

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)
held at 3.00 pm on Thursday, 8 December 2022

Present:

Members: Councillor J Innes (Chair)
Councillor F Abbott
Councillor P Akhtar
Councillor J Blundell
Councillor S Keough
Councillor A Masih
Councillor R Thay

Co-Opted Members: Ghulam Vohra

Other Members: Councillor K Sandhu, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills
Councillor P Seaman, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

Employees (by Directorate):

Children's Services	J Gregg (Director), M Clayton
Education and Skills	K Nelson, R Sugars,
Revenues and Benefits	K Gist, B Strain
Law and Governance	G Holmes, C Sinclair

Apologies: Councillor CE Thomas and A Tucker

Public Business

12. Declarations of Interests

Minute 5 (Cost of the School Day Project and Support to and from Schools for Financial Hardship)

- Councillor F Abbott declared that she was Chair of the Feeding Coventry Steering Group
- Mr G Vohra declared that he was a Governor of Lyng Hall School

As neither declaration was a disclosable pecuniary interest, Councillor Abbott and Mr Vohra remained in the meeting during the consideration of the item.

13. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2022 were agreed and signed as a true record.

Matter Arising:

Children's Services Ofsted Outcome

In respect of the Board's request for information on bidding for short term funding, it was reported that this was a national issue recognised by the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee and a report on Governing England made the following recommendation on this matter "*In response to this report, the Government should make a clear commitment to put an end to the ubiquitous system of bidding for pots of money that appear to us to be wasteful of resources that could be deployed more effectively at all levels.*" The Board would receive an update on the Government's response as soon as it was available.

14. **Cost of the School Day Project and Support to and from Schools for Financial Hardship**

The Board considered a briefing note which provided information on the Cost of the School Day Project in Coventry and on support available to and provided by schools for pupils in financial hardship.

The briefing note indicated that the cost-of-living crisis was a national issue and the scale of the challenges provided limited ability for schools to respond in isolation. Schools alongside the Local Authority, and in partnership with community, voluntary and statutory sector organisations and businesses contributed to the 'One Coventry' response to the rising costs of living.

The Cost of the School Day project was run by Child Poverty Action Group and had run in Coventry between December 2020 and July 2022. It was a child's voice and whole school community project that focused on tackling financial barriers to learning and poverty stigma in schools and it helps schools and local authorities to take action which support children and young people's participation and wellbeing and support families on low incomes. The approach had been adapted to enable the project to continue during the pandemic.

The work had included direct work with schools, advice, support and training, resources for schools, practice gathering and sharing best practice with other schools and a collaborative approach.

Data on usage, reach and feedback was detailed in the briefing note, together with further information on free school meals (FSM), financial support for FSM during holiday periods, holiday activities and food programme, pre-loved uniform, Coventry Society working with schools, integrated services and the Coventry Food Network.

The Board questioned Officers and received responses on a number of matters relating to the presentation including:

- Clarification on free school meals and entitlement
- Sharing information with communities where English was not their first language
- Uptake of holiday activities

Following discussion, the Board requested further information on Schools that were participating in the Cost of the School Day Project and it was agreed that this information would be circulated to Members.

In respect of the pre-loved uniform project, Officers undertook to ensure all schools had a full brief on this initiative in advance of the start of the school year.

RESOLVED that the Board:

(a) Note the content of the report

(b) Agree that a letter be sent to the Secretary of State and Shadow Secretary of State for Education and the three Coventry MPs. The letter would be sent jointly from the Board, the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills and the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and would convey their concerns regarding the impact of poverty and the cost-of-living crisis on children's learning.

(c) Agree to receive a report at a future meeting on the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on schools' budgets

15. Support to Care Leavers and The House Project

The Board considered a briefing note which set out the main changes in support offered to care leavers as a result of *The Children and Social Work Act 2017 (the Act)*. The paper focused on one area of the Coventry Local Offer to care leavers which was the housing support for children in care and care leavers through the Coventry House Project.

The Act introduced a requirement for Councils to publish a Local Offer for care leavers. The Local Offer was a document that outlined the services and support that would be available to care leavers in the local area where they live when they leave care. It included information about legal entitlements (rights) as well as any extra support that the Council might choose to give. The Coventry Local Offer was agreed by members in November 2018.

Section three of the Act introduced a new duty on local authorities, which required it to offer Personal Adviser support to all care leavers up to the age of 25.

Both the local offer and extension of Personal Adviser support were now embedded in Children's Services. This was helping to ensure that care leavers get support required, recently endorsed during a recent Ofsted inspection. The Briefing note also set out the background information to the House Project, Financial impact and the 'Staying Close' offer.

In attendance at the meeting were Service users, Paris and Alex, together with staff from the House Project. Paris and Alex spoke about their experience of their journey to independence with the help of the House Project, and staff spoke about their roles in supporting the young people.

The House Project had helped create a supportive, and creative offer for children in care and care leavers of Coventry. The feedback from partners and the children and young people involved with the project had been positive. There is a great

energy and creativity from the young people and practitioners and a real sense of community. The young people had created a peer network and have helped one another to refurbish their homes. There was recognition in the Ofsted Inspection for the sense of community and support/participation that the House Project had within Coventry.

The partnership with Citizen Housing Association was critical to the Coventry House Project. Citizen had pledged to provide properties to the young people on the project and they are also a steering group partner. There had been discussions with the Strategic Lead for Housing and a plan to reapproach all housing providers in Coventry given the success from cohort 1 and 2 of the Coventry Project.

During discussion it was suggested that there was an opportunity to include 'Care Leaver' as a protected characteristic and agreed that this be recommended to the Cabinet Member.

The Board also discussed and agreed to ask the Cabinet Member to investigate the possibility of increasing the £2k setting up home grant for care leavers. In addition, it was also agreed that it would be beneficial to engage with other housing providers in order to expand the accommodation offer.

Councillor P Akhtar, in his role on the West Midlands Combined Authority Transport and Delivery Committee, undertook to investigate the possibility of securing free travel for Care Leavers as Manchester City Council currently do. On behalf of the Board, the Chair thanked Alex, Paris and all attendees for their excellent and informative presentation.

RESOLVED that the Board:

- (a) Note the content of the report and presentation.**
- (b) Commended all those involved in the House Project and expressed support for work being done to expand the Project.**
- (c) Recommend that the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People investigate the possibility of the Council including 'Care Leaver' as a protected characteristic.**
- (d) Recommend that the Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities encourage other social housing providers to be involved with the House Project.**
- (e) Recommend that the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and the Cabinet Member for Strategic Resource and Finance investigate the possibility of increasing the £2k Setting Up Home grant for Care Leavers**

16. Work Programme and Outstanding Issues

The Work Programme was noted including the addition of the Recommendation at Minute 14 above which would be included on the agenda for the February 2023 meeting.

There were no outstanding issues.

17. **Any Other Business**

There were no other items of business.

(Meeting closed at 4.45 pm)