

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee held at 11.00 am on
Wednesday, 29 July 2020

Present:

Members: Councillor R Brown (Chair)

Councillor N Akhtar
Councillor A Andrews
Councillor J Clifford
Councillor L Kelly
Councillor C Miks
Councillor G Ridley
Councillor K Sandhu
Councillor R Singh

S Hanson, Co-opted Member of Education and
Children's Services Scrutiny Board

Other Members Present:- Councillor G Duggins, Leader of Coventry City Council
Councillor B Gittins, Deputy Cabinet Member, Children
and Young People
Councillor K Maton, Cabinet Member for Education and
Skills
Councillor P Seaman, Cabinet Member for Children and
Young People

Employees: V Castree, Law and Governance
G Holmes, Law and Governance
J Essex, Education and Skills
K Nelson, Director of Education and Skills
P Smith, Children's Services

Apologies: K Jones, Co-opted Member of Education and Children's
Services Scrutiny Board

Public Business

13. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

14. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 8 July, 2020 were agreed as a true record.
There were no matters arising

15. Education and Vulnerable Families

Cllr Brown introduced the item, outlining the effect that the pandemic had had on children, young people and their families, especially with the closure of schools to the majority of children and young people. The concern was that the lockdown situation has put additional pressure on already vulnerable families and that there was hidden harm in the system.

The Committee received a presentation which outlined the following;

- The situation had strengthened partnership working further
- That dynamic reset and recovery plans were in place at the Local Authority, Health and education settings level
- That all partnership schools were prepared to welcome all children back to school in September 2020.
- Support services were ready to resume full 'Covid safe' operations.
- That Children's Services, Police, Education continued to work together to address the presenting city-wide impact of Covid-19
- Circa 260 iterations of guidance have flowed from central government for schools
- To secure the safe opening of schools to Key Workers and Vulnerable Children all LA schools and settings and the vast majority of Academies had completed and submitted to the Local Authority Covid-19 operational risk assessments.
- The process had been repeated for the planned full re-opening of schools in September 2020 to reflect new Government guidance
- The breakdown of attendance of vulnerable student
- Free school meals update including that by mid-April 100% of known eligible children were recorded as accessing FSM, from a starting point in mid-March of just over 20%
- That to date, Coventry maintained schools have reported:
 - Additional costs of £450,000
 - Lost income of £580,000
 - Claiming for £270,000
- 1200 laptops have been reconfigured, updated and delivered to vulnerable children in conjunction with Children's Services, the Virtual School, IT, transport.
- The coordination of on-line resources for schools e.g. Coventry Recovery Curriculum
- Additional funding streams and funding for the sustainability of services
- The challenges ahead including:
 - Expectation of increased demand on front-line services across education and care will need to be absorbed, whilst sustaining Covid-19 responses leading to increased capacity challenges
 - Implementing the Outbreak Control Plan in response to Covid-19 transmission in schools and the community would require secure contingency planning and resource switching and service disruption
 - Home to school transport was an emerging challenge, that may impact on risk management in schools, pupil attendance, sufficiency and costs
 - Resource implications

The presentation also covered the steps being taken to keep children safe in the community by:

- Continuing to deliver ongoing protections, support and intervention to vulnerable children
- Four Family Hubs had remained open continuing to provide a “here to help” function for families
- Schools and education services setting up a contact system for vulnerable children who did not require or take up a school placement – this extended across school holiday periods and complimented social work contacts

It was also highlighted that there is an estimated financial impact of £1.5 million to Children’s Services.

The Committee also heard how Covid-19 had affected priorities and plans and what opportunities there were to do things differently in the long term. This included:

- Increased pressure on the system has resulted in an increased risk for children and young people, services continue to do all they can, when they can, to ensure children and families in Coventry are safeguarded
- The impact of COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the progress with the Children’s Services Strategic Plan resulting in timescales for actions to be revised.
- The Transformation Programme will be reconfigured as a result of COVID-19
- Some Local Authority education systems and processes have been delivered virtually leading to increased engagement, improved efficiency and productivity and improved outcomes – these benefits will be retained as part of a hybrid offer to families and schools
- The school partnership has strengthened – working together the ‘One Coventry’ approach needs to be sustained as the benefits driven by crisis management, have been strongly evidenced in practice
- Opportunities for more flexible working to be offered to staff going forward
- Opportunities to explore more virtual training/learning options/including foster carers
- Technology could be used to compliment rather than replace physical visits (hybrid offer)
- Technology provides a stronger and broader reach – proved invaluable as a communication and training tool

Following the presentation, Members raised a number of questions and issues, and received the following responses;

- The definition of vulnerable with regard to children and young people hadn’t changed throughout the pandemic period
- Recovery curriculum has a shift in emphasis to social, emotional and mental health
- Monitoring progress of children while not in school would be done on a national level, but with support locally through the partnership, who would collect data and prioritise funding to those schools where it was needed most
- Educational Psychology team had pulled together an approach to offer support for staff in schools which had gone Council wide, in terms of their well-being and mental health. There were strategies in place to make sure staff are not feeling isolated at home.
- The reliance on technology has been both a positive and a barrier to learning. It had highlighted the costs of access to technology and wifi, as well as

identifying inequalities. Digital literacy was key to access. There was a need to re-prioritise to improve the digital literacy offer for parents and carers

- The Council won't know the true financial position for schools until the end of the financial year. Schools were already in a tight position financially with most schools in Coventry already losing money under the new funding model.
- The funding for tutoring would not be going directly to schools, but to a national tutoring programme. Full details of this programme were not currently available.

The Committee noted their concerns that the two funding streams available to schools from the catch up premium and the National Tutoring Programme could be double counted if one was needed to subsidise the other.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the positive impact of the partnership approach, in minimising the potential impact of Covid-19 on all children and young people within the education system; including those from vulnerable families be noted and that the implementation of the Outbreak control plan be supported**
- 2) That the potential consequences that the loss of 4 months formal education will have on all children is considered and noted, which is likely to include: low attendance rates and disengagement; mental health and well-being concerns; increase in exclusions; exposure of hidden harm; transport barriers; ongoing disruption in the event of Covid-19 transmission episodes and increased poverty as the economic consequences are felt.**
- 3) That the financial and physical resource implications and limitations to respond to the anticipated increase in demand for statutory support services (including early help, social care and SEND) as all children return to nursery, schools or colleges and the full impact of Covid-19 and the extended lockdown is exposed be noted.**
- 4) That the Committee note the Outbreak Control Plan, which is pivotal to Coventry's recovery strategy across both social care and education**

16. Scrutiny Management

Councillor R Brown, Chair of the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee, attended the meeting of Cabinet Member for Jobs and Regeneration held on 14 July 2020 for consideration of an item relating to "Whitley Depot Rebuild – Additional Capital Allocation"

Councillor R Brown agreed that the decision was urgent and that call in should not apply. In accordance with the Constitution, this matter is reported to inform the Committee of the reason for urgency which is that the tender deadline expired on 17 July, 2020. To delay contract award risked the project having to be retendered and the capital costs increasing.

17. Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee Work Programme 2020/2021 and Outstanding Issues

The Committee considered and noted their Work Programme for 2020/21.

RESOLVED:-

- 1) That the meeting scheduled for 19th August is not required**
- 2) That a programme of dates for all Scrutiny Boards from September onwards be circulated**
- 3) That Digital Inclusion and Skills be added to the Work Programme**
- 4) That Vulnerability and Disadvantaged Young People as a result of Covid be referred to the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)**

18. Any Other Items of Public Business

The Committee noted it was the 20th anniversary of the Local Government Act 2000, which introduced the Cabinet and Scrutiny model of local government.

There were no other items of urgent public business.

(Meeting closed at 1.00 pm)