

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)
held at 10.00 am on Thursday, 13 February 2025

Present:

Members: Councillor CE Thomas (Chair)
Councillor J Birdi
Councillor B Christopher
Councillor J Gardiner
Councillor S Nazir
Councillor E M Reeves
Councillor R Thay
Councillor A Tucker

Co-Opted Members: Mrs S Hanson, David Jackson and Ghulam Vohra

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

Others present: N Rock, Head of Stoke Park School

Employees (by Service Area):

Children's and Education S Sen (Director of Children's Services and Education),
R Sugars, A Whitrick

Apologies: Councillor R Lancaster

Public Business

64. Declarations of Interests

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests.

65. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on the 16th of January 2025 were agreed and signed as a true record subject to the following amendment to Minute 60/24 headed, "Coventry Safeguarding Children's Partnership Yearly Report".

The following change to be inserted, this replacing the reference to this issue in the earlier Minutes:

"The Chair outlined her views on the recent comments at Parliament concerning grooming gangs in Coventry and the steps the local authority had taken in preventing and combating child exploitation. This was challenged by a Member of the Board and noted."

66. **Coventry Education Performance**

The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) considered a Briefing Note and a presentation of the Director of Children's Services and Education regarding the Coventry Education Performance.

The Briefing Note updated Members of the Board on Coventry's 2024 performance in the following areas:

- Trends in pupil numbers
- Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)
- Phonics
- Key Stage (KS) 2
- Key Stage (KS) 4 (provisional)
- 16-19 attainment (provisional)
- Attendance and exclusions
- Difference in performance between males and females
- Performance of vulnerable groups

Officers highlighted the statistical information set out in section 4.4 of the report which stated:

- There had been an increase in pupil population over the last 5 years from 57,570 in 2020 to 61,566 in 2024 – 6.9% increase since 2020.
- The number of children eligible for free school meals had increased from 20.1% in 2020 to 28.2% in 2023 – an 8.1% increase over 5 years.
- There had been an increase of 5.9% in non-white British children between 2020 and 2024.
- The proportion of the pupil population receiving SEN support had also increased by 2,157 (2.6%) since 2020, and 726 (increase of 1%) more children on an EHCP.

In considering the Briefing Note and presentation, the Board questioned officers, received responses, and discussed matters as summarised below:

- A national increase in number on free school meals and how this could be down to changes in Universal Credit.
- How SEND performance compared to national averages and the work being done to improve the service.
- That there was no data on Key Stage 3 performance as this was not assessed nationally, but progress made at KS3 was reflected in KS4 results.
- How schools and the Council were providing for the estimated 4000 new students in the city and how population growth and transience was affecting schools and different areas in different ways.
- Recognition of the good work supporting pupils with English as an additional language and the positive impact that additional languages can have on learning.
- How parents were encouraged to ensure their children were attending school.
- That the presented data didn't include home educated children, and further how legislative changes would impact home education providers.
- That independent schools were not included in the discussion and the data.

- The cause of exclusion numbers increasing in schools, particularly SEN schools.
- If mainstream and special schools could follow a model of sharing facilities and green spaces where geographically appropriate.
- How exclusions impacted children's grades and those of their classmates, and how exclusions were judged and implemented.

Members requested that the following information be circulated to them:

- Further information from SACRE on the numbers of children receiving religious education (if available).
- Data regarding the proportion of unaccompanied asylum seekers in receipt of free school meals.
- The Report of the Task and Finish Group on Autism.
- The One Strategic Plan Sufficiency Report from 2023-24.
- The new model for managing exclusions be added to the work programme for 25/26.

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

- 1. Agrees to note the information in the report about the Coventry Education Performance.**
- 2. Agrees that a letter be sent to Natalie Rock, Head of Stoke Park School, and representatives of the other education partnerships, formally thanking them for their work, and noting the challenges faced and improvements made.**

67. Children's Services Resources and Efficiency Peer Challenge

The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) considered a Briefing Note of the Director of Children's Services and Education which provided information on the Children's Services Resources and Efficiency Peer Challenge outcomes and next steps.

Officers noted that in August 2022, Children's Services were rated as a 'Good' service by Ofsted and the Youth Justice Service were graded 'Outstanding' after an Inspection by HMI Probation in February 2023. Followed by a Joint Targeted Area Inspection focusing on Serious Youth Violence receiving a positive report in May 2024. The service had five Children's Homes, all rated as 'Good' by Ofsted in the last twelve months and an ambitious residential homes expansion programme to increase the number of Children's Homes further, with a further two due to open this year.

The Children's Services Resources and Efficiency Peer Challenge was held on 15-17 October 2024. Peer Challenges are delivered by experienced officer peers. The make-up of the peer team reflects the requirements and focus of the Peer Challenge. The Team consisted of five Peers:

- Lead Peer – a former Chief Executive
- Social Care Peer – Director of Children and Families
- Finance Peer – Director of Resources (S151)
- Commissioning peer – Head of Commissioning

- Peer Challenge Manager – Local Government Association (LGA)

The Peer team were asked to focus on four key areas as agreed with the Council.

- Cost of placements
- Structure, capacity and opportunities through integration.
- Understanding and analysing costs, and incorporating best practice
- Use of organisational capacity, resources, and support

Officers briefed Members on how the LGA Peer Challenge Team had provided a series of recommendations, which would be developed into an action plan to embrace new ways of working and support more targeted early help work to meet needs at the earliest point in the system.

In considering the Briefing Note, the Board questioned officers, received responses and discussed matters as summarised below:

- Why some details were omitted, if there could be more specifics on changes, and further numbers, and whether this could be brought back to the Board on a more regular basis.
- Whether the proposals in the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill would change their approach and if so, how this would be reflected in any action planning.

RESOLVED that the Children’s and Young People Scrutiny Board (2):

- 1) Notes the information in the Briefing Note on the Children’s Services Resources and Efficiency Peer Challenge.**
- 2) Requested that a further report be submitted to a future meeting of the Board on the Progress on the Peer Review Action Plan.**

68. Work Programme

RESOLVED that the Children’s and Young People Scrutiny Board (2) notes the Work Programme 2024/25 and that:

- 1. The ‘Early Help’ item replaces the ‘Family Healthy Lifestyles’ item for the April 2025 meeting of the Board.**
- 2. Pending the Department for Education confirmation of funding, a report scheduled to be submitted to the Cabinet Member headed ‘Sufficiency – Early Years, Mainstream and SEND’ has been moved from the 13th of March 2025 meeting of the Board to a meeting of the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills in the next Municipal Year.**

69. Any Other Business

There were no items of public business.

(Meeting closed at 12.10 pm)