

APPENDIX

Assurance Document for fulfilment of the Director of Children's Services (DCS), – Updated May 2024.

Introduction

In May 2023 the Director for Children's Services (DCS) (who held the statutory role under Section 18 Children Act 2004), resigned his post. Under his leadership, Children's Services had moved from a service requiring improvement to a service that is deemed by the inspectors to be Good.

The resignation of the DCS had coincided with the appointment of a new Chief Executive for the City Council. It was 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.

Therefore, on a temporary basis, an Interim Director of Children's Services was internally recruited who was responsible for Children's Social Care including Child Protection, Youth Justice and Early Help services. Further, on an interim basis, the Chief Partnerships Officer became the statutory Director of Children's Services under Section 18 Children Act 2004 to discharge the education and children's social services functions of the local authority.

A Statement of Assurance was prepared to outline these arrangements and provide assurance as to how the statutory functions would be met and this was considered by Council at its meeting on the 20 June 2023.

The Chief Partnerships Officer has resigned her post and will be leaving the organisation on 30th June 2024. Following a comprehensive recruitment process a new Director of Children's and Education Services has been appointed who will join the City Council on 19th August when she will take on the statutory role of Director of Children's Services.

Interim arrangements

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

The Interim Director reported 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; and took on the statutory role of Director of Children's Services.

Following the arrival of the new Chief Executive a flatter senior leadership structure was put in place and the Interim Director of Children Services now reports directly to the Chief Executive and has further increased oversight of education services.

Following the departure of the Chief Partnerships Officer (Director of Partnerships and Performance) on the 30th June 2024, on an interim basis Neil Macdonald, as Interim Director of Children's Services, will be delegated as the statutory Director of Children's Services under Section 18 Children Act 2004 to discharge the education and children's social services functions of the local authority

Permanent arrangements for the statutory role of DCS

On the 19th August 2024 the new Director of Children's and Education Services will take up her position with the City Council and from that date be delegated as the statutory Director of Children's 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.

The Director of Children's Services reports directly to the Chief Executive providing a clear and unambiguous line of responsibility and direct access between leadership teams in Children's Services, the Chief Executive and Elected Members are in place creating robust local accountability.

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 Leadership Board 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 Chief Partnership Officer and prior to the arrival of the new Director of Children's Education Services. From the 19th August 2024 the new Director of Children's and Education Services will take on the statutory role.

Summary

This is now the seventh 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.