

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)
held at 10.00 am on Thursday, 28 November 2019

Present:

Members: Councillor K Sandhu (Chair)
Councillor P Akhtar
Councillor J Blundell
Councillor J Clifford (substitute for Councillor B Kaur)
Councillor J Lepoidevin
Councillor G Lloyd
Councillor C Thomas

Co-opted Members: Mrs S Hanson

Cabinet Members: Councillor P Seaman (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People)
Councillor K Maton (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills)

Employees (by Directorate):

People A Brennan, J Gregg, A King, G Lewis, H Nagra, K Nelson,
Place G Holmes, M Rose

Invited: I Parry - Centre for Public Scrutiny
G Banks - Chief Executive Coventry College
K Allen - Operations Manager Prospects Service
Students from Coventry College

Apologies: Councillors L Kelly, R Thay and B Kaur
Mrs K Jones

Public Business

23. Declarations of Interests

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests.

24. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 3rd October, 2019 were approved.

Further to minute 19/19 the following documents were circulated; a glossary of acronyms; a briefing note from Adoption Central England confirming sessional work arrangements.

Further to minute 20/19 a visit to Broadgate house had been arranged for 5th December, 2019 for the Scrutiny Board to meet with Social Workers.

25. **Children's Services Improvement**

The Scrutiny Board considered a briefing note of the Deputy Chief Executive (People) which provided an update on progress with Children's Services improvement reported to the Continuous Improvement Executive Group on 22 October 2019. The next Continuous Improvement Executive Group would be held on 19 December 2019.

The Continuous Improvement Executive Group would ensure tighter focus on continuous improvement and Ofsted preparation. The impact of performance would be managed and monitored by the group. This was an interim measure before returning to business as usual, in accordance with the revised arrangements for Children's Safeguarding, and subject to satisfactory inspection by September 2020. At this time the Executive Group would cease, oversight and monitoring would be transferred to Coventry Safeguarding Children's Partnership. Improvement Board members fully supported the revised arrangements and membership of the group.

The Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive continued to give public commitment that Children's Services remained a key priority for the Council. This included prioritising funding for Children's Services to maintain its capacity to improve. The Council, alongside partner organisations continued a relentless focus on securing improvements in services for children, young people and families to ensure they were safeguarded and achieve positive outcomes.

The next standard Inspection of Children's Services was likely to be between September 2019 and September 2020.

The report noted progress with the following:

- Children's Services Strategic Plan Journey to Excellence 2019-2022 which included transformation and improvement priorities, a revised vision and the improvement journey achievements to date
- The new Performance Board which would focus on core performance data and understand areas of performance that required improvement
- Quality Assurance Framework which detailed how quality was managed and measured. Monthly visits had been introduced.
- Social Work Academy at which 56 Newly Qualified Social Workers had been recruited and supported in their professional development since July, 2018.
- Workforce review of business services and the Social Worker of the Year Awards.
- Through Care had been nominated for their innovative work including the TV documentary 'Superkids' and the development of the local offer.
- Partnership working and the recent SEND inspection and forthcoming Inspection of Children's Services. The Scrutiny Board 2 Task and Finish Group had been established to review partnership engagement and working in Children's Services.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People congratulated the Social Work Academy Team on winning the Guardian Public Service Award for Workforce Learning and Development. This was recognition for the work that had been undertaken to support the newly qualified social workers in the early years of

their professional development and transition from university to become practice ready. The award also recognised the work on the progression scheme and recruitment and retention.

The Chair had welcomed to the meeting some young people from Coventry College who were present for the item on Post 16 Transitions, however they were invited to join the Members of the Board for the whole meeting.

The Board joined the Cabinet Member in congratulating the Social Work Academy Team on winning the Guardian Public Service Award for Workforce Learning and Development.

The Board and the young people present questioned the Cabinet Member and officers on the following:

- Caseload
- The Strategic Plan and further detail of data, for example, age, gender, ethnicity and number of Looked After Children as a percentage of the population of the city
- Future retention
- Families that do not engage with services
- Funding
- Looked After Children Leaving Care
- Preventing neglect
- Plans for 2020

Officers were also proud of the Social Work Academy Team and brought the Guardian trophy to the meeting. Officers discussed the Strategic Plan and how the data charted the journey, also citing pockets of good and outstanding practice. Officers were supporting retention of staff within the service, but with a reduced turn-over of staff and a more stable workforce there potentially may not be the opportunity for internal progression in the future. This could in turn lead to attrition and the loss of social workers to neighbouring authorities that did not have such a stable work force. Options to address this were discussed and members were keen that opportunities were sought at a regional level to try and address some of these concerns, either by supporting a more stable workforce regionally or to shift the focus of the academy to post qualifying awards for Coventry social workers.

Officers also discussed the strength based approach, constraints of funding, intervention levels and increasing early help. Members were reassured that the Council exceeded the minimum requirement for supporting Care leavers

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board

- 1) acknowledge progress and congratulate the Social Worker Academy Team on winning the Guardian Public Service Award for Workforce Learning and Development.**
- 2) recommend that the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People investigate options including scope for collaborative working with other Local Authorities by building on the success of the Social Work Academy to continue the retention of Social Workers in Coventry.**
- 3) request a six-month update on Children's Services data and a further breakdown of the information**

26. Early Years

The Scrutiny Board considered a briefing note of the Deputy Chief Executive (People) which provided an update on Early Years.

The briefing note and presentation detailed the following:

- A definition of 'School Readiness' and the expected 'Good Level of Development (GLD) against the 17 assessed Early Learning Goals (ELG)
- The Ofsted Profile of the 364 registered childcare providers in Coventry
- Performance and the gaps between Coventry children and vulnerable groups including disadvantaged children, children classified as not 'white British', disadvantaged white British boys, children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) children Looked After, gender differences and children with English as an Additional Language (EAL)
- Uptake of Places
- Family engagement in learning emphasising the goal was not to serve clients but to gain partners, which required a detailed understanding of the family contexts and barriers
- Partnership working, early help examples of activities with various partners were provided
- Next steps including the '50 things to do before you're 5' app

The Board and young people questioned the Cabinet Member and officers on the following:

- The distribution of hubs and providers
- Identifying disadvantaged groups
- Assessment of learning needs especially during transition
- Barriers to learning in particular to speech and language
- The statement that 'gaps in achievement can be determined at age 4 and children never catch up' and therefore the importance of early help
- The impact of the indices of multiple deprivation information that Coventry was in the most deprived fifth of all Local Authorities in England and deprivation was also linked to poorer outcomes
- The impact of migrant health needs assessment identifying that over 100 languages were spoken in Coventry and 9 per cent of households did not have someone in who speaks English as a first language
- The '50 things to do before you're 5' app

Officers discussed with the Board

- How the data was used to focus on certain groups and the benefits of this
- The challenges to increasing engagement of parents and the benefits of persistence with hard to engage parents
- The barriers parents and families face when engaging with services
- The recent evidence of benefits gained from having a strong conceptual development of any language not necessary English
- The '50 things to do before you're 5' adaptation of an app for use in Coventry

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board

- 1) Acknowledge the progress in early years and recognise the barriers that staff and parents continue to face**
- 2) Request a map with providers of early years provision and their locality to hubs**

27. Post 16 Transitions and Young People who are not participating in Education, Employment and Training (NEET).

The Scrutiny Board considered a briefing note of the Deputy Chief Executive (People) which provided an update on post 16 transitions and young people who were not participating in Education, Employment and Training (NEET).

The Chair welcomed the young people from Coventry College and thanked the Chief Executive for allowing the Board to hold the meeting in their Boardroom. Members at the meeting introduced themselves and the Chair explained the role of Councillors, procedure and that we were currently in a pre-election period which restricted the promotion of political parties.

The young people discussed their individual learning experiences and aspirations. The Chair thanked the young people for their presentation and asked about the advice they would give to young people leaving school. The advice they suggested included:

- Not giving up on your dreams as there would be alternative options to reach them
- It was okay to be unsure about what you want
- Do not stress to much
- Do not allow difficulties and disabilities to impact negatively on you

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People also thanked the young people for sharing their journeys and discussed how employers could support the journey too.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills shared in thanking the young people and felt they were brave, inspiring role models. He echoed that learning was a journey with choices and different routes, if you do not succeed at a certain point then it was not the end of that dream.

The Chief Executive of Coventry College presented to the Board the Further Education offer and how they encourage students to find the 'best version of themselves' she was proud of the representatives able to contribute positively to the meeting. She discussed the strategic plan, priorities and purpose and that although they were judged as requires improvement they had pockets of outstanding work and high aspirations.

The report noted the recent changes to the Department for Education (DfE) definition of NEET and what information the Local Authority were required to collect and report to the DfE on. The report also contained performance information from 2017-2019 for NEET and Not Known and included detail about various categories including gender, special educational needs and ethnic groups.

Working in partnership was highlighted in the report including Prospects, who were contracted to deliver the service, working with a range of other teams including Through Care, SEND, Youth Offending Service and Positive Youth Foundation at various locations to assist young people. The report also detailed 'Ambition Coventry' which was funded via grants to 6 delivery partners with the aim of reducing youth unemployment and supporting marginalised groups of young people. The report stated that the NEET figure was higher at age 16 than 17 in Coventry, the West Midlands and nationally but this was a typographical error and the figures were higher at 17 than 16.

The Chair welcomed Karen Allen from Prospects to the meeting and her contribution to the discussion regarding working together, being persistent and resilient were key to supporting vulnerable young people.

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

- tracking young people who were NEET
- Strategies to encourage engagement
- Concerns about exploitation, activity unknown and homeless young people
- Work experiences

Officers discussed Coventry's positive NEET figures and continued commitment to support young people. Officers also discussed communication between partners, acting quickly and persistence. The embedded rhetoric regarding NEETs joining gangs when the reality was that vulnerable young people were being exploited and the focus needed to be on the prevention of this. Officers know who the young people were that were logged as activity unknown and they work to engage with these young people and support vulnerable young people. The number of young people that were NEET was a national problem. Barriers were being discovered and signposting established as well as working with employers to develop social values and site visits into employment.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board

- 1) thank the college and the students for hosting the meeting, contributing to the discussion about post 16 transition and supporting young people.**
- 2) thank Karen Allen and Prospects for contributing to the discussion and supporting young people.**
- 3) request further data about qualifications of NEETs and those who had been excluded.**

28. Work Programme

The Scrutiny Board noted the work programme

29. Any Other Business

There were no other items of business.

(Meeting closed at 12.40 pm)