

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)
held at 2.00 pm on Thursday, 10 December 2015

Present:

Members: Councillor M Mutton (Chair)
Councillor S Bains
Councillor L Bigham
Councillor J Lepoidevin
Councillor C Miks
Councillor H Noonan
Councillor J O'Boyle
Councillor P Seaman

Co-Opted Members: Mrs K Jones

Cabinet Members: Councillor E Ruane (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People)
Councillor S Thomas (Deputy Cabinet Member for Education)

Employees (by Directorate):

F Doyle, People Directorate
Gosling, People Directorate
J Gregg, People Directorate
G Holmes, Resources Directorate
L Ricketts, Place Directorate
M Rose, Resources Directorate
J Sembi, People Directorate

Apologies: Councillor N Akhtar and D Kershaw
S Hanson and R Potter

Public Business

34. Declarations of Interests

There were no Disclosable Pecuniary Interests.

35. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 5th November, 2015 were approved.

The Scrutiny Board discussed Matters Arising from the last meeting and further to Minute 28/15 'Quality Assurance – Children's Placements' the Scrutiny Board noted the letter from the Minister of State for Children and Families, received in response to the letter from the Board.

36. **Progress of Recommendations of the Task and Finish Group on Fostering**

Further to Minute 54/14 the Board received a progress report of the Executive Director for People, regarding the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group on Fostering, which were approved by the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People (minute 36/14 refers). The report also included the Annual Report of the Fostering Service 2014/15 updated at Quarter 2 in 2015/16.

The report noted that Coventry had successfully implemented a skills fee per child in April, 2015 and had become a Fostering Friendly Employer in September, 2015. Childcare support for carers whilst on training had been agreed with Workforce Development. The report also noted that work was still in progress regarding the 'staying put' policy and the 'team around the child' approach.

Maureen Flick was welcomed to the meeting. The Board had invited her to the meeting and she spoke on behalf of the Coventry Foster Carers Association. Foster Carers welcomed the new skills fee per child and praised the work so far on the 'team around the child'. Foster Carers felt that "staying put" in foster placements should be normal practice for vulnerable young people and suggested that it be promoted with young people. They also felt that social workers should be assigned for longer and during vulnerable young people's transition to adult services i.e. not just until they were 18.

The Fostering Annual Report and update summarised service activity and highlighted the challenges of recruiting and supporting the number and type of carers who could meet the children's needs. The report recognised that foster carers were our most respected and valued resource.

The Board questioned the officers and the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People on aspects of the reports which included:

- Whether the skills fee per child had made a difference and attracted Foster Carers since April, 2015
- Praise for becoming a Foster Friendly Employer and ways to encourage engagement of other businesses in the city to also become Foster Friendly employers

RESOLVED that the Board:

- 1. note progress against the recommendations and support the work needed to achieve the outstanding recommendations**
- 2. request a further update in 6 months on the 'Staying Put' Policy**

37. **Early Help and Partnership Working**

Further to Minute 53/14 the Scrutiny Board noted a progress report of the Executive Director for People regarding Early Help. The high service demand and financial challenges in Coventry, underlined the importance of delivering effective Early Help. Early Help was defined as reaching children, young people and families when a need first emerged and intervening when we could have the most impact. Appended to the report were performance data and a troubled families (now known as strengthening families) programme update.

The report set out that effective Early Help was the responsibility of everyone in Coventry and how organisations including Coventry City Council would work together with families and how we would measure effectiveness. The graduated approach to service delivery provided different types of service to different levels of vulnerability. The Service delivery included:

- the Acting Early (0-5) initiative
- implementing the Strengthening Families programme (formally Troubled Families) Phase 2
- integrating early years services in 'hubs'
- meeting government participation targets for 2,3 and 4 year olds
- focussing on the toxic trio (domestic violence, alcohol and drug abuse)
- building on strong partnerships between schools, early help services and families
- strengthening the parenting offer
- developing a new model for mental health and emotional wellbeing support
- Phase 2 of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Reforms "lifting the cloud of limitation"
- delivering 'Ignite' – building on working with families to build capacity to manage problems and develop networks
- delivering effective health promotion and positive lifestyle choices

Officers highlighted the guiding principles of Early Help, the importance of working together and listening to the 'voice of the child' when assessing the family needs. Officers also discussed changes to services and measuring performance indicators.

The Board were very supportive of the name change to Strengthening Families.

The Board questioned the officers and the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People on aspects of the reports which included:

- changes to services and working in 'hubs'
- supporting schools
- working with neighbourhoods and local Councillors
- the Early Help approach referred to those 0-19 years old and up to 25 years old for young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, members asked who was responsible for the decision to intervene when the young person was over 18
- Ignite
- Strengthening Families targets
- Tracking families
- Case studies
- Empowering Communities
- Families not engaging
- Agencies leading on Common Assessment Framework's (CAFs)

Officers reported that a consultation on 'Connecting Communities' was underway which would impact on decisions about how services would change along with an

assessment of needs and skills. The aim of 'Connecting Communities' was to get the right services in the right areas of the city.

RESOLVED that the Board:

- 1. note the report and requested a report back in 6 months to update members on Early Help**
- 2. request case study examples of Early Help support**

38. Children's Services Spend and Use of Agency Staff

Further to Minute 32/15 the Board considered a report of the Executive Director for People regarding Children's Services Spend and Use of Agency Staff.

The report noted that Ofsted had identified a number of priority actions and areas for improvement and as a result an additional £5.6million for 2014/15 had been allocated to Children's Service's to improve, recruit and retain an effective workforce. Following the appointment of the Director for Children's Services the Children's Workforce Strategy would be revised and would be presented to the Board in February, 2016. The Strategy would aim to fulfil the requirements of the Improvement Plan and would include use of agencies and a model for the future. A revised offer for retention, alternative methods of recruitment and training would also be included.

In January 2015, 14 local authorities had agreed a protocol on capped rates for several levels of social work after Chief Executives and Directors of Children's services had raised concerns regarding escalating hourly rates. Work was also in progress to create a bank of references between local authorities to enable effective monitoring.

The report detailed the current use of agency staff which represented 25% of the workforce. Agency spend to date was £3.8 million and the forecast for agency spend in 2015/16 was £5.8million, a table detailed how agency spend was reducing however, 2014/15 included a £2million one off spend.

The 'Do it for Daniel' recruitment campaign had resulted in 47 appointments, however 13 had since withdrawn from the roles and a new campaign was underway. The Council had Social Worker Retention Scheme which would be reviewed to ensure it was fit for purpose and regionally competitive.

The Board questioned the officers and the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People on aspects of the reports which included:

- The Council's agency contract
- Successes that had resulted in Agency spend reducing
- The attraction of working for an agency and making the Council more attractive

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board note the report and welcome the opportunity for consideration of the Children's Workforce Strategy in February, 2016.

39. **Improvement Board Progress Report from 18 November 15**

Further to Minute 31/15 the Scrutiny Board noted a joint briefing note which detailed progress on the Children's Services Improvement Plan, reported to the Children's Services Improvement Board on 18th November, 2015 based on data from October, 2015. The next Improvement Board would be held on 6th January, 2016.

The progress report included an update on the six themes aligned to the Department for Education (DfE) notice and an update on the Local Safeguarding Children's Board as well as outcomes from the Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Review.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People also updated the Board on the outcomes of the Peer Review.

The Board questioned the Cabinet Member and officers on performance management. Further to Minute 2/15 the outcomes of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) Performance Management Task and Finish Group (now known as Supervision of Social Care Workforce) would be reported back in the New Year.

RESOLVED that the Board:

- 1. note the progress to date and would receive regular updates**
- 2. note the outcomes from the LGA Peer Review**

40. **Work Programme**

The Board noted that further to minute 42/14, an Adult Education update on the impact of actions taken, to improve the number of learners living in deprived neighbourhoods accessing Community Learning courses, had been circulated and as members had no further questions would now not be a future agenda item.

The Board also discussed future issues that would be added to the work programme and an additional discussion with Scrutiny Board (5) regarding Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) following the Joint Meeting held on 25th November, 2015.

RESOLVED that the following issues would be added to the work programme:

- Staying Put**
- Early Help – 6 month update**
- Changes to the Library Service – March, 2015**

41. **Any Other Business**

There were no other items of business.

(Meeting closed at 3.35 pm)

