Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) held at 2.00 pm on Thursday, 30 November 2017

Present:

Members:	Councillor M Mutton (Chair) Councillor S Bains Councillor D Kershaw Councillor J Lepoidevin Councillor A Lucas Councillor P Male Councillor C Miks Councillor K Mulhall Councillor P Seaman
Co-Opted Members:	Mrs S Hanson and Mrs K Jones
Cabinet Member:	Councillor K Maton
Employees (by Directorate):	
Place	G Holmes, M Rose
People	J Essex, S Mills, K Nelson,
Apologies:	Councillor Ruane
Invited:	**Parents** C McCann L Grove **Headteachers** J Benton – Westwood Academy J Silverton – Fredrick Bird Primary School

Public Business

25. **Declarations of Interests**

There were no Disclosable Pecuniary Interests.

26. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 12th October, 2017 were approved.

27. **Implementation Update - Home to School/College Travel Assistance**

Further to Minute 44/16 'Education Travel Assistance Policy Changes – Public Consultation' the Scrutiny Board requested an update on the policy changes as they had been contacted by parents. Following consideration at Scrutiny Board 2

on 8th December, 2016 and a public consultation which took place from 21st November 2016 to 31st January 2017, Cabinet had approved a revised policy on 7th March, 2017, which was in force in April 2017 for new applicants and applied to existing applicants from September, 2017 (their minute 120/16 refers). The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills was invited to the meeting and also parent representatives were invited to speak at the meeting.

The Cabinet report noted that Coventry City Council had statutory responsibilities for travel assistance for eligible children and young people. However, it over-provided traditional forms of transport for children and young people compared to statutory duties and the provision made by other local authorities. There were two key consequences of this. Firstly, some children and young people were missing out on the opportunity to develop independent travel skills, which could be taken forward into adult life. Secondly, there was significant forecast overspend on the Council's Home to School Transport budget (2016/17 forecast £3.6m spend against a £3.1m budget). Current policies and practice were not aligned with national statutory duties.

The Cabinet report detailed the findings from the public consultation and recommended the implementation of revised policies. Where this lead to travel assistance stopping for some children and young people, alternatives were to be discussed with the family including particular consideration of independent travel as appropriate.

The briefing note to update Scrutiny on the revised policy explained applications for assistance and the process of appeals. It was evident that the new process was labour intensive and the decision making process in relation to entitlement was complex. Many applicants met the eligibility criteria on the basis of distance. In these cases, Special Educational Needs (SEN) criteria did not need to be applied and the applications were processed quickly. The application of entitlement on the grounds of SEN for children of statutory school age, was relatively easy to apply and most of these applications were processed quickly. Post 16 applications proved more problematic to process, because there was no automatic duty on the Local Authority to make arrangements. Judgement therefore had to be applied on whether a young person could reasonably make independent arrangements to travel to school or college. This was particularly difficult when a student or their parent/carer declared that they had access to a car and a driver, but were seeking reimbursement for the cost of fuel.

Following application of the process, learning and feedback has led to the following actions for improvement:

- The application deadline for 2018/19 would be brought forward to ensure that applicants received a decision before the end of the current academic year
- The application form would be revised, to assist applicants in providing all necessary information to inform the eligibility decision making process. This would be tested with the assistance of parents before it was launched to ensure that it was easy to understand and as simple as possible to complete

- The application form would enable post 16 applicants to provide evidence of low-income eligibility where required, at the point of application. This would ensure that contributions towards the cost of transport were assessed accurately at the point of first application thereby avoiding the need to appeal
- The current Travel Assistance policies would be supported with an easy to follow parent/young person guide. The draft guide would be reviewed with and by parents to ensure that it provided all of the information necessary before publication.

Parents spoke to the Board about their survey regarding the concerns of over 200 families affected which included:

- Poor communication most were not aware of the consultation
- Ambiguous, inconsistent and unhelpful advice
- Confusing appeals
- Anxiety caused for parents
- Ongoing appeals and concerns about whether the process would need to be an annual application
- Writing a poor letter addressed to young people with learning difficulties

The Cabinet Member and officers present responded to parents by thanking them for their feedback and apologising for the anxiety caused by the process. The process would benefit from improvements put in place following discussions with parents. Officers also reported on recent government revised guidance, publicity, consultation events and communication.

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

- The appeals process
- Applications refused at statutory school age
- Disruption to attendance at school during the process
- Contacting parents
- Improving consultations

The Scrutiny Board thanked parents for their contribution to the meeting and felt it added value to the discussion.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board requested a report back be considered in 6 months following the analysis of the implementation and that parent representatives be invited to the meeting.

28. **Exclusions, Alternative Provision and Elective Home Education**

The Scrutiny Board considered a briefing note of the Deputy Chief Executive (People) which provided an overview of:

- The number of permanent exclusions that had been implemented by Coventry schools over the last three academic years;
- The post exclusion process, leading to either an alternative school offer or alternative provision. This included recent service developments which

were implemented in September 2017, as an outcome of the Education re-design process;
- The numbers of families who had made a decision to educate their children at home, Elective Home Education (EHE) and the reasons, highlighting those that had chosen that route to avoid a permanent exclusion.

The briefing note explained that the vast majority of primary age pupils excluded from school were offered an alternative mainstream primary school. The specialist teaching support and advice service to schools for social, emotional and mental health difficulties (SEMH Team) delivered a nationally accredited de-escalation behaviour management intervention and other support. There was not a Pupil Referral Unit for Primary but an intensive programme known as KEYS, targeted at children at risk of exclusion, individual needs were assessed and then a programme of support established prior to re-integration into school. Woodfield School was a special school for primary age pupils with SEMH, at which children could be placed.

Secondary schools invested in a variety of internal behaviour support interventions and have managed move arrangements as part of their fair access protocol, there was also SEMH provisions. The Local Authority maintained a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) (Coventry Extended Learning Centre) to secure an appropriate education for students who had been permanently excluded from school. The Work Related Learning Team, work on behalf of schools to commission, coordinate and quality assure, off-site work-related learning provision for 13-19 year-old learners, particularly those who were most at risk of becoming disengaged from learning and 'not in education employment or training' (NEET). A pupil referral unit for pupils admitted to the University Hospital Coventry and Warwickshire (UHCW) provided education for pupils aged 4-16 on three paediatric wards (Wards 14-16), who were well enough to access learning.

The briefing noted the legal position with regard to Elected Home Education (EHE) was Section 436A of the Education Act 1996, imposed a duty on the local authority to establish (so far as it is possible to do so) the identities of children of compulsory school age in the authority's area; who were not registered at a school and were not receiving suitable education otherwise than at school. Local Authorities had no statutory duties in relation to monitoring the quality of home education and did not have the power to meet with or directly speak to the child. However, if the Council believed a child was not receiving a suitable education or was at risk, separate powers were invoked to enable an appropriate intervention.

It should be noted that parents were not required to register their child for EHE, or to seek the local authority's permission or approval. Consequently, it was recognised nationally, that LA EHE registers did not include the whole EHE population. The briefing provided analysis of the register, categorised reasons parents chose to EHE and key issues in relation to EHE.

Headteacher representatives had been invited to the meeting to contribute to the discussion.

Officers and Headteachers discussed the following with the Board:
- National context
- Safeguarding

- Relationships with the community
- Access visits
- Pathways
- Partnerships
- Managed moves
- Signs that more challenging behaviour is being displayed by children at a younger age
- KEYS provision

The Board questioned officers and Headteachers on the following:

- Data
- Managing transfers
- Excusions
- Safeguarding EHE
- Mental Health
- Alternative Provision PRU request
- Pathways back into mainstream education
- Behaviour support pre-school
- Financial implications of EHE
- Reasons for disruptive behaviour
- The category of philosophical/religious/cultural reasons parents chose to elect for Home Education

Officers agreed to circulate further information about the category philosophical/religious/cultural reasons parents chose to elect for Home Education.

The Board thanked the Headteachers for contributing to the discussion.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board requested the following:

1) **a report at the end of the academic year regarding changes to the Coventry Extended Learning Centre (CELC) be considered by Scrutiny**
2) **a Task and Finish Group to consider Mental Health from an educational perspective be arranged**

29. **Outstanding Issues**

The Scrutiny Board noted the Outstanding Issues.

30. **Work Programme**

The Board noted the work programme with the addition the following issues requested today:

- a home to school/collage travel assistance report in 6 months
- an update on the Coventry Extended Learning Centre (CELC)
- Task and Finish Group be arranged to consider Mental Health from an educational perspective

31. **Any Other Business**

Mrs Hanson's Award for her services to education in the City

The Scrutiny Board congratulated Mrs Hanson on her recent nomination for Maundy Money from the Queen. The Board were very supportive as Mrs Hanson was a valued member of the Board and had been part of the Board since it was established. She had been nominated for her services to Education in the City and was successful. The award will take place on Maundy Thursday.

(Meeting closed at 4.30 pm)