

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)
held at 2.00 pm on Thursday, 8 December 2016

Present:

Members: Councillor M Mutton (Chair)
Councillor S Bains
Councillor L Kelly
Councillor D Kershaw
Councillor M Lapsa
Councillor A Lucas
Councillor P Male

Co-Opted Members: Mrs K Jones

Cabinet Members: Councillor K Maton
Councillor E Ruane

Employees (by Directorate):

A Coles, People Directorate
J Essex, People Directorate
J Gregg, People Directorate
G Holmes, Resources Directorate
M Rose, Resources Directorate

Apologies: Councillor N Akhtar, C Miks and P Seaman
S Hanson and R Potter

Public Business

40. Declarations of Interests

Councillor Kershaw declared an interest in Minute 44/16 below in that he had previously made decisions on the Education Travel Assistance Policy Changes Issue and he left the room while the item was discussed.

41. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 10th November, 2016, were approved.

42. Improvement Board Report - 14th November, 2016

Further to Minute 25/16 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 14th November, 2016, based on data from October, 2016.

The progress report included an update on the six themes aligned to the Department for Education (DfE) Improvement Notice and appended to the report was the Children's Services Improvement Plan on a page 2016-17.

At the request of the Scrutiny Board the regular report had been amended to highlight improvements since the last report.

The Scrutiny Board questioned the Cabinet Members, and officers on the Ofsted letter which summarised the monitoring visit to Children's Services on 8th and 9th November, 2016 and had been published on 8th December, 2016.

The Director of Children's Services noted that the Department for Education (DfE) assess progress against the improvement journey whereas Ofsted look at improvements to outcomes for children in specific cases.

The Scrutiny Board questioned officers on the following:

- Response to the letter and action plan
- Making supervision reflective
- Concerns about lack of progress
- Training for chairs of child protection conferences
- Assurance about risk

The Scrutiny Board congratulated officers on recruitment reducing the reliance on agency staff.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board noted progress and request that the next update include the Improvement Board response to the Ofsted letter.

43. **Improving and Redesigning City Council Children's Residential Care Provision**

The Scrutiny Board considered a Briefing Note and Report of the Executive Director for People which detailed different options for the reconfiguration of the City Council Children's Residential Care Provision.

Children's Internal Residential Care Redesign was one of eight projects which formed part of the Children's Services Transformation Programme, and set out to improve the quality of children's homes provided by the Council, whilst realising revenue benefits. It was planned that the redesign of the service would reduce spend on external residential provision by creating additional internal capacity by utilising the existing resource tied up in the current provision. The proposal was to provide homes with additional capacity, higher levels of occupancy and improved quality of care that represent better value for money.

The Cabinet Member Report, appended to the briefing note recommended a period of stakeholder consultation to explore options for the reconfiguration of the service by providing 4 smaller homes for children to replace the existing provision at Gravel Hill and The Grange children's homes. The proposal was based on an identified need to create a more coherent, modern and suitable model of provision for the future care of Coventry's children and young people who required a residential home while they were being looked after by the local authority.

The Board were requested to consider the proposals as part of the stakeholder consultation. At the suggestion of the Cabinet Member for Children and Young

People the Chair of the Scrutiny Board had invited the Westwood Ward Councillors who would be affected by the proposals.

The Scrutiny Board questioned the Cabinet Members and officers on the following:

- The potential challenges and opposition to changes
- The importance of communication with ward councillors and residents
- Short term placements for assessment of needs
- Less children's homes and more homes for children with opportunities to prepare children for adult life and responsibility
- Corporate Parent responsibilities
- Finances
- Voice of the Children and Consultation input from Voices of Care and Care Leavers

The Scrutiny Board welcomed the discussion about smaller homes for children in Coventry.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the Scrutiny Board support Option 1, the recommended proposal and request that the following be involved in the process:**
 - **local Councillors**
 - **local residents**
 - **Voices of Care**
 - **Care Leavers**

- 2) **Scrutiny Board contributions be included in the report for consideration by Cabinet following the consultation and a Briefing to be sent to the Cabinet Member**

44. **Education Travel Assistance Policy Changes - Public Consultation**

The Scrutiny Board considered a Briefing Note and Report of the Executive Director for People which provided information on proposed changes to the Education Travel Assistance Policy.

The report recognised that Coventry City Council has statutory responsibilities for travel assistance for eligible children and young people. However, it currently over-provided traditional forms of transport for children and young people compared to statutory duties and the provision made by other local authorities. As a consequence, some children and young people were missing out on the opportunity to develop independent travel skills. Independent travel skills gained in adolescence can be taken forward into adult life. Also there was significant forecast overspend on the Council's Home to School Transport budget (2016/17 quarter 1 forecast £3.5m spend against a £3.1m budget). Current policies and practice were not aligned with national statutory duties.

The Cabinet Member report appended to the briefing note recommended a public consultation on a revised travel assistance policy (for school aged children and young people aged 5-16 years old) and an amendment to the existing post 16 travel assistance policy that included the levying of a travel assistance charge for post-16 travel with exemption for low-income families. At his meeting on the 10th November 2016 (minute 3/16 refers), the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

approved a public consultation from 21st November 2016 to 13th January 2017, leading to a report back to the Cabinet on 7th March 2017, on the following:

a) A revised Travel Assistance Policy (Statutory School Age Children) which aligned the statutory walking distance eligibility criteria to national levels and had a stronger focus on the Council's travel assistance on public transport and innovative travel options aimed at reducing dependence on minibus and taxi options as appropriate.

b) A new Travel Assistance Policy for post 16 and post 19 students that fully reflected current statutory requirements. This policy included a contributory charge towards the cost of travel assistance for all post-16 students whose families did not meet the criteria for low income household concessions.

The Scrutiny Board were recommended to consider the proposals and feedback in response to the consultation.

The Scrutiny Board questioned the Cabinet Member and officers on the following:

- The number of young people potentially affected and if they have been contacted
- Enhanced resource provision
- Reassuring those not affected
- Cost of providing what is statutory requirement

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board agreed the recommendations and requested that

- 1. Officers directly contact parents and carers affected as a matter of urgency**
- 2. The cost of providing only what was statutorily required be shared with the Board**

45. **Outstanding Issues**

The Scrutiny Board noted the briefing note of the Scrutiny Co-ordinator regarding outstanding actions requested by the Board and that there were a number of items outstanding.

RESOLVED that the officers with Outstanding Items be contacted.

46. **Work Programme**

The Scrutiny Board noted the work programme and requested that the Cabinet Reports referred to in minute 43/16 and 44/16 above be shared with the Scrutiny Board for information in the new year. Officers to investigate Member visits to residential homes.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member reports be circulated to the Scrutiny Board and officers investigate member visits to residential childrens homes.

47. **Any Other Business**

Congratulations to the Horizon Team

The Scrutiny Board would like to send their congratulations to the Horizon Team for winning a silver award at the National Award Ceremony

(Meeting closed at 3.40 pm)