

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)
held at 10.30 am on Thursday, 22 January 2026

Present:

Members: Councillor L Kelly (Chair)

Councillor J Birdi

Councillor J Gardiner

Councillor M Mutton

Councillor E M Reeves

Councillor K Sandhu (By invitation)

Councillor P Seaman (By invitation)

Councillor R Thay

Councillor A Tucker

Councillor B Christopher (By Invitation)

Co-Opted Members: David Jackson and Ghulam Vohra

Employees (by Service Area):

Education and Children A Coles, R Eaves, M Moore, S Sen, R Sugars

Law and Governance J Gill, G Holmes, A Veness

Apologies: Councillor S Jobbar, S Nazir and S Hanson

Public Business

27. Declarations of Interests

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests.

28. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on the 27th of November 2025 were agreed and signed as a true record.

The Board undertook a visit to Coventry Outdoor Education Service further to the previous item on Children Absent from Education. Following the trip officers recorded their thanks for those involved, expressed their positive views on the programme/team and asked for any further questions relating to the trip be sent to officers.

29. Safeguarding Children's Partnership Yearly Report

The Board considered a briefing note and presentation of the Director of Children and Education which provided an update on the Coventry Safeguarding Children's Partnership (CSCP) yearly report in relation to activity of the CSCP April 2024-2025.

Officers explained how Working Together 2023 stated, 'Safeguarding Partners must jointly report on the activity they had undertaken in a 12-month period. That reporting should be transparent and easily accessible to the families and professionals. The focus of these reports should be on multi agency priorities, learning, impact, evidence and improvement.' The report was published and can be found attached at Appendix 1 of the document pack.

The CSCP had 3 priorities for 2024-25, which would be the same priorities for 2025-2026:

- Neglect
- Exploration
- Making the system work

Officers highlighted a series of key successes of the programme:

- Coventry Safeguarding Children's Partnership had a robust response to the (at the time) new requirements under Working Together 2023 including the Lead Safeguarding Partners, the Independent Scrutineer and the engagement of Education.
- Quality assurance activity showed improved recognition and response to neglect.
- The response to children affected by serious youth violence and exploitation identified as strong in the Joint Targeted Area inspection continued to improve.
- Early help in Coventry was strong, and this supported the identification of children requiring support at the earliest opportunity.
- Over 2500 practitioners had attended Coventry Safeguarding Children's Partnership training, webinars and learning events at time of publishing
- The Safeguarding Together Action Group (STAG) was then made up of 210 frontline practitioners across 100 agencies and continued to grow, ensuring that key messages got to the frontline.
- The partnership was committed to making Coventry a place where children and young people felt valued, supported and able to enjoy themselves and this was delivered through the Child Friendly Cov initiative.
- 'Your Voice Matters' the young people's group supported children and young people to have a voice. Work had been undertaken to ensure that their views were acted upon.
- Coventry Safeguarding Children's Partnership continued to be much more responsive to emerging issues rather than sticking to a planned programme of work. An example of this was the audit in relation to the Working Together 2023 health check.

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

- Concerns that Electronic Patient Record issues were being used as a reason for health partners not, as the initial rollout was two years ago which gave ample time to learn, were likely not the case, as there seemed to be genuine technical issues that were being worked on with this year's new rollout.

- There was varied practice from frontline police officers, but this was being addressed by the use of the Aware app and in most cases police actions were appropriate.
- Efforts were made to avoid children being sent into the criminal justice system over minor infractions and that although a response was in progress, this was impacted by changes of senior management in the West Midlands Police.
- A consistent key concern has been a lack of professional curiosity but was now being specifically targeted in training by senior officers which had seen good attendance.
- That although there were often persistent and ongoing difficulties finding enough midwives on the national level, Coventry currently had sufficient midwives and did not expect to experience issues with recruitment.
- That a representative from the police is required to attend the joint safeguarding meetings for them to be quorate.
- That school's use self-assessment to report on their safeguarding but can request support from Council officers and Safeguarding is part of the Ofsted framework.

Members requested that the following actions be taken and information be circulated to them:

- A date be scheduled for an item on Youth Justice at SCRUCO.
- Officers to liaise with co-opted member G Vohra to consider the reintroduction of Faith Forums.
- A presentation given at all members seminar concerning SEND be circulated to the Board.

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.

30. **Holiday Activities and Food Programme**

The Board considered a briefing note of the Director of Children's and Education Services that provided an update on the Coventry Holiday Activities and Food (HAF).

Officers outlined how the HAF programme was a national initiative, aimed at addressing holiday inequalities through a blend of free positive activities and experiences coupled with healthy food and support to families.

Officers further listed the national aims of the programme which were to ensure a high-quality experience that would result in children:

- Receiving healthy and nutritious meals
- Maintaining a healthy level of physical activity
- Being happy, having fun and meeting new friends
- Developing a greater understanding of food, nutrition and other health related issues
- Taking part in fun and engaging activities that support their development and well-being
- Feeling safe and secure

- Getting access to the right support services
- Returning to school feeling engaged and ready to learn

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. In January 2025, the programme was extended for a further year for 2025. On 28 August 2025, the government announced a 3-year funding settlement of over £200 million each year for the national HAF programme (i.e. through to March 2029). This funding forms part of the Children, Youth and Families Grant within the local government finance settlement.

It was outlined how the 2025 school summer holiday programme was the most successful HAF holiday programme that Coventry had of yet delivered. Highlights included:

- 4,491 eligible children and young people benefitted (up from 4,141 for summer 2024);
- This included 1,637 eligible children with SEND plus other family members;
- Over 22,000 sessions were delivered and meals provided;
- Over 100 different activities/clubs were delivered; 43 providers were directly funded (see Appendix 1) with several other providers/partner organisations being sub-funded by these providers; and
- Families gave a 4.4/5-star feedback rating on the activities.

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

- That 36% of children accessing the programme had additional needs.
- Efforts were being made to extend the appeal to older children who considered the programme too juvenile for them, and this included inviting former HAF children for their input.
- There were existing efforts to expand the programme, but this needed to be costed and within budget.
- The programme was being targeted at deprived areas with higher crime and sometimes working with partners not using the HAF branding to avoid stigma.
- Officers were broadly unable to accept donations from charities for this public programme, but efforts were being made to work with external partners to access additional funding and expansion opportunities

Members requested that the video shown in the meeting as part of officer's presentation be circulated to the board.

The Board made note of their appreciation for the scheme and its success, thanking the officers involved for their good work.

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

- 1) Considered and noted the information provided on the HAF programme.
- 2) Recommend that the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People seek to expand the service where possible and seek further funding to enable this to happen.

31. Work Programme

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

32. Any Other Business

There were no items of public business.

(Meeting closed at 11.57 am)