

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)
held at 10.00 am on Thursday, 16 October 2025

Present:

Members: Councillor L Kelly (Chair)
Councillor B Christopher (by invitation)
Councillor S Gray
Councillor M Mutton
Councillor S Nazir
Councillor P Seaman (by invitation)
Councillor R Thay
Councillor A Tucker

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

Employees (by Service Area):

Education and Children M Clayton, S Sen, A Whitrick

Law and Governance G Holmes, C Taylor, A Veness

Apologies: Councillor J Birdi, J Gardiner and S Jobbar

Public Business

13. Declarations of Interests

The Board noted that Councillor A Tucker was a member of the Fostering Panel. As this was not a disclosable pecuniary interest, he remained in the meeting.

14. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on the 11th of September 2025 were agreed and signed as a true record.

15. Children's Services Annual Adoption Report 2024/2025

The Board considered a report of the Director of Children's and Education Services that provided an overview of the adoption activity and performance in 2024/25.

Officers explained that each local authority was required by regulation to publish an annual adoption report. The Annual Adoption Report (Appendix 1) provides an overview of adoption activity and performance for the year 2024-2025.

Coventry Children's Services delivered adoption services in partnership with the Regional Adoption Agency – Adoption Central England (ACE), which has been operational since 1st February 2018. This was in accordance with national policy

that all local authority adoption services were required to be part of a Regional Adoption Agency by 2020.

ACE provided a number of services as a local authority shared services arrangement hosted by Warwickshire County Council. Details of the services provided by ACE were included in the Annual report

In partnership with ACE the local authority planned to improve and develop its adoption practise in the following key areas:

- Continue to develop collaborative working across Children's Services for effective pre-birth, pre-proceedings and care proceedings to ensure timely permanence is achieved for all children.
- Continue to ensure fostering for adopt / early permanence is considered for every child where appropriate and a rationale for decision is recorded.
- Continue to collaborate with ACE on an operational and strategic level (via the ACE Executive board) regarding sufficiency challenges in ACE to minimise delay for children being matched with adoptive families.
- All social workers who are working with children who have a plan / potential plan of adoption will undertake permanency planning training offered by ACE to continue to promote good practice in this area.
- All social workers will undertake training on life story work, life story books offered by ACE to continue to promote good practice in this area.
- Coventry to have an established framework for assessing and supporting post adoption relationship maintenance between Adoptive families and Birth families.

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

- The service activity figures followed promising downward trends that were lower than both national and local levels. Despite this, the council would continue to focus on improving the service.
- How the council was focusing more on ensuring children received some form of direct contact with birth parents. This was the norm outside of the UK and in line with national attempts to increase this kind of contact where possible.
- How social media had made contact between birth parents and children outside of council instruction, this further encouraged the council to promote appropriate and supervised contact.
- That although the overall reduction in people willing to adopt may be in part due to a focus on increased contact between parents and children, a more significant factor was the cost-of-living crisis dis-encouraging potential adopters from taking on this additional financial burden.
- That when children are fostered, they are more likely to see their birth parents weekly but when adopted, this was more often a few times a year.
- Fostered children are still officially seen as in the council's care whereas adopted children are fully in their adoptive parents' care with minimal direct supervision.
- Children are usually adopted to parents outside their local authority to promote stability, although this is situation dependant and not mandatory.

- That although parents can decline to meet their birth children once adopted to different parents, this is rare.
- Research had shown that increased contact between children and their birth parents led to more positive long-term outcomes and improved their sense of identity.
- The age of the child impacts how contact with their birth parents is managed, furthermore, adopted children are given life story books to help them understand and explain their identity.
- Social workers stay assigned to the children throughout their life and are available even as adults to provide support.
- That all children are given life story work and social workers are trained to include it in their support.

Members requested that the following information be circulated to them:

- Explaining the decrease in ADM decisions that a child should be placed for adoption as reported by ACE between 2022 and 2025.
- Concerning the ethnicity of adopted children and how it impacts the time to place them.
- The numbers of children adopted from abroad.
- Detailing the Richard Rose and Joy Reece models with examples of them in practice.
- Be brought to the next annual report detailing life story work and how it impacts adopted children later in life.

The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) Resolved to note the contents of the briefing note and report and had no further recommendations for the Cabinet Member.

16. **Children's Services Annual Fostering Report 2024/2025**

The Board considered a report of the Director of Children's and Education Services that provided an overview of the fostering activity and performance in 2024/25.

Officers explained how the foster care was subject to legislative and regulatory guidance through The Children Act 1989, The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the Fostering Services: National minimum standards 2011. They further explained how it was further regulated through the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations published in 2010 and the Assessment and Approval of Foster carers guidance 2013.

The regulatory framework for fostering set out the minimum standards expected to ensure that the care provided by foster carers was adequate to ensure that those children placed within fostering homes are well cared for and achieved good outcomes.

The requirement for fostering agencies to produce an annual report is primarily set out by Ofsted and governed by the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, specifically Regulation 35, along with the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services, particularly Standard 25.7.

The purpose of the annual report was to evaluate the effectiveness of the fostering service; to identify areas for improvement and development; to ensure compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements; to inform stakeholders, about the service outcomes and future plans. The review of the Fostering service activity and performance data was outlined in the Annual Fostering Service report attached.

The Fostering Service plan to improve and develop the following key areas in 2025/2026:

- Continue to drive the Fostering Excellence Project to enable increased capacity and resilience of internal mainstream fostering households
- Continue to develop recruitment of carers from a range of diverse backgrounds to more closely match the backgrounds of children in care
- Identify reasons for drop out between enquiry, expression of interest and approval, to improve conversion rate
- Finalising and launch Coventry's Kinship strategy and offer
- Continue to develop Kinship fostering in line with the Kinship strategy and our Kinship offer and aim to increase permanence through special guardianship arrangements
- Ongoing growth of the Next steps fostering scheme
- Relaunch parent and child and out of hours schemes
- Launch a short stay provision to support families in need to prevent children coming into care
- Continue to ensure foster carers are consulted about all changes that affect their role
- Widen mentoring offer for connected persons carers and offer to applicants during the assessment process
- Review support available to children of foster carers and newly approved foster carers during their induction period
- Embed DDP principles and continue to upskill all workforce caring for children

In considering the Briefing note and report, the Scrutiny Board asked questions, received responses and discussed a number of matters as summarised below.

- Evidence showed children in foster care often went on to become foster parents
- Foster carers are kept updated and in contact through online networks and mailing lists. There is also financial and practical support available to carers as allocated by an annual review.
- That the budget for fostering could lead to overspends and underspends in some areas during the same year as the budget was aspirational and planned for growth, although it could be later supplemented and adapted through additional support packages.
- The decrease in fostered children was due to more children remaining with their families as encouraged by the council but only when it is decided to have been appropriate and completely safe to do so.
- The fostering panel met weekly and undertook vital work in supporting carers and discussing how to improve the process of fostering.

- It took an average of 2 years from the start of assessment to becoming a foster carer. Work had started looking at reducing these timescales by using technology in a different way.
- That placement disruption was often related to childhood trauma. Turnover of supervising social workers was low which is important for consistency.
- That fosterers may choose to stop fostering as they age but the council had no age limit on fostering children.
- The council performs medical checks to ensure prospective carers are capable of caring for themselves and children.
- Fostering to adopting is rare but if requested, care is taken to consider its potential impact on the child.
- The council is actively recruiting new foster parents via community groups promoting fostering, links with faith groups, social media and street campaigns, they also specifically target areas where they know homes are more likely to have room to house foster children.
- There are various issues around matching children to families including size of sibling groups, room space within the house and concerns of conflict between fostered children and pre-existing children.
- That although the drop from 511 initial enquiries to only 20 households approved may seem disconcerting, initial enquiries were an online tick box with low commitment, the drop is when these are followed up on with greater commitment required and information regarding the requirements is explained.
- The council had a productive, robust and healthy working relationship with the judicial system that facilitates a quick and high performing fostering process.

Members requested that the following information be circulated to them:

- A link to the national campaign video promoting and explaining fostering.
- Explaining the reasons for the numbers of foster carers reducing significantly at each stage after initial contact.

The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) Resolved to note the contents of the briefing note and report and had no further recommendations for the Cabinet Member.

17. Children's Services Resources and Efficiency Peer Challenge Progress Against the Recommendations

The Board considered a briefing note of the Director of Children and Education outlining the progress against the Local Government Association Children's Services Resources and Efficiency Peer Challenge Recommendations of October 2024.

Officers explained how corporate and political leaders in Coventry were passionate and committed to achieving the best for children. Over the past decade, Children's Services had been focused on improvement and there had been a political and corporate commitment to making the necessary resources and funding available to support the Children's Services journey.

In August 2022, Children's Services were rated as a 'Good' service by Ofsted. The service was anticipating a further inspection imminently. 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 seven Children's Homes, six homes had been inspected during 2025, of which five are rated as 'Good' by Ofsted and one rated 'requires improvement'. The ambitious residential homes expansion programme to increase the number of Children's Homes included a further two to open in 2026.

Building on the significant improvements within Children's Services, the integration of Children and Education on 1st April 2024 provided an opportunity and capacity to explore new ways of working. The integration had resulted in changes to the roles and responsibilities of the senior leadership team and the external appointment of a new Director of Children's and Education Services appointed in August 2024.

The financial position remained a challenge for all local authorities; the One Coventry Transformation Plan set out how the Council will respond to the challenges and embrace new approaches and technology.

In October 2024, a Local Government Association Peer Challenge team were invited by the Council to review how Children's Services provide services to children and young people to identify potential opportunities to control and reduce costs and ensure efficiencies. Peer Challenges are improvement focused and are not an inspection.

The challenge was similar to one that the Council underwent in January 2024 and does not result in any grade. The Council was given positive feedback about the Corporate Peer Challenge and many great comments about the Council's work, highlighting some areas for improvement on how the council can work in the future. The Children's Services Resources and Efficiency Peer challenge provided a further opportunity to build on the excellent work and identify areas for improvement.

The report outlined the council's progress against their recommendations and what steps the council was taking to rectify any issues.

In considering the Briefing Note, the Scrutiny Board asked questions, received responses and discussed a number of matters as summarised below:

- That the council had undertaken wider work around improving the kinship support offered locally, assessing connecting and supporting foster carers including private fostering arrangements.
- That despite the small number of privately fostered children the council still had a duty to ensure they were getting the support and oversight they needed including six-weekly visits at minimum.
- That there is 24/7 phone call support for care leavers provided by Ask Jan a charity supported by the council that was staffed by trained councillors and also offering face to face counselling.

- That improvements in children's services were in some part due to a change in culture with a strong focus on continual improvement and the council would continue to focus on providing better and better services.

Members requested that in relation to 6.0 Progress against the Recommendations, Recommendation 3, officers were to check that the transformation plan has been Member endorsed.

The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) Resolved to note the contents of the briefing note and had no further recommendations for the Cabinet Member.

18. **Work Programme**

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board's Work Programme for 2025/26 be noted.

19. **Any Other Business**

There were no items of public business.

(Meeting closed at 11.30 am)