

Assurance Document for fulfilment of the Director of Children Services (DCS), – Updated June 2023.

Introduction

In May 2023 the Director for Children Services (DCS) (who holds the statutory role under Section 18 Children Act 2004), resigned his post, under his leadership Children Services had moved from a service requiring improvement to a service that is deemed by the inspectors to be good. He is therefore leaving the organisation with the service in a secure position.

The DCS reports to the Chief Partnership Officer (CPO) whose role is to drive forward the One Coventry Plan working with partners to deliver for the residents of Coventry. The One Coventry Leadership Team (OCLT) is the driver for these changes led by the Chief Partnership Officer and Chief Operations Officer. The DCS sits on OCLT enabling a unified cross directorate approach which allows for a collective oversight of an integrated service for children.

The resignation of the DCS has coincided with the appointment of a new Chief Executive for the City Council. It is therefore considered that interim arrangements for the DCS should be put in place pending the arrival of the new Chief Executive and her further consideration as to what arrangements she considers would best serve the organisation on a permanent basis moving forward.

Interim arrangements

The City Council benefits from an experienced children's social care manager who has significant experience and knowledge and the ability to place young people at the heart of service delivery. On a temporary basis pending a permanent recruitment campaign an Interim Director of Children's Services has therefore been internally recruited who will be responsible for Children's Social Care including Child Protection, Youth Justice and Early Help services

The interim Director will report into the Chief Partnership Officer (CPO). The CPO has significant experience in leadership roles across the wider Children's Services arena and holds responsibility for ensuring that staff are supported and developed so that they are effective and competent in discharging the statutory functions across all those services working with and supporting children and Young People in both education and social care. The CPO has a key role in facilitating and promoting partnership working across the City, sits as part of the Strategic Leadership Team with strategic oversight across the City Council and co-chairs the One Coventry Leadership Team.

The Head of Paid Service for the Local Authority has a statutory responsibility to ensure that the Safeguarding Partnership arrangements are appropriate and fit for purpose and that the Chair(s) feel that they have sufficient resource and leadership support to discharge their responsibilities effectively.

Interim arrangements for the statutory role of DCS

On an interim basis the Chief Partnership Officer will be delegated as the statutory Director of Children Services under Section 18 Children Act 2004 to discharge the education and children's social services functions of the local authority.

Local Assurance and Governance Arrangements

Within the legal framework it is for individual local authorities to determine their own organisational structures in light of their local circumstances.

However, local authorities must ensure that there is a single officer responsible for both education and children's social care. In Coventry City Council this is achieved by an integrated approach sitting alongside the Council's key priority that ensures that the safety and the educational, social and emotional needs of children and young people are central to the local vision.

Given the breadth and importance of the children's services functions that the DCS covers, local authorities should give due consideration to protecting the discrete roles and responsibilities of the DCS before allocating to any additional functions other than children's services. Following the departure of the current DCS the interim arrangements proposed are for the Chief Partnership Officer to assume the DCS role, therefore consideration should be given for the potential for a dilution of the role in light of the breadth of the CPO's area of responsibility. However, the CPO will maintain strong line management responsibility with a unified cross directorate approach which allows for a collective oversight of an integrated service; held under the umbrella of the emerging One Coventry programme enabling Children's services to be at the heart of the Council's service delivery to its communities.

The CPO reports directly to the Chief Executive providing a clear and unambiguous line of responsibility; however direct access between leadership teams in Children's Services, the Chief Executive and Elected Members are in place creating robust local accountability. All directors are also part of the One Coventry Leadership Team providing an overview of the City Council's activity and providing the necessary degree of influence over it.

Political and Strategic alignment

The City Council is committed to working with local communities to improve the quality of life for Coventry people, this is central to the Council's plan and the values of the Council's Elected Members.

To achieve this ambition, the Council's Executive has designated lead Cabinet Members with portfolio responsibilities for Education and Skills and Children and Young People. The Cabinet member for Children and Young People is the lead member for Children's services (S19 Children Act 2004).

Each Cabinet Member portfolio holder has responsibility within their areas of responsibility to improve the quality of life for Coventry people, including to improve educational outcomes by working with schools to continue to improve standards (Cabinet member for Education and Skills). Improving health and wellbeing and reducing health inequalities by helping local residents lead healthier lifestyles including better mental health (Cabinet Member for Public Health and Sport). Protecting the most vulnerable people by keeping children safe and providing early intervention for families who need it (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People).

However, these individual portfolio responsibilities operate as a cohesive whole through a holistic approach overseen by the CPO and via joined up strategic oversight by the Cabinet.

A joint approach to service delivery through these internal arrangements alongside a partnership approach therefore enables a “One Coventry” approach to meeting the Council’s Plan.

Cohesive approach to delivery

Effective partnership working and interagency cooperation continues to be promoted and developed including via attendance at forums such as Health and Wellbeing Board, Local Safeguarding Boards for Children and Adults, Head teacher Forums, Youth Offending teams and Children and Adult Commissioning Boards.

Children’s social care has been on an improvement journey and the approach to unified Council delivery is part of sustaining improvement.

This Cohesive approach to both strategy and delivery between the Education and Children’s Social Care services enables an integrated approach to service delivery but with identified expert professional leadership.

Conclusion

Interim arrangements as outlined above are being put in place following the departure of the current Director for Children’s Services; it is envisaged that these arrangements will be in place for six months allowing for the new Chief Executive to consider the organisational structure moving forward and for a comprehensive recruitment process to take place.

The corporate governance arrangements, as outlined above, and the strength of individual and strategic collective oversight demonstrates a more conducive approach for the statutory roles to sit on a temporary basis with the Chief Partnership Officer who holds a wider holistic level of oversight.

Summary

This is now the sixth review of this local assurance, and it has been rewritten to take into consideration the interim arrangements following the departure of the current DCS. The efficacy of more permanent arrangements will be subject to peer challenge and review, as part of the process of securing continuous sector-led improvement in the quality of services. This will include listening to the young people of Coventry to establish their experiences and confidence in the new arrangements.