

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)
held at 10.00 am on Thursday, 21 December 2023

Present:

Members: Councillor CE Thomas (Chair)
Councillor J Blundell
Councillor S Keough
Councillor R Lancaster
Councillor A Masih
Councillor K Maton (substitute for Cllr T Khan)
Councillor S Nazir
Councillor E M Reeves
Councillor A Tucker

Co-Opted Members: Mrs S Hanson and Mr D Jackson

Other Members: Councillor G Duggins (Leader)
Councillor Dr K Sandhu (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills)
Councillor P Seaman (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People)

Employees (by Directorate):

Children's Services N Macdonald (Interim Director), M Clayton, R Jayswal

Education and Skills R Sugars (Director), H Bedford, A Coles

Law and Governance G Holmes, E Jones, T Robinson

Apologies: Councillor A Jobbar (Deputy Cabinet Member for Children and Young People)
Mr G Vohra

Public Business

22. Declarations of Interests

The Board noted that Councillor R Lancaster was involved in the delivery of the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme and Councillor CE Thomas was a Governor of Riverbank Academy and a trustee of the Willenhall Community Forum. As these were not disclosable pecuniary interests, they remained in the meeting.

23. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 23 November 2023 were signed as a true record.

There were no matters arising.

24. **Family Valued Programme**

The Board considered a briefing note of the Interim Director for Children's Services which provided an update on the progress and impact of the Family Valued Programme during the funded period and outlined the proposed next steps.

Family Valued was introduced in Coventry Children's Services as part of the national Strengthening Families, Protecting Children (SFPC) Programme; a 5-year programme funded by the Department for Education (DfE), focussing on safely reducing the number of children entering care, through implementing one of three programmes: Leeds Family Valued, Herefordshire Family Safeguarding, North Yorkshire's No Wrong Door.

Coventry City Council were one of the adopter local authorities of the Family Valued Programme; a Leeds City Council whole-system change programme seeking to create a shift in culture towards working 'with' families rather than doing things 'to' or 'for' them. The overall aim was to support more children to live safely at home with their families and within their communities, through introducing restorative practices and services.

Coventry Children's Services received grant funding of £4,204,141 over a 2.5-year period. Coventry Family Valued launched in April 2021, with the funded period ending in September 2023. The grant funded 36 full-time equivalent (FTE) additional posts in Children's Services to support the implementation of Coventry Family Valued. These additional posts have seen the significant expansion of the Family Group Conference (FGC) Service, additional capacity within the Connected Persons Team and Participation Team, the implementation of a Reunification Project and the creation of a Restorative Practice Team.

The briefing note summarised that alongside the additional posts there has been an implementation plan consisting of six workstreams: 1) Sustainability, Finance and Performance, 2) Embedding Relationship Based Practice, 3) Expansion of Family Group Conferencing and New Restorative Services, 4) Promoting Connected Persons and Permanence through Special Guardianship Orders, 5) Reunification Project, 6) Voice and Influence.

Additionally, Coventry Family Valued branding and communications across Children's Services and the partnership has centred around the three spires of Coventry Family Valued, to support practitioners, managers, and partners to connect with the aims and objectives of the programme: Spire 1 - A child friendly city, Spire 2 - Family-led decision making, Spire 3 - The Coventry Way.

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

- Family Group Conferencing (FGC) and referral percentages – the criteria and reasons for engagement and success rate including links to the Family Group Network.

- The financial sustainability of the program and the expectations for the lifecycle of the DfE grant.
- Assessments done by the Connected Persons Team instead of Child Social Workers and the communication between the two.
- The Youth Parliament Events.
- Corporate Parenting training for elected Members.
- The differences in levels of support between the Connected Persons Team and Special Guardianship Orders.
- The fostering process for family members considered as connected persons.
- Court proceeding costs and bid costs.

Councillor P Seaman (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People) thanked officers for the briefing note and recognised the unquantifiable value the programme has provided to children's services to, most importantly, keep children out of care. Specifically, the programme has helped to change the whole culture of children's services and will continue to have knock on effects for families as well as reducing costs. She further emphasised that beneficial impacts have been achieved even within the wider context of national challenges to children's services and the unsustainable bidding process. Lastly, she drew attention to the Reunification Project as a key aspect of the programme that offers hope to children and families.

RESOLVED that the Board:

- 1. Notes the current progress and impact for children, young people and their families.**
- 2. Notes the next steps in relation to sustaining and growing Coventry Family Valued.**

25. Coventry Holiday Activities and Food Programme

The Board considered a Briefing Note and video presentation of the Director of Education and Skills on the Coventry Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme.

The Holiday Activities and Food programme is a national initiative, aimed at addressing holiday inequalities through a blend of free positive activities and experiences coupled with health food and support to families.

Coventry City Council receives an annual Department for Education grant (for 2023/24 with a further £100,000 Coventry Building Society investment) and leads a multi-agency partnership to deliver activities in the Easter, Summer and Christmas school holidays.

The core eligibility criteria are school-age children (reception to year 11 inclusive) on benefits-related free school meals. Local Authority areas have discretion to broaden eligibility and Coventry have extended this to: child in need, child protection plan, child looked after and children assessed (through an early help assessment) to be in financial hardship or part of the Ukrainian Family Scheme (Professionals can refer appropriate children).

The national roll-out of HAF took place in 2021, with the first Coventry face-to-face delivery taking place in the 2021 summer holiday. HAF funding is committed until 31 March 2025, with Christmas 2024 currently being the last funded holiday. Coventry City Council is part of the national HAF network and there is a key focus on building the case for funding to be continued post-2025 in the context of increasing needs.

Councillor Dr K Sandhu (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills) began by highlighting the great achievements of the programme to deliver such a successful and wide-ranging set of activities for over 4000 children in 2023. Alongside being an exemplifier of partnership working, the programme has been able to offer opportunities to children with a wide range of different needs. Additionally, support from sponsors such as Coventry Building Society has been greatly beneficial in building confidence and support for families. She concluded by stating that these achievements speak to a wider impact than just food and activities and thanked officers for all their hard work in delivering the program.

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

- The 2024 programme of events and its circulation to the Coventry Board of School Governors.
- Day trips for children and insurance policies.
- Opportunities for children and families to pay to be part of the programme if they don't meet the qualifications for free provision.
- The relationship between HAF and the Household Support Fund – the end of the Household Support Fund, provision for vouchers for free school meals, and a current campaign underway to secure government funding for both programmes by the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills.
- HAF being a core service that links hard to reach families to other council services.
- Core eligibility criteria and its expansion to newly arrived families.
- Expanding provision for children to festivals and cultural events.
- Cooperation with other Local Authorities in the delivery of their HAF programmes at a regional and national level.
- The special school pilot program and ensuring that all schools sign up.

Arising from the briefing note, video presentation, comments from the Cabinet Member, and questions to officers, the Board shared their thanks to officers and the Cabinet Member in successfully delivering the programme so far.

RESOLVED that the Board:

- 1. Notes the information in the report about the Coventry Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme.**
- 2. Promotes the Coventry HAF programme and enables the programme to continue to develop and to contribute to the national HAF Framework case for continued funding post March 2025.**

3. **Thank officers and the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills for their delivery of the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme.**
4. **Formally supports the campaign of the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills to secure government funding for the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme and Household Support Fund beyond the committed end date of 31 March 2025.**

26. **Work Programme**

The Board noted the Work Programme with the agreement that the following item be moved to a later date:

- One Strategic Plan - School Place Sufficiency

Secondly, the Board noted that at the meeting scheduled for the 14 March 2024, with the agreement of both Chairs, there will be a joint meeting of Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) and Health and Social Care Scrutiny Board (5) to discuss the following item:

- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

Finally, it was noted that following a review of the One Coventry Annual Performance Report at Scrutiny Co-Ordination Committee on 20 December 2023, performance indicators which have not been met have been referred to the Board for inclusion on the Work Programme 2023/24.

27. **Any Other Business**

There were no other items of business.

(Meeting closed at 11.45 am)