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**To: Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) 16<sup>th</sup> July 2026**

**Subject: Inspection of Coventry local authority children's services**

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## **1 Purpose of the Note**

- 1.1 To inform the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) of the inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children in care and care leavers.

## **2 Recommendations**

The Education and Children's Scrutiny Board (2) are recommended to:

- 1) Consider the recommendations highlighted in the inspection report
- 2) Identify any items to look at in more detail on the work programme 2026-2027
- 3) Identify any recommendations for the appropriate Cabinet Member.

## **3 Introduction Ofsted inspection of Children's Services**

- 3.1 All Local Authority Children's Services are inspected by Ofsted, every three-four years. The focus of inspections includes:
- The effectiveness of local authority services and arrangements to help and protect children, and enable families to stay together and get the help they need
  - The experience and progress of children in care wherever they live, including children who return home
  - The effectiveness of the arrangements for permanence for children who are looked after, in stable, loving homes, including adoption
  - The experience and progress of care leavers

Inspectors also evaluate:

- The effectiveness of leaders and managers
- The impact of leaders and managers have on the lives of children and young people

- The quality of professional practice delivered by multi-disciplinary local authority teams that are equipped and effective
- 3.2 Children's Services were last inspected in June 2022. A change to the inspection framework in January 2023, introduced a separate judgement and evaluation criteria added for 'the experience and progress of care leavers'. The outcome of Coventry's inspection in 2026, therefore includes a separate judgement for care leavers for the first time.
- 3.3 Local Authority Children's Services Inspections are based on a strength-based approach focusing on social workers and social work practice.
- 3.4 The inspection framework requires local authorities each year to share a self-evaluation of practice and meet with the regional Ofsted representatives to discuss progress impact and practice. Children's Services shared their updated March 2026 self-assessment at the annual engagement meeting held on 19 May 2026.
- 3.5 The self-evaluation provides an overview of quality and impact of social work practice; and an overview of how the quality assurance framework assesses quality and impact and sets out the service plans and priorities for the next 12 months.
- 3.6 Since January 2025, Coventry Children's Services has continued to strengthen its delivery of relational, child-centred and family-led practice, under the Coventry Family Valued practice approach. This has been underpinned by improved management oversight, strong multi-agency collaboration and a clear focus on impact.
- 3.7 The service had made measurable progress in reducing the number of children subject to child protection plans and children in care, although there has been some recent increase. With regards to workforce, there is evidence of increased stability and also of sustained reduction in agency staffing, while maintaining stable caseloads. Quality assurance activity consistently evidences purposeful and meaningful capture of children's voices and positive progress across the service. However, supervision is an area that requires further attention and will be the focus for improvement in 2026. In relation to homes for children, investment in local sufficiency, including the expansion of children's homes and the use of needs-led decision-making tools, is improving placement stability and value for money.
- 3.8 Progress is being made in implementing the Family First Partnership Programme reforms and the partnership is working at pace to meet the timeline of March 2027 for Family Help and Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams to become operational.
- 3.9 Over the past year, there has been a strong commitment to learning, inclusion and anti-racist practice which is supported by a developing workforce offer and effective partnerships. While increasing demand, SEND pressures and sufficiency challenges remain, there is a clear and credible trajectory of improvement, with well-defined priorities in place to further strengthen outcomes for children and families over the next year. With children and families

firmly at the centre of practice, the Child Friendly Cov approach demonstrates the ambition the city holds for its children and young people.

#### 4 Inspection Outcome

- 4.1 Children's Services were inspected on **9-13 March 2026**. The Ofsted report was published on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2026, judging Coventry Children's Services as 'Outstanding' in four of the five judgement areas – as follows:

4.2

| Judgement                                                                | Grade       |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families | Outstanding |
| The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection    | Good        |
| The experiences and progress of children in care                         | Outstanding |
| The experiences and progress of care leavers                             | Outstanding |
| Overall effectiveness                                                    | Outstanding |

- 4.3 The link to the full inspection report <https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50301676>
- 4.4 The significant achievement demonstrates the work of teams in every area of the service who have worked with 'our' children, young people and families and partners showing their enthusiasm, dedication and determination to give the best service to the children, young people and families in the city.
- 4.5 Just over 12 years ago in 2014, following the death of Daniel Pelka, Children's Services received an '**inadequate judgement**' from Ofsted, which resulted in government intervention and a regime of monitoring visits by Ofsted, and improvement progress overseen by a board. Our journey of improvement began in earnest to transform the service.
- 4.5 In March 2017 the service demonstrated improvement and were judged '**requires improvement to be good**'. The relentless journey of improvement and commitment from staff, partners and leaders judged Children's Services to be '**Good**' in June 2022.
- 4.6 Since the last inspection the service have continued to strengthen the quality and impact of services. Despite considerable external challenges of the number of children living in poverty and significant rise in demand for services we were judged '**Outstanding**' in May 2026. Ofsted inspectors stated '*Impressive, outward looking leaders have demonstrated an unwavering ambition and commitment to children in Coventry.*'

- 4.7 The service has brought to life our Child Friendly Cov aspirations, to make Coventry the best place for children to grow up by putting children and families right in the heart of all we do. Young people have been given a voice and know they are listened to.
- 4.8 Political and corporate leaders, partners and local business leaders have been relentless in their determination for children in Coventry to succeed.
- 4.9 Ofsted judgements for all LAs in England, highlight that **Coventry is 28<sup>th</sup> of 153 local authorities representing the top 18% nationally.** Coventry compares well, as **one of four local authorities in the West Midlands region rated ‘Outstanding’** overall. This achievement is significant and one that we should all be proud of.

## **5 Inspections findings**

5.1 A summary of the inspection report findings is highlighted below:

### **5.2 The experience and progress of children in help and protection**

- Children in Coventry who need help and protection receive prompt and effective support from practitioners who know them well
- Children benefit from a range of early help services delivered through local family hubs
- Concerns about children are appropriately referred to the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) by partners
- The Emergency Duty Service (EDS) is effective in ensuring that children are appropriately safeguarded out of office hours.
- Trusting relationships with parents lead to a greater understanding of the issues impacting on the care for the child.
- Feedback from the judiciary and the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) describes highly effective practice with parents during proceedings
- Children who live in private fostering arrangements are well supported
- Children who are at risk of exploitation and of going missing are supported by skilled workers from an effective, well-coordinated service
- Earlier identification and effective interventions ensure that 16- and 17-year-old children at risk of homelessness are provided with effective support
- Disabled children are supported by practitioners who develop meaningful relationships with them and understand their complex needs
- Effective edge-of-care services support families to bring about positive change when children are at risk of coming into care
- There are clear systems in place to identify and monitor children receiving elective home education

### **5.3 The experience and progress of children in care**

- When children can no longer stay at home safely, timely decisions are made for them to come into care
- Children in care benefit from positive relationships with their workers, who know them well and want the best for them
- Children in care are involved in key decisions that will impact on their lives. Their views are sought through regular conversations with their social worker, IRO and in their reviews
- There is strong ambition in Coventry to return children home from care whenever this is safe and possible
- Family network meetings consider extended family members caring for children if they cannot remain living with their parents. Kinship carers receive a high level of training and support from their social workers.
- Children's physical and emotional health needs are met well through a comprehensive, wide-ranging offer of face-to-face and online support.
- The virtual school provides effective and increasingly impactful support for children in care. Impressive leadership over the last year has led to strengthened oversight, inclusion and SEND provision, contributing to rising attendance, no permanent exclusions and a significant reduction in the use of part-time timetables
- Children in care benefit from a wide range of social, educational and recreational opportunities, including football, dancing and music groups
- There is strong oversight and support for children who go missing from care.
- Disabled children in the care of the local authority live in stable placements that meet their complex needs
- Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children receive effective help and support to meet their needs and are highly valued.
- The right adoptive homes are found for children who need them

### **5.4 The experience and progress of care leavers**

- When children transition to adult services, timely referrals ensure that plans are effective and well thought through
- Care leavers have positive, trusting and stable relationships with Personal Advisers.
- Aspirational pathway plans are co-developed with care leavers in sufficient time to support a successful transition to support children as they approach adulthood
- There is comprehensive support for care leavers over the age of 21 years if they choose to access this
- Care leavers are supported to maintain relationships with people who are important to them through the well-established Lifelong Links service
- Care leavers' physical, emotional and mental health needs are well met

- Care leavers benefit from a comprehensive, wide-ranging local offer that has been developed in partnership with them, regardless of where in the country they live
- Care leavers are supported to develop independent living skills, including managing their own tenancies, finding work and support to manage their finances.
- 'Staying put' and 'staying close' arrangements are maturely developed in Coventry.
- Coventry has a strong, joined-up system to help care leavers move into education, training and employment

#### 5.5 The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families

- Children and care leavers in Coventry benefit from consistently good practice from practitioners who know them well. As a result, most children and young people make impressive progress
- Partners, local businesses, colleagues, families and children all benefit from the Family Valued relational practice model, which continues to embed across the city
- More children and families now access help and support at a time and place that is right for them.
- Leaders have worked with children and local businesses to make Coventry a child-friendly city.
- Building on existing strong foundations, leaders are making steady progress in the implementation of the children's social care reforms through the Families First Partnership Programme.
- Leaders understand the quality and impact of practice with children and families.
- As a result of targeted work to increase sufficiency, there is now a wider range of placements available when children cannot remain living at home.
- Progress for children in care is reviewed and monitored through a highly effective corporate parenting board
- Importantly, leaders have significantly strengthened their approach to equality, identity and diversity, and practice and attitudes are tangibly changing as a result
- Through a comprehensive workforce strategy and offer to workers, there is a reducing reliance on temporary workers
- Management oversight of frontline practice is mostly effective in providing case direction.
- The comprehensive training offer and opportunities to progress and develop are contributing to staff stability and motivation to work in Coventry

5.6 The inspection report identified two recommendations to strengthen and improve further:

- ***The consistency of the quality and impact of planning for***

***children in need of help and protection.***

- ***The consistency of the quality and impact of supervision.***

## **6 Next Steps**

- 6.1 The national children's social care reforms provide an important opportunity to strengthen and accelerate our local ambitions for children and families. The direction of travel, including a stronger focus on Family Help, multi-agency working, kinship and family networks, and evidence-informed practice, aligns closely with our commitment to strengthen practice further and ensure children receive the right help at the right time, aligned to the One Coventry ambition. We want to shift the balance of support towards earlier help, prevention and whole-family approaches, so that families are supported before needs escalate and children are helped to remain safely within their families and communities wherever possible.
- 6.2 The test and learn pilot of the end-to end pathway from Family Help to multi-agency child protection commenced at the beginning of June 2026 in the East locality team and will be an opportunity to evaluate at the end of the six months and provide a basis for the phased roll out implementation planned March 2027.
- 6.3 While we recognise the progress already made, we will not stand still. We will continue to learn, challenge ourselves and work with partners to deliver consistently outstanding practice, improve outcomes and strive for the very best for all our children, young people and families.
- 6.4 A Children's Services Action Plan has been developed to focus on strengthening and developing what is already very strong and will include quality and impact of plans and supervision in line with our Quality Assurance Framework.
- 6.5 Progress against the areas for development will be monitored by the senior leadership team and presented to a future Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2).

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