

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)
held at 3.00 pm on Thursday, 16 March 2023

Present:

Members: Councillor J Innes (Chair)
Councillor P Akhtar
Councillor J Blundell
Councillor S Keough
Councillor A Masih
Councillor P Seaman
Councillor R Thay
Councillor CE Thomas

Co-Opted Members: Mrs S Hanson and Mr G Vohra

Other Members: Councillor P Seaman (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People)

By invitation: David Jackson (Observer)

Employees (by Directorate):

Children's Services J Gregg, A King, R Sugars

Law and Governance G Holmes, C Taylor

Apologies: Councillors F Abbott, B Gittins (Deputy Cabinet Member for Children and Young People), K Sandhu (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills) and A Tucker

Public Business

25. Declarations of Interests

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests.

26. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 February 2023 were agreed and signed as a true record.

Minute 21 (Coventry Education Performance 2022) – Budgets had been approved in January which would be passed on to schools from April 2023.

A response had not yet been received from the Secretary of State. This would be followed up.

27. Early Years Strategy

The Board considered a briefing note of the Director of Children's Services regarding the Early Years Strategy.

In England a child's progress was reviewed between the age of 2 and 3 and again at the end of the school year in which they turn 5. The teachers judgement was used to assess the child's attainment against 17 Early Learning Goals (ELG's) covering 7 areas of learning.

Achievement of some of the 17 goals at the 'expected level', lead to a child meeting an indicator called a 'Good Level of Development (GLD)'. This was a national indicator of whether a child was ready for school, even through the assessment took place at the end of the Reception year.

In 2021, the Early Learning goals changed however, they continued to be a measure of attainment, not progress. Local Authority moderation of the data, was no longer a statutory requirement and along with the impact of Covid-19, the data for 2022 was not comparable with previous datasets.

The changes included:

- Revisions to strengthen all areas of learning with new educational programmes that set out what children must experience and learn about.
- Revisions to all 17 ELG's across the 7 areas of learning to make these more precise.
- Revised text to make it easier to understand what was required for a child to be working at the expected level of development and to link more closely with Key Stage one curriculum.
- Removal of 'exceeding' assessment band.

The school readiness local position showed that:

- Overall achievement of a Good Level of Development in Coventry was 61.2% compared to the national average of 65.2%. The higher gap to national for the area of communication and language may suggest children in Coventry had been affected by the impact of Covid-19 to a greater extent than other children nationally. Compared to the West Midlands, Children in Coventry were not achieving as well as their peers, where achievement of GLD was 63.7%.
- Data for groups showed the positive impact of approaches to 'SEND support' in the early years with outcomes were significantly above national performance. Children supported by an education and health care plan also achieved slightly above national outcomes. Those with an identified SEND need related to communication and language need, achieved above average.
- The outcomes for children looked after by the Local Authority appeared to be of significant strength however, the cohort size was small.
- Programmes of support were in place to further support disadvantaged groups and White British Boys, where outcomes were lower than national.
- Outcomes for children for whom English was not their first language, were slightly below national average.

- Appendix 1 detailed examples of activity in response to data, links to Early Years Strategy and new opportunities to continue to improve School Readiness.

The Coventry Early Years Strategy: Every Child, Every Chance, Every Day, developed in November 2020 was built around the Marmot Review Priority Objectives for 2020. Extracts from the Leadsom Report 2021 were also incorporated into the Strategy which was then published in September 2021 alongside 4 Service Area plans. Revised mapping of available services and support for children and families from birth to 5 years was completed across the city. In March 2022 a review of progress was undertaken and over the last 9 months, delivery of actions had continued the next step being to monitor progress more closely and implement outcomes.

Coventry's Marmot Action Plan was being refreshed to address potentially widening health inequalities as part of Coventry's post Covid-19 recovery and work was taking place with partners to collate programmes of work and activities. On behalf of the Marmot Partnership, the Public Health Inequalities team were working in partnership with the Senior Adviser for Early Years and partners to capture the work to reduce health inequalities. By February 2023, a final draft of the Marmot action plan would be presented to the Partnership and the Health and Wellbeing Board.

Over the past 5 years, the number of Early Years and Reception Year children with additional needs had increased significantly. This was partly due to the impact of Covid-19. The Saplings Programme complemented the existing SEND provision by enhancing the local offer to children who needed extra help during their Reception Year and these children spend part of their time learning in the Saplings Base at Little Heath Primary School.

In Autumn term 2022, 33 children were referred to the programme, 18 of which were identified as appropriate for the intervention. These children came from 15 different schools, between 1 and 6 miles from the Saplings Base.

The Members asked questions and received responses on a number of matters including:

- Work undertaken through the strategy on social interaction and language development to assist the increasing number of children with SEN.
- Rolling out the '50 things' app to ensure a robust universal offer including interactions with family hubs and outreach locations, upskilling practitioners and training a further 20 staff in Portage (pre SEN support).
- Impact of the Saplings Programme and regular evaluation of the programme.
- The impact of Covid leaving a legacy of children impacted by family trauma and adverse childhood experiences affecting emotional and social wellbeing.
- Training and workforce development. With the Early Years sector, staff turnover was high. There was a focus on quality and building sufficiency.
- Children being taught to use technology and internet safety within the Early Years curriculum.

- Early Years staff training was rolled out face to face, hybrid, online and via webinars. Designated Safeguarding Lead training had traditionally been face to face however, was currently online due to supply staff shortages.
- The issue of white British boys underachieving and programmes of support being in place.
- The Best Start in Life Programme.
- Internal data on children who had not been to school or had fallen behind was used to target resources effectively.

The Board recognised, commended and thanked officers for the work they continued to do in challenging circumstances to improve the education outcomes for the children of Coventry.

RESOLVED that the Board:

- 1. Note the 2022 dataset for pupils aged 5 in Coventry schools**
- 2. Note the progress of the Early Years Strategy, within the context of Covid-19 and be aware of new opportunities to address identified concerns related to school readiness.**
- 3. Note the progress in relation to the Marmot Review and initiation of the Saplings Programme.**
- 4. Requests a report to be brought back to SB2 in the 2023/24 Municipal Year regarding the Best Start in Life Programme and the Early years Saplings Programme be added to the Work Programme in 2023/24.**

28. Children's Services Development Plan (Ofsted actions)

The Board considered a briefing note of the Director of Children's Services regarding Children's Services Ofsted Areas for Development Action Plan Progress.

Children's Services were re-inspected by Ofsted from 13 June – 1 July 2022. The report was published on 12 August 2022 and the overall judgement for Children's Services in Coventry was 'Good'.

The Ofsted inspection report identified 4 areas for further development:

- The focus on children's views and carers capacity to meet children's needs in private fostering arrangements
- The response to children aged 16 and 17 who are homeless
- The mental and emotional wellbeing provision for care leavers
- The quality of team managers supervision provided to social workers

A Children's Services Areas for Development Action Plan had been developed in response to the Ofsted recommendations and areas for development and submitted to Ofsted on 18 November 2023.

Progress against the Children's Services Areas for Development Action Plan was as follows:

Recommendation 1 – the focus on children’s views and carers capacity to meet children’s needs in private fostering arrangements.

A Private Fostering Action Plan was developed and provided to Ofsted. Progress against actions was monitored monthly.

Two Lead IRO roles had been identified for children who were privately fostered to provide quality assurance around their care arrangements and ensure that their voices and wishes were heard and considered. As the Private Fostered children were allocated to an IRO, a system was in place to raise any significant concerns in advance.

Recommendation 2 – the response to children aged 16 and 17 who are homeless.

A quality assurance process was undertaken to review and improve the response and practice for 16/17 year olds presenting as homeless. The process had been incorporated into the Children’s Services Quality Assurance Framework to monitor on a regular basis.

A Youth Hub in the city for young homeless people had been developed to provide a welcoming safe accessible environment to access support, information and guidance. The project would go live in April 2023.

Recommendation 3 – the mental and emotional wellbeing provision for care leavers

An initial review of LAC CAMHS service had been undertaken to identify what worked and any gaps in service. The service had been redesigned and would be recommissioned by April 2023.

The funding pathway CAMHS service development for 18-25 years had been identified.

The Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Support service for up to 25 year old care leavers tender for Tier 2 had been awarded and went live in December 2022.

A pilot called ‘Ask Jan’ (a 24/7 telephone counselling and support service for care leavers) was undertaken, with a cohort of care leavers to assess impact and effectiveness which was progressing forward and would be evaluated.

Recommendation 4 – the quality of team managers supervision provided to social workers

Managers had completed a dip sampling exercise of supervision records. This information was being collated and analysed with findings to report tracking distance travelled and was completed in February 2023.

A range of leadership programmes had been offered to Managers including a bespoke Black Asian Leadership programme, planned for spring 2023.

The recording guidance relating to supervision and management oversight which enabled managers to capture reflective supervision in recording and drive progress in children's plans through supervision was being embedded within the service in line with Coventry Family Valued.

A range of focus groups were held in February to help managers see how they could support sustainability and embedding of the 'method and mindset model'.

The progress against the Areas for Development Action Plan would be monitored on a quarterly basis.

The Members asked questions and received responses on a number of matters including:

- An outstanding result could be achieved by delivering on the 4 areas outlined as recommendations in the Action Plan and also on the following:
 - Stabilise the workforce, recruit social workers and minimise end of use agency staff
 - Strengthen performance measures post Inspection
 - Delivery the family valued programme
 - Deliver the Ofsted Action Plan
 - Develop an extra mile offer
 - Continue to deliver an accurate self-assessment
 - Finalise the Strategic Plan, stretch targets and aspirations
 - Strengthen the impact of interventions
- Staffing recruitment and retention was challenging, particularly recruitment of experienced social workers.
- A Memorandum of Understanding was in place which did not allow social workers who moved to work for an agency, to then work for a Local Authority for at least a 6 month period.
- An increase in demand for staffing continued due to the increase in cases.
- Staff wellbeing weeks to increase motivation, mindset and welfare had been and would continue to be rolled out.
- The design of a multi-agency social worker team to provide a wrap-around service for families was not currently possible due to lack of funding
- The fostering team were proactive in matching children with families according to risk and need, including culture, ethnicity, community, religion and faith.
- The Social Worker Academy had made good progress to encourage social workers with ethnic and minority backgrounds. Universities had taken positive action to recruit from minority and ethnic groups and there had been significant interest from abroad.
- 87% of social workers were female.
- Private fostering was publicised each year by law. Communication material could be found in GP surgeries and schools.

In response to the questions, officers undertook to circulate the following information to the Board:

- The staff wellbeing programme.

- The breakdown of ethnic minority children known to Children's Services at the time of the Ofsted Inspection and the diversity and ethnicity of social workers.
- Communication materials regarding private fostering.

Officers agreed to provide help and assistance with the paperwork for ethnic minority fosterers on a case-by-case basis.

The Board thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for their work on the Children's Services Development Plan.

RESOLVED that the Education and Children's Scrutiny Board (2)

- 1. Notes the progress against the Ofsted recommendations highlighted in the Ofsted Areas for Development Action Plan.**
- 2. Includes Fostering and the Family Values Project (including the Reunification Project) on the Work Programme for 2023/24.**

29. Work Programme and Outstanding Issues

The Board noted the work programme and agreed the inclusion of the items below on the 2023/24 work programme.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board (2) notes the Work Programme and includes the following on the 2023/24 Work Programme:

- **Best Start in life Programme**
- **Early Years Saplings Programme**
- **Fostering**
- **Family Values Project (including Reunification Project)**

30. Any Other Business

The Board noted the Youth Justice System Ofsted result of Outstanding.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board (2) send a letter of congratulation to Councillor P Seaman and J Gregg and their team for the Youth Justice System Ofsted result of Outstanding.

(Meeting closed at 5.00 pm)