

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)
held at 10.00 am on Thursday, 26 March 2026

Present:

Members: Councillor L Kelly (Chair)
Councillor J Birdi
Councillor J Gardiner
Councillor M Mutton (Substitute for Councillor F Abbott)
Councillor S Nazir
Councillor E M Reeves
Councillor R Thay
Councillor A Tucker

Co-Opted Members: Mrs S Hanson (Nominated by the Church of England)
Mr D Jackson
Mr G Vohra (Nominated from other faith groups in the city)

Other Members (by invitation): Councillor K Sandhu – Cabinet Member for Education and Skills
Councillor P Seaman – Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

Employees (by Service Area):

Education and Children C Heeley, A King, J Moffat

Law and Governance G Holmes, M Salmon

Apologies: Councillor B Christopher - Deputy Cabinet Member for Children and Young People (by invitation)

Public Business

39. Declarations of Interests

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests.

40. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 26th February 2026 were agreed and signed as a true record. There were no matters arising.

41. Early Years Strategy and Best Start in Life

The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) received a briefing note and presentation of the Director of Children's Services and Education that provided an update on the implementation of the Best Start in Life (BSiL) Strategy

and Local Area Plan (2026–2029), set out Coventry’s statutory Good Level of Development (GLD) targets and the approach to delivery through Best Start Family Hubs and partners, and confirmed the proposed approach to governance, workforce, and monitoring.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People attended the meeting for this item of business.

The briefing note and presentation highlighted:

- Coventry’s early years position, statutory GLD targets, and delivery through Best Start Family Hubs
- The national requirement: a Best Start in Life Strategy and Local Area Action Plan in operation by April 2026 and Coventry’s response
- Coventry: Good Level of Development (GLD) - current position and trend (Reception 2024/25), and the position by the end of academic year 2027/28
- Current Coventry delivery system working in collaboration to support children in early years and have the best start in life, and to achieve a good level of development
- Best Start in Life: National Strategy - HM Government Best Start in Life Strategy 2026–2029
- Bold Start, Bright Futures (2026–2029) - Plan to Improve Child Development and Health Outcomes from pre-Birth to 5
- Best Start Family Hub and Healthy Babies Investment, Workforce and Branding
- Next Steps - completion of the Best Start in Life Strategy and Local area Action plan by mid-late April and publication; establishment of the multiagency governance for this ambitious programme of work and performance dashboard; refocus of the interventions and service offer to children in most need (boys, children learning EAL, FSM, SEND) and geographical wards to narrow the gap; close monitoring of the impact of the local area action plan to ensure outcomes are being delivered and targets are likely to be met

In considering the briefing note and the presentation by officers, the Board discussed issues, asked questions and received responses from officers and the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills on matters including:

- The Government required the production of the Strategy, which aligned with our Marmot City priorities, by July 2026
- The Authority worked with a range of partners, Education and Children’s Services, Family Hubs, SEND services, schools, and early years providers, and there was already a work stream that was multi-agency supported and an operational stakeholder group in operation
- A new governance process would be established for the Strategy – Best Start in Life Partnership Programme Board and also a Multi-Agency Operational Stakeholder Group, who would establish its own Service Level Action Plans
- The Outcomes Framework would be shared across the partnership

- The targets were challenging but achievable through partnership working and commitment
- The drivers for the Strategy needed to remain the same
- Changing culture could be challenging and there were known and unknown challenges
- There was a need to access information about the groups of children not yet seen and targeting these children may require slightly changing course dependant on their needs
- It was anticipated that there would be a timeframe of 10 years for the results of the work to be realised
- A further 6 years of investment, in addition to the first 3 years funding, would be required to realise a difference
- Data analysis through the HDRD had identified disadvantage and poverty as the key factor for families – need to look into the reasons behind the issues experienced by these families and work flexibly to target work.
- There was a recognised developmental delay in some children from a very early age – improvement in the early years stage would benefit children and families, particularly for when children started school
- There had been a particular focus on 3–4-year-olds, however it was recognised that the dip in development in 2024 was possibly as a result of Covid born children not being able to access services and suggested that more investment for 0-2yrs was required
- There was a good pathway with parental engagement which helped to shape the offer/services - families were committed and wanted the best for their children, they were telling the Local Authority what they needed and engaging with the offer
- The Council was highly regarded by the DFE for the work it had undertaken
- Milestones in children's achievements/good levels of development had been modelled, and data analysis had improved
- From 1st April 2026 Local and National Branding that would be used for the Best Start Family Hubs (these will retain their own colours), and the Healthy Babies Programme. The changes would be gradually introduced but would follow a plan for completion as soon as was practicable
- The Family Hub offer was available to children of all ages and their families
- Community and digital offers were big objectives
- The Council had provided its support for the continuation of the development and provision of the services for the future

The Board thanked offices for their presentation and their continued commitment to the work and requested that Annual Reports on Progress be submitted to the Board.

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

- 1) Notes the progress to date on the Best Start in Life Strategy and Local Area Plan.**
- 2) Endorses the delivery approach and the proposed governance and monitoring arrangements.**

- 3) **Supports the continued integrated work with a range of partners, Education and Children's services, Family Hubs, SEND services, schools, and early years providers to accelerate improvement in GLD, especially for disadvantaged children.**
- 4) **Annual Reports on Progress be submitted to the Board, including take up from different groups of children.**

42. **Family First Partnership (Social Care Reform)**

The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) received a briefing note and presentation of the Director of Children's Services and Education that provided an update on Coventry's progress in design and implementation for the Families First Partnership Programme.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People attended the meeting for this item of business.

The briefing note and presentation highlighted:

- Publication of the Department for Education new guidance on the Families First Partnership Programme (FFPP) to transform the whole system of help, support and protection for children and families
- The Council's work supported the implementation of the Programme which aligned with delivering the One Coventry approach and strengthening the system around families
- Coventry brought together partners from across the local system, including Council services, health, policing, education, and the voluntary and community sector, to develop an initial response to the national programme
- Work was built on Coventry's well-established strengths, including its Family Hub offer and mature, targeted Early Help system, which already provided coordinated accessible support to children, young people and families in the city
- The establishment of a multi-agency transformation team bringing together officers from education, health, policing, and the Local Authority
- A focus on shaping the Family Help Service Model, ensuring that future developments aligned with national reform requirements and enhanced Coventry's existing integrated approach
- Establishing a robust foundation for the next stage of development, including further design, testing, and phased implementation through 2026.
- Preparation for a wider set of developments required through Families First
- The integration of Family Help and Child Protection, the strengthening of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, and the delivery of more consistent, relationship-based practice for children and families
- The design of the Multi-Agency Child Protection Team model to sit alongside Family Help as a core component of the future integrated system of support, safeguarding, and protection
- The Multi-Agency Child Protection Team model which built on and evolved the current Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub arrangements supporting more consistent thresholds, improved information-sharing, and stronger collective ownership of risk

- The integration of the Child Protection Conference Chair function into the Lead Child Protection Practitioner role
- Next steps: continue with local planning and development of enhanced partner-involved multi-agency arrangements; development of a test-and-learn pilot focused on end-to-end pathway from Family Help through to Multi-Agency Child Protection; ensuring that the Family Help element of the model was fully embedded, robust and delivering impact; and the continuation of testing and refining key components of the Multi-Agency Child Protection model
- Coventry's funding position – the Department for Education's commitment to four years of funding to support Coventry in delivering the full scope of the Families First Programme from 2025/26 to 2028/29
- Governance Arrangements – the Families First Partnership Board, the Coventry Children's Safeguarding Partnership; and the Children and Education Steering Group, would provide a coherent structure that supported both strategic leadership and operational delivery in line with national expectations and local priorities

In considering the briefing note and the presentation by officers, the Board discussed issues, asked questions and received responses from officers and the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills on matters including:

- The Outcomes Framework provided an indication of the Council's successes which included: how many families were reached; reducing the number of children from early help going forward; children thriving, doing well and being safe; and families retaining one lead practitioner
- The dedicated multi-agency Transformation Team brought together education, health, and policing, alongside the local authority ensuring that the programme was co-owned across the partnership, with expertise, influence, and leadership to drive system-wide change
- A dedicated post in Coventry, who ran a Health Oversight Group, would look at what health services needed to do to change and adapt
- Regular meetings with Public Health looked at what services they commissioned
- Work was built on strong relationships to ensure that SILO working was not undertaken
- Digital technology (AI) was being utilised to assist where possible and appropriate
- CoventryFamilies.co.uk – learning from access to the site, the system could send relevant information to users. This targeted individuals with trusted information without the need for them to search

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People thanked officers for their continued hard work, dedication and commitment to the children and families in the city.

The Board requested that the relevant Director be requested to address digitally secure network provision for the Police to enable them to be situated with the MASH Team in an appropriate location.

RESOLVED that the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board (2) notes progress to date on the design and implementation planning of the Families First Partnership Programme and endorses the delivery approach and the governance and monitoring arrangements.

43. Work Programme 2025/26

The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) received a briefing note of the Scrutiny Co-ordinator that detailed issues that were on the Board's Work Programme for meetings of the Board for 2025/26. As this was the last meeting of the year, the Board noted the items they had considered over the course of the year, the list of matters to be considered on a date to be confirmed, and the list of matters to be considered in the next Municipal Year.

Further to Resolution 4) in Minute 41/25 above, an item headed 'Early Years Strategy and Best Start in Life Annual Report on Progress' be added to the Work Programme.

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

- 1) Notes the matters considered during the Municipal Year 2025/26, the list of matters to be considered on a date to be confirmed, and the list of matters to be considered in the Municipal Year 2026/27.**
- 2) Agrees that 'Early Years Strategy and Best Start in Life Annual Report on Progress' be added to the Work Programme for future consideration.**

44. Any Other Business

There were no other items of public business.

Ofsted Inspection

The Board noted that the outcome of the recent Ofsted Inspection would be published in a report on 18th May 2026.

The Chair thanked all officers in Children's Social Care and Education Services for their continued dedicated hard work supporting families and children in the city and for their work on the inspection and asked that this be placed on record.

Thanks

The Board thanked Councillor Kelly for her work Chairing the Board for 2025/26 and asked that this be placed on record.

(Meeting closed at 11.40 am)