever possible practitioners from the service facilitate the training for foster carers. The Fostering Service contribute to monthly meetings to plan and coordinate the training offer with the wider children's services training and development offer.

Training can be access via online platforms, JRNI and Flourish. Flourish access has been opened to allow all foster carers access to a range of training in a variety of topics. Removing the barrier of the supervising social worker needing to allocate courses has allowed foster carers more autonomy in their learning albeit it is discussed in supervision visits and of course recommended training and development is suggested through the personal development plan.

Foster carers can access both mandatory courses, ensuring they have the training necessary to undertake their role and more in-depth training for those carers who want to develop particular specialisms or a deeper knowledge of a subject area, for example Foundations for Attachment or Behaviour that challenges you. Both courses run over several weeks to develop a more in depth understanding of how to care for children through trauma informed care.

We have adopted Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP), which is a therapeutic model to support children and families affected by developmental trauma and attachment difficulties. This approach equips professionals and caregivers with the knowledge and skills to apply DDP principles effectively.

Refresher training is offered to foster carers who have completed their mandatory training, and it is expected that they undertake this at least every 3 years, in order to keep up to date with current practices.

Preparation training (Skills to Foster) for all prospective mainstream foster carers, continues to be delivered by the fostering team, and include foster carers as well as care experienced adults. These groups are held face to face at regular intervals.

The Service also facilitates a bi-monthly preparation training course for connected persons foster carers entitled “Skills to Care” and a bespoke training course for special guardians and those considering special guardianship.

The Service continues to support newly approved foster carers in completing the mandatory Training, Support and Development Standards (TSD). There is an adapted version of these standards for connected persons foster carers and there is an expectation that any connected person’s carer completes this within 18 months of approval.

## 5. Foster Carer engagement

This section summarises development work from April 2024 to March 2025, driven by consultations with foster carers and stakeholders.

Month	Development heading	Development work
April	Refer a Friend scheme  Additional Allowances consultation	Consultation to gauge what foster carers appreciate more when they refer a friend to become an approved foster carer.  The aim of this consultation was to make the policy clearer, fairer and consistent across different groups of carers. This consisted of a survey/questions and focus groups to ensure those who wanted to take part were able to contribute.
May	Consultation – Level 3 Progression – form and criteria updated	A working party of social workers from support and connected persons collaborated to look at the current criteria and updated it accordingly. Consultation out to carers for their views from 2 <sup>nd</sup> May.



	CFCA meeting  Annual Conference	<p>This meeting was attended by Katherine Robinson, Operational Lead to discuss matters arising with the FCA members</p> <p>This was at University of Warwick and in person. The theme was The Impact of Trauma and our keynote was Nick Barwick; Nick was able to share his lived and professional experiences which were valued by delegates. The overall rating for the conference was 4.23.</p>
June	Foster Carers Supervision document	We often get feedback around the use of the forms we use. A working group was created to update the document and consult with foster carers. This was completed and the final consultation went out for last comments and suggestions on June 4 <sup>th</sup> 2024. This has now been implemented.
July	Mentoring scheme	We received some feedback from connected persons foster carers and special guardians stating they too would like to access a mentor when things are either new or tricky at home caring for the children. Work began from here off the back of that feedback, due for roll out early February 2025.
September	Summer Celebration 2nd September	<p>This year's Summer Event was held at the AT7 Centre and as we hired the whole venue it meant we could offer a huge variety of activities, including swimming, gyms for the over 12's, dance, soft play plus many different activities in the main hall provided by different parts of Children's Services.</p> <p>The event was a success and rated over all by the attendees at 4.7 out of 5.</p> <p>Catering was provided.</p>
October	CFCA Meeting  Thank You event	<p>Not attended due to staff absence but feedback given through chair</p> <p>We had asked our foster carers and special guardians how they would like us to show our appreciation for what they do for the children and young people they care for. The response was, a relaxed, informal opportunity to come together and celebrate with time together, with no big speeches.</p> <p>To meet this, we hired the marquee at Coventry Rugby Club, had a buffet instead of afternoon tea, provided soft play area for preschoolers. We presented some of the carer's who were nominated by social workers and leaders, with flowers and a gift card to extend thanks for going 'the extra mile'.</p> <p>We asked for feedback and overall the event was well received and appreciated. When we run a similar event in the future, foster carers would like the opportunity to get</p>

		involved with the nominations for additional thank you tokens.
November	New course – Court Process and Skills	Carers were asked to share their views on what they believe should be included in a workshop to help them understand more so they can support the children that they care for, better.
December	Training Needs Analysis	This was sent out to all Foster Carers to contribute their views on the current offer and what they believe should be included in the offer for 2025/26. The results were used by the working group that included the Principle Social Worker, Fostering Team manager and fostering Senior Practitioner.
January 25	CFCA meeting	A discussion with foster carers took place and items fed back to the service
February	All About Me – new way of working  Mentoring Development	This was a meeting to invite foster carers and connected carers to share their views on the proposed model by Richard Rose, to enable them to be more involved and effective in the Life Story work of the children they care for.  The feedback was shared with the working group and built into the training that is now available.  The existing service for mainstream foster carers is expanding into the Connected Persons team and for Special Guardians. There needed to be a discussion and consultation with the current mentors to enable this work to develop and go live.
March	Parent and Child fostering	Supervising Social Workers were asked to discuss with carers who are approved and those who may consider, Parent and Child Fostering. The consultation looked at specific questions around this due to the need CCC have to provide this internally. The results showed that many hadn't enough room to accommodate and the summary report is being developed by the Fostering Support Team Managers  23 out of 55 carers said they would consider it or would need more space.

In addition, Cllr Seaman and senior managers in the Service have attended the Foster Carers Association and foster carers are also active leads on Corporate Parenting Board.

## **5.1 The Foster Carer Association**

All Coventry approved foster carers are members of the Coventry Foster Carer Association (CFCA), although participation is voluntary. The Foster Carer Association has met monthly throughout the period of this report. The Fostering Operational Lead and Fostering Service

Development Co-ordinator have attended part of the meeting on a regular basis to receive feedback and suggestions from foster carers on issues which are important to them.

In addition to meetings, the Foster Carer Association host support groups as well as social events for foster carers and manage a social media group from which foster carers can seek support directly from their peers.

Members of the Foster Carer Association regularly support events in which they present the perspective of foster carers to children's services staff. Foster carers are regularly involved in staff recruitment.

## **6. Quality Assurance and Service Development**

During the past twelve months, the service has continued to focus on developing and improving practice. This has included regular quality assurance activity including collaborative practice evaluations, quality assurance checklists and observation of fostering practice. The service also undertakes a service performance review on a quarterly basis with learning from this shared during development sessions with the teams. Alongside the consistent supervision of social workers these measures continue to enable the service to improve its work. Learning shared within monthly quality assurance reports, are fed back to the management team to celebrate what we are doing well but also areas that we can develop further. Embedding this learning, contribute to consistent good practice with the aim of ensuring positive outcomes for children in a fostering arrangement.

We continue to actively seek feedback from our carers and consider these as part of our ongoing service improvement.

The fostering service participates in both regional and national forums to promote improvements in our support to fostered children. The Operational Lead chairs the West Midlands Regional Forum for local authority fostering registered managers, members of the Recruitment and Assessment team attends both regional and national fostering recruitment forums and the panel advisor attends a regional forum for fostering panel advisors.

Connected Persons team managers attend a specific regional forum to discuss connected persons' practice and proposed changes.

Collaborative discussions have also taken place in relation to creating a regional recruitment hub as part of the reforms initiated by the DfE.

## **7. Financial impact**

Internal fostering continues to be one of the most cost-effective placements for children in care, on a unit cost basis, as well as providing quality outcomes for

Coventry children. The overall placements strategy reflects this, and the fostering fees budget will increase as appropriate in future years to reflect increased targets. Additional resources will also be made available as necessary to expand the internal fostering team to support the increasing numbers of foster carers.

	2021/22		2022/23		2023/24		2024/25	
	Budget	Actual	Budget	Actual	Budget	Actual	Budget	Actual
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
<b>Internal fostering team</b>	3,234	3,403	3,515	3,763	3,732	4,110	3,910	4,174
<b>Internal fostering fees: mainstream</b>	6,420	6,066	6,304	6,078	7,328	6,144	7,237	6,370
<b>Internal fostering fees: specialist</b>	181	225	458	259	340	445	801	598
<b>Connected person fees</b>	1,279	1,685	1,337	1,696	1,655	1,925	1798	2256
<b>Total</b>	<b>11,114</b>	<b>11,379</b>	<b>11,614</b>	<b>11,796</b>	<b>13,055</b>	<b>12,624</b>	<b>13,746</b>	<b>13,398</b>

Fostering fees for 2024/2025 were increased by 3 % and maintenance allowances by 6.3% from 2023/2024 levels in order to recognise the impact of inflation and the rise in the cost of living and to ensure that our rates remain competitive with those of surrounding local authorities. Fees and allowances are above the rates recommended by the Fostering Network and continue to compare favourably to those paid by neighbouring authorities.

## 8. Summary and priorities for the next 12 months

- Continue to drive the Fostering Excellence Project to enable increased capacity and resilience of internal mainstream fostering households
- Continue to develop recruitment of carers from a range of diverse backgrounds to more closely match the backgrounds of children in care
- Identify reasons for drop out between enquiry, expression of interest and approval, to improve conversion rate
- Finalising and launch Coventry's Kinship strategy and offer
- Continue to develop Kinship fostering in line with the Kinship strategy and our Kinship offer and aim to increase permanence through special guardianship arrangements
- Ongoing growth of the Next steps fostering scheme
- Relaunch parent and child and out of hours schemes

- Launch a short stay provision to support families in need to prevent children coming into care
- Continue to ensure foster carers are consulted about all changes that affect their role
- Widen mentoring offer for connected persons carers and offer to applicants during the assessment process
- Review support available to children of foster carers and newly approved foster carers during their induction period
- Embed DDP principles and continue to upskill all workforce caring for children

**Report author:**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Zelma van Rhyn', written in a cursive style.

**Zelma van Rhyn, Interim Operational Lead Fostering  
Children and Education Services**

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Coventry City Council

## Briefing note

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

**16 October 2025**

**Subject: Children's Services Resources and Efficiency Peer Challenge Progress Against the Recommendations**

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### **1 Purpose of the Note**

- 1.1 To inform the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) of the progress against the Local Government Association Children's Services Resources and Efficiency Peer Challenge Recommendations of October 2024.

### **2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 The Education and Children's Scrutiny Board (2) are recommended to:
- 1) To note the outcome and current progress
  - 2) Identify any recommendations for the appropriate Cabinet Member

### **3 Information and Background**

- 3.1 Corporate and political leaders in Coventry are passionate and committed to achieving the best for children. Over the past decade, Children's Services have been focused on improvement and there has been a political and corporate commitment to making the necessary resources and funding available to support the Children's Services journey.
- 3.2 In August 2022, Children's Services were rated as a 'Good' service by Ofsted. The service is anticipating a further inspection imminently. The Youth Justice Service were graded 'Outstanding' after an Inspection by HMI Probation in February 2023. Followed by a Joint Targeted Area Inspection focusing on Serious Youth Violence receiving a positive report in May 2024. The service has seven Children's Homes, six homes have been inspected during 2025, of which five are rated as 'Good' by Ofsted and one rated 'requires improvement'. The ambitious residential homes expansion programme to increase the number of Children's Homes includes a further two to open in 2026.
- 3.3 Building on the significant improvements within Children's Services, the integration of Children and Education on 1st April 2024 provided an opportunity and capacity to explore new ways of working. The integration has resulted in changes to the roles and responsibilities of the senior leadership team and the external appointment of a new Director of Children's and Education Services appointed in August 2024.

- 3.4 The financial position remains a challenge for all local authorities; the One Coventry Transformation Plan sets out how the Council will respond to the challenges and embrace new approaches and technology.
- 3.5 In October 2024, a Local Government Association Peer Challenge team were invited by the Council to review how Children's Services provide services to children and young people to identify potential opportunities to control and reduce costs and ensure efficiencies. Peer Challenges are improvement focused and are not an inspection.
- 3.6 The challenge is similar to one that the Council underwent in January 2024 and does not result in any grade. The Council was given positive feedback about the Corporate Peer Challenge and many great comments about the Councils work, highlighting some areas for improvement on how the council can work in the future. The Children's Services Resources and Efficiency Peer challenge has provided a further opportunity to build on the excellent work and identify areas for improvement.

#### **4 Children's Services Resources and Efficiency Peer Challenge**

- 4.1 The Children's Services Resources and Efficiency Peer Challenge was held 15-17 October 2024. It focused on four key areas as agreed with the Council.
- Cost of placements
  - Structure, capacity and opportunities through integration.
  - Understanding and analysing costs, and incorporating best practice
  - Use of organisational capacity, resources, and support

#### **5 Findings**

- 5.1 The Peer Challenge team provided a report in December 2024 highlighting the positive feedback and areas for development. The team were impressed with public and private sector partnership work which has contributed to attracting sponsorship and avoiding costs, whilst contributing to bringing more organisations together around Child Friendly Cov.
- 5.2 The service has proactively developed its in house residential provision with five homes in operation, this is now seven with two new homes having opened in early 2025. The planned approach of seeking to utilise available in-house residential provision for the hardest to place children with the most complex needs has the potential to reduce the spend on high-cost placements.
- 5.3 Since the reunification project commenced in April 2021, the service has reunified fifty-four children to date, enabling and supporting children to return home to their families. This is constantly reviewed to ensure children who can be reunified return home to their families, which is the best outcome for the child.
- 5.4 The Children's Services commissioning function is well integrated with the operational service; the peer team saw evidence of effective and robust joint working between the sufficiency and children in care leadership leading to good outcomes for children.



- 5.5 The outcomes led quality assurance of external residential providers to ensure that Coventry children are having their needs met to high quality provision is a real strength.
- 5.6 The council's One Coventry approach is evident across the system, partners are committed and passionate about working together to deliver the best for the "Cov child" and there is evidence of organisations working effectively together: including working together to secure external funding, and co-ordinated partnership responses to serious youth violence, recognised as a strength in the recent Joint Target Area Inspection.
- 5.7 The peer team also acknowledged and recognised our mature and effective relationships across the Education partnership.
- 5.8 The peer team identified six high level key recommendations for the Council to consider supporting Coventry to navigate through the financial challenges faced, whilst keeping children's needs central. Children's Services developed a plan of actions to take forward in response to the Resources and Efficiency Peer Challenge. The plan has involved working with the Council and its partners to embrace new ways of working to support more targeted early help work to meet needs at the earliest point in the system.
- 5.9 The introduction of the Children's Social Care Reforms across all local authorities in April 2025 brings several fundamental reforms and opportunities for Councils to further strengthen the focus on early intervention and is a key priority in 2025/2026 and 2026/2027. IMPOWER a project team are working with Children's Services on the delivery of the Reforms and also with a focus on children in care to improve the understanding of children's needs and their associated care costs, identify gaps in support and enhance commissioning processes to better match needs and support through the roll out of their Valuing Care Tool.

## **6 Progress against the Recommendations**

6.1 Progress against each recommendation is highlighted below:

### **Recommendation 1: Support a strengthened culture between children's and corporate services**

- 6.2 Separate quarterly meetings with the S151 and the Cabinet Member for Finances and Resources were introduced in April 2025 to review finances and resources to provide robust oversight and monitoring of resources.
- 6.3 Children's and Education Services Performance Meeting are also held bi-monthly with the Leader and Chief Executive, Director of Children's and Education Services and Cabinet Member to review performance progress and quality assurance activity to improve and strengthen performance.
- 6.4 In January 2025, Children's Services implemented new performance monitoring arrangements focusing on four key areas:
- *MASH/Early Help/Children in Need*
  - *Child Protection/Child Exploitation*
  - *Children in Care (Fostering/Children's Homes/Commissioning)*
  - *Children in Care (Care leavers/UASC 16+ and Children and young people with disabilities)*

6.5 The new Performance Review Meetings are providing more robust scrutiny and challenge focusing on a specific area of the service.

***Recommendation 2: Consider an organisational review of children and education services to ensure a joined-up approach and identification of financial efficiencies***

6.6 Children's Services is anticipating an Ofsted Inspection imminently, a wider review of Children's and Education services will be undertaken after the inspection and will be influenced by the implementation of the social care reforms.

6.7 The implementation of the social care reforms is well underway, with Impower supporting a collaborative multi-agency approach that has successfully established clear thresholds and consistent pathways for the Family Help element of the programme. Early outcomes demonstrate strengthened partnership working. The programme now moves into its next phase, with engagement and design for the Multi-Agency Child Protection teams, building on the strong foundations already in place.

6.8 The review of the Emergency Duty Team has been completed, and the new EDT structure is now established and operational.

6.9 A weekly Resource Panel is held to scrutinise/challenge spend on placements/commissioned providers. alongside weekly placement sufficiency meeting to support planned moves to avoid high-cost unregistered provision. In addition, bi-monthly residential review meetings also take place which review costs/spend and opportunities for step down/ reunification or move to alternative home.

6.10 Following the roll out of the new 'Homefinder Form', panels are being adjusted to support additional scrutiny, through the embedding of the Valuing Care Tool into assessment of needs linked to resources.

***Recommendation 3: Have a member endorsed transformation plan approved annually at the time of the MTFs approval.***

6.11 A Change Board, chaired by the Chief Executive, has been established. The Change Plan includes children's services and education change programme. The Children and Education Steering Group – facilitated by the transformation team reports to the Change Board on progress. Plans to transform and improve services are scrutinised by the Board.

***Recommendation 4: Decision making on unplanned entrants to care should be made at strategic lead level to promote accountability and ensure consistency of thresholds***

6.12 The Local Authority Scheme of delegation was reviewed in November 2024, to reflect the changes in decision making for unplanned entrants to care, being undertaken by Strategic Leads. This provides additional scrutiny from Strategic Leads who have responsibility for children in care. This is promoting accountability and ensuring consistency of thresholds.

***Recommendation 5: Consider opportunities to improve budget oversight***

6.13 A number of measures have been implemented to improve budget oversight. The sufficiency risk has been incorporated into the Children and Education Services Risk Register to monitor as part of the overall service risks; this is in addition to weekly resource panel meetings to scrutinise spend on placements.

- 6.14 Weekly Valuing Care Panels are now taking place to review plans for children and ensure grip on arrangements for those children who can be stepped down from residential provision and or reunified to family members.
- 6.15 In August 2025, a corporate audit on purchase card transactions commenced to consider how improvements can be made on budget oversight and compliance on the use of purchase cards and to acknowledge strengths in current practice.
- 6.16 In addition, the Senior Leadership team monitor expenditure monthly at strategic level and ongoing oversight of budget is monitored by all managers on a monthly basis.

**Recommendation: 6 Consider social work practice opportunities**

- 6.17 A number of initiatives and opportunities are being implemented to consider social work practice, including the LGA 's recommendation of a single front door for services to children and families.
- 6.18 The recently launched Families First Partnership Programme, the vehicle for the implementation of the Social Care Reforms requires the implementation of an integrated front door (IFD) for children's services. This is in the process of being developed collaboratively to enable children and families to receive the right help, at the right time, from the right person or agency leading to improved outcomes, earlier intervention, and more effective use of resources across the partnership.
- 6.19 The Effective Support for Children and Families in Coventry partnership threshold document was implemented in July 2025, following a collaborative, multi-agency approach and agreed sign-off across partners. Early indicators are positive, with a reduction in referrals into statutory services already being seen.
- 6.20 A review of Social Work Academy was undertaken earlier in the year, to review the number of newly qualified social workers for each cohort. Growing our own social workers is supporting the workforce and reducing reliance on agency social workers. In the last six months February 2025 to 30 September 2025, the number of agency social workers has reduced from 38 to 25.
- 6.21 Finally, to improve practice and have greater oversight and grip of the budget, the Strategic Leads have responsibility for agreeing independent and specialist assessments, A positive outcome from this has been a reduction in the commissioning of external assessments while delivering significant cost savings.

## **7 Next Steps**

- 7.1 Children's and Education Services will continue to monitor progress against the recommendations in response to the Resources and Efficiency Peer Challenge. Working with the Council and its partners to embrace new ways of working and deliver further improvements and efficiencies in the future.

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# Agenda Item 7

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) Work Programme 2025-26

Last updated 1<sup>st</sup> October 2025

Please see page 2 onwards for background to items

<b>10 July 2025</b>
Cabinet Member Portfolio Priorities Draft Work Programme 25-26
<b>11 September 2025</b>
Outdoor Education The Complexities in Finding Homes for Children in Care
<b>16 October 2025</b>
Adoption Service Annual Reports Fostering Annual Report Progress on LGA Peer Review Action Plan
<b>27 November 2025</b>
Child-Friendly Cov Children in Care Pledge Children Absent from Education
<b>22 January 2026</b>
Safeguarding Annual Report Holiday Activities and Food Programme
<b>26 February 2026</b>
School Performance Data Annual Report SEND Strategy Update
<b>26 March 2026</b>
Early Years Strategy and Best Start in Life Family First Partnership (Social Care Reform) Regional Placements
<b>Meetings to be allocated</b>
School Places Sufficiency Kinship Strategy and Local Kinship Offer (25/26) MASH – Effective Support for Children and Families in Coventry Youth Provision in Coventry Health and Wellbeing in Schools Family Health and Lifestyles Service Behaviour Pathway Campaign on smart phones in school Children and Adolescents Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Local Transformation Plan April 2025 – March 2027 Family Valued and Reunification Project Breakfast Clubs Child Sexual Exploitation Families First Partnership Programme
<b>Items taken for information</b>
Site visit to Coombe Abbey Outdoor Education Centre

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) Work Programme 2025-26

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<b>Date</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Detail</b>	<b>Cabinet Member/ Lead Officer</b>
<b>10 July 2025</b>	Cabinet Member Portfolio Priorities	To invite Cllr Sandhu and Cllr Seaman to identify their priorities for the coming year, for Scrucro to be able to identify future items and hold Cabinet Members to account	Cllr Sandhu Cllr Seaman
	Draft Work Programme 25-26	To consider the draft work programme and to identify any additional items or task and finish groups	Cllr Kelly G Holmes
<b>11 September 2025</b>	Outdoor Education	To cover the work being delivered on Outdoor Education, including the extended offer as well as plans for celebrating Dol Y Moch's anniversary.	R Sugars Cllr Sandhu
	The Complexities in Finding Homes for Children in Care	Looking at the complexities of homes for children, including placements, and the associated costs.	Cllr Seaman Sukriti Sen
<b>16 October 2025</b>	Adoption Service Annual Reports	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 Matt Clayton
	Fostering Annual Report	To consider performance of the fostering service including support to foster carers from their perspective	Cllr Seaman A Whitrick
	Progress on LGA Peer Review Action Plan	As a follow up to the item received on 13 Feb 2025, Members requested a more detailed progress report	S Sen Cllr Seaman
<b>27 November 2025</b>	Child-Friendly Cov	Progress update on impact and recommendations made at the meeting on 17 <sup>th</sup> October 2024 <a href="#">BN CMCYP - Child Friendly Cov.docx</a>	Matt Clayton Cllr Seaman
	Children in Care Pledge	Progress on the pledge for children in care and care leavers	Matt Clayton Cllr Seaman
	Children Absent from Education	To establish a T&F to look at this in more detail. Covering Elective Home Education, Child Missing Education, SEND without an appropriate place	Rachael Sugars, Cllr Sandhu
<b>22 January 2026</b>	Safeguarding Annual Report		
	Holiday Activities and Food Programme	Update including progress on recommendation to Cabinet Members <a href="#">BN CM ES HAF Dec 24.docx</a>	Adrian Coles

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) Work Programme 2025-26

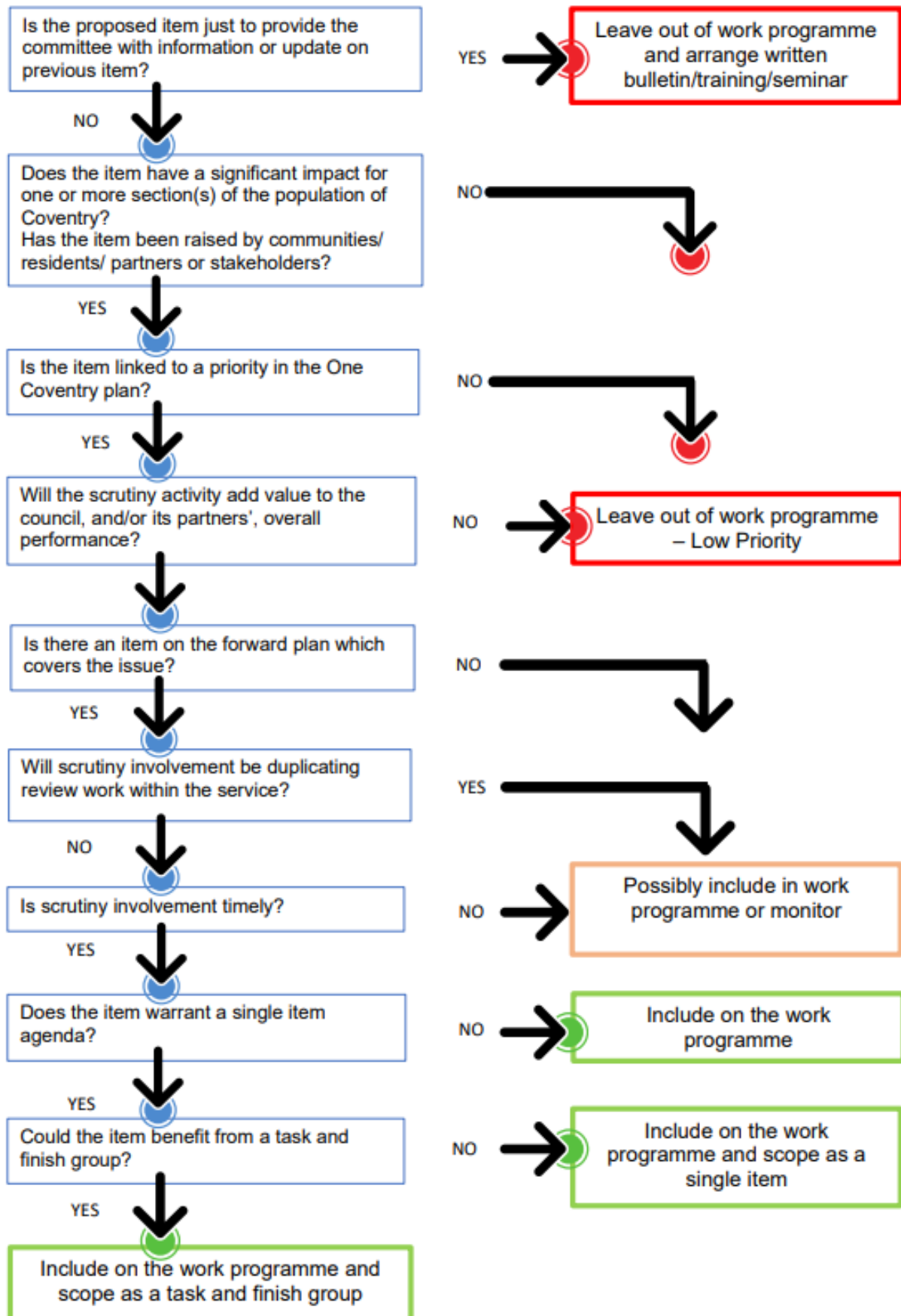
<b>Date</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Detail</b>	<b>Cabinet Member/ Lead Officer</b>
<b>26 February 2026</b>	School Performance Data Annual Report	An annual report on looking at performance and progress against national indicators	Cllr Sandhu Rachael Sugars
	SEND Strategy Update	To consider the refreshed strategy following co-production with children and parents. To specifically look at SEND provision in mainstream schools – possibly to include Behaviour Strategy and alternative provision	Jeannette Essex Cllr Sandhu
<b>26 March 2026</b>	Early Years Strategy and Best Start in Life	To come in 2025 and to include progress on actions requested on 17/7/24 re: oral and dental health – links with Best Start in Life	R Sugars/J Moffat Cllr Sandhu and Cllr Seaman
	Family First Partnership (Social Care Reform)	Update on social reforms and the Council's response.	Cllr Seaman S Sen, C Heeley
	Regional Placements	Also to include progress on WEst Midlands Safer Centre	S Sen Cllr Seaman
<b>Meetings to be allocated</b>	School Places Sufficiency	Primary, Secondary and Special – to look in more detail at the delivery on the One Strategic Plan – refer to Scruco for Cabinet Report.	
	Kinship Strategy and Local Kinship Offer (25/26)		
	MASH – Effective Support for Children and Families in Coventry	Looking at the impact of the new partnership threshold document in reducing inappropriate referrals into MASH, as well as diversion to Family Hubs.	Cllr Seaman Sukriti Sen
	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 wellbeing in schools and universities – including the school nursing service	
	Family Health and Lifestyles Service	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. Also how the	Bill McCann, Angela Baker Cllr Caan

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Date	Title	Detail	Cabinet Member/ Lead Officer
		service is supporting Early Help <a href="#">BN CM CYP &amp; PHSW - Early Help.docx</a>	
	Behaviour Pathway	To include the Belonging Strategy, Coventry Alternative Provision and the evaluation report on the pilot programme to reduce exclusions. To include with February meeting item on SED.	R Sugars Cllr Sandhu
	Campaign on smart phones in school	Looking at the impact on behaviour, mental health and attention span	Cllr Sandhu
	Children and Adolescents Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Local Transformation Plan April 2025 – March 2027		
	Family Valued and Reunification Project	Pick up outstanding items from 24-25, cost of care proceedings, ethnicity, cost of different levels of intervention	
	Breakfast Clubs		
	Child Sexual Exploitation	Work of the Horizon Team – links with the police and health.	Cllr Seaman Chris Heeley
	Families First Partnership Programme		
<b>Items taken for information</b>	Site visit to Coombe Abbey Outdoor Education Centre		



### Work Programme Decision Flow Chart



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