

SCRUTINY BOARD (CHILDREN'S SERVICES)

THURSDAY, 8TH MARCH, 2007

PRESENT: Councillor J Bale in the Chair

Councillors J Chapman, B Cleasby, R D Feldman,
A Harrison, V Kendall, J Lewis, K Renshaw and B Selby

**CO-OPTED MEMBERS:
(VOTING)**

Mr E A Britten	- Church Representative (Catholic)
Prof P H J H Gosden	- Church Representative (Church of England)
Mr C Macpherson	- Parent Governor Representative (Special)
Mrs S Knights	- Parent Governor Representative (Primary)

**CO-OPTED MEMBERS:
(NON-VOTING)**

Ms C Foote	- Teacher Representative
Mr P Gathercole	- NCH Representative
Ms T Kayani	- Leeds Youth Work Partnership Representative

108 Chair's Opening Remarks

The Chair welcomed all in attendance to the March meeting of the Scrutiny Board (Children's Services).

109 Declarations of Interest

The following Members declared personal interests in relation to agenda items 9 and 10 due to their respective positions as either school or college governors (Minute Nos. 114 and 115 refer):-

Councillors Bale, Chapman, Cleasby, R D Feldman, Harrison, Kendall, J Lewis, Selby, Mr E A Britten, Mr C Macpherson and Mrs S Knights.

Councillor Cleasby and Professor P H J H Gosden both declared personal interests in relation to agenda items 9 and 10 due to being members of the School Organisation Committee (Minute Nos. 114 and 115 refer).

Mr C Macpherson declared a personal interest in relation to agenda item 9, as his daughter attended the North West Specialist Inclusive Learning Centre (SILC). (Minute No. 114 refers).

Councillor Kendall declared a personal interest in relation to agenda item 11, due to being a member of the Skyrack Adoption Panel (Minute No. 116 refers).

Mr P Gathercole declared a personal interest in relation to agenda item 11, due to being a representative of NCH, an organisation which acted as an

adoption agency and provided services to looked after children (Minute No. 116 refers).

Ms C Foote declared a personal interest in relation to agenda item 10, due to being a member of the JTUC (Minute No. 115 refers).

Mrs S Knights declared a personal interest in relation to agenda item 11, due to being a Foster Parent (Minute No. 116 refers).

A further declaration of interest was made at a later point in the meeting (Minute No. 114 refers).

110 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of Councillor L Mulherin, Mr T Hales and Mrs S Hutchinson.

111 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 8th February 2007 be approved as a correct record.

112 Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 5th February 2007 be noted.

113 Members' Questions

As prior notice had been received from Members, the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report which afforded Scrutiny Board Members the opportunity to put questions to the relevant Director, or the Director's nominee.

Keith Burton, Deputy Director of Children's Services, Commissioning and Partnerships, was in attendance to answer Members' questions.

(a). In the light of the **Unicef report** that ranked the UK bottom of a league table for child wellbeing across 21 industrialised countries, do the officers think that we are setting our aspirations too low? Are there any plans for looking at best practice in the highest achieving countries (Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark and Finland)?

In response, the Deputy Director of Children's Services, Commissioning and Partnerships, advised Members of what he believed to be the four main issues arising from the report in relation to the delivery of Children's Services in Leeds. In summary, the four main issues were:-

- The importance for a country to place a greater cultural emphasis upon children, young people and the family unit;
- That those societies with low poverty levels, less inequality and greater social mobility tended to feature positively within the report, as such social conditions enabled the aspirations of children and young people to be maximised, which was in contrast to some countries where children's

aspirations were often eroded, due in part to the generations of poverty which often existed;

- The emphasis placed in the UK upon narrow areas of academic achievement and standardised testing, which had resulted in a competitive culture being embedded within education, in addition to under achievement in certain areas;
- The need to ensure that the aspirations of children and young people were maximised, a priority which the Deputy Director of Children's Services, Commissioning and Partnerships, believed had been reflected in recent policy development, through the establishment of initiatives such as 'Every Child Matters'.

A question and answer session resulting from the response then ensued. The main areas of debate were as follows:-

- The need to ensure that the emphasis of any future initiatives was placed upon a child's enjoyment in addition to achievement;
- Members noted the general success in the report of countries with smaller populations;
- The role of the **Children and Young People's Plan** in helping to improve the services provided to children and young people in Leeds when compared to the rest of the UK;
- The need to promote greater levels of peer support amongst young people in order to reduce problems such as bullying;
- The actions which could be taken via the '**Narrowing the Gap**' initiative to address the culture of low level aspiration which had developed in certain communities and the importance of such projects as EASEL in this context;
- The five outcomes which formed part of the Every Child Matters agenda, and the need to ensure that such outcomes were operational;
- The social and economic pressures currently placed upon parents, and how such pressures impacted upon today's children and young people;
- The need to ensure that children were not viewed merely as economic units when considering the provision of services.

(b). What **Contact Centre** provision does Social Services fund to enable separated parents to exercise contact arrangements properly?

In response, Members learned that there was no direct Local Authority provision for those seeking advice following marital break up, and that involvement in parental contact with children only happened where Social Services was involved due to a child being at risk or in care.

Having noted the arrangements for the wider services provided in this field, in addition to the support provided by voluntary organisations, the Deputy Director of Children's Services, Commissioning and Partnerships, noted Members' concerns and undertook to investigate further whether an increase in contact centre provision might reduce the levels of delays which had been experienced in private law cases.

The Board acknowledged the response which had been submitted and requested that a response in relation to the further work requested was submitted to a future meeting of the Board, if possible prior to the end of the municipal year.

(Councillor Renshaw joined the meeting at 9.40 a.m. during the consideration of this item)

114 **Specialist Inclusive Learning Centres (SILCs)**

Further to Minute No. 20, 13th July 2006, the Board received an update on the progress made by Education Leeds in relation to the action plan which had been drawn up in response to the publication of the Scrutiny Board's inquiry report into Specialist Inclusive Learning Centres (SILCs). The findings of the Scrutiny Board working group, a body which had been established to monitor the progress made in relation to the action plan, were also detailed for Members' consideration.

Carol Jordan, Strategic Manager, Behaviour and Attendance, and Paul Barker, Inclusion and SEN Team Leader, both of Education Leeds, were in attendance to answer Members' questions.

Following a brief overview of the information detailed with the report, a question and answer session ensued. The main areas of debate were as follows:-

- Members clarified whether a debate with all stakeholders concerning the principles and future direction of the SILC strategy had begun;
- The need to ensure that a clear strategy which reflected the changing needs of the service and which struck the correct **balance between inclusion and integration** was established in relation to the future provision of the SILCs;
- Members raised concerns regarding the timescales assigned to several of the responses within the action plan, sought clarification on the reasons for such lengthy timescales and highlighted the impact that such timescales may have upon service users in the interim;
- The Board sought clarification on the extent to which a funding model for the SILCs could be established, bearing in mind the service's ongoing structural review;
- Members sought further clarification on the arrangements for a proposed **funding model** for the SILCs, in order to ensure that the problems which had been experienced in the past would not occur again;
- With regard to the delays which had been experienced, Members enquired whether such delays had been caused by the degree of uncertainty which surrounded the SILC's long term funding arrangements;
- Members emphasised the importance of **effective communication** with all stakeholders and made enquiries into the number, level of parental involvement and effectiveness of the **Parent Forums** which had been established;
- Members noted that the **Portage Team** had nearly doubled the number of families receiving the service since 2005, asked whether this increase had been due to a reduction in the regularity of visits made by the team to

service users and sought clarification over the vacancy in the team which was to be filled after two years;

- The Board referred to the **accessibility of information** relating to the range of services available to children with special educational needs, asked whether such information was available from one source and whether enough was being done to provide 'clear, co-ordinated and updated information';
- The actions being taken to ensure that the Choice Advisor interfaced with those families who were most in need of information and guidance;
- Members emphasised **the difference between informing and consulting with service users** and highlighted the need to ensure that effective consultation on any proposed change to service delivery was undertaken;
- The Board emphasised the demands which were being placed upon those employees who taught children with special educational needs, raised concern at the amount of **training** in this field which was aimed at teaching assistants and highlighted the pressures currently placed upon teachers which restricted them from undertaking such courses.

In conclusion, Members stressed the need for the Scrutiny Board's successor to continue to monitor this issue, especially in relation to the short term recommendations made by the Scrutiny Board in addition to the **longer term structural and funding arrangements**.

RESOLVED –

- (a). That the report and information appended to the report be noted;
- (b). That the Scrutiny Board and its successor, continue to monitor the progress made by Education Leeds in relation to the recommendations of the Scrutiny Board following its inquiry into the Specialist Inclusive Learning Centres.

(Mrs S Knights declared a personal interest in relation to this item, due to being a member of the North West SILC Parents Forum)

115 The Implications of Trust Schools for the Local Authority - Inquiry Session Two

Further to Minute No. 104, 8th February 2007, a report was submitted by the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development which detailed the information to be considered as part of the second formal session of the Board's inquiry into the Implications of Trust Schools in Leeds.

Appended to the report for Members' information were the agreed terms of reference for the Scrutiny Board inquiry, in addition to a range of information from Children Leeds, the Schools Commissioner, Department for Education and Skills, Garforth Community College, Trinity and All Saints College, Temple Moor High School Science College and David Young Community Academy.

Carol Gray, representing the Schools Commissioner, Department for Education and Skills, Dirk Gilleard, Deputy Chief Executive, Education Leeds,

Richard Smith, Team Leader, Governor Support, Education Leeds, Keith Burton, Deputy Director of Children's Services, Commissioning and Partnerships, Paul Edwards, Head Teacher, Garforth Community College, Ian Garforth, Chair of Governors, Garforth Community College, Ros McMullen, Principal, David Young Academy, Martin Fleetwood, Principal, Temple Moor High School Science College and Tony Sheppard, Chair of Governors, Temple Moor High School Science College, were all in attendance to answer Members' questions and submit evidence to the Board.

Having received a summary of the information submitted on behalf of the Director of Children's Services, representatives of the Schools Commissioner, Garforth Community College, David Young Academy, Temple Moor High School Science College and Education Leeds all submitted their views in relation to the impact that the introduction of Trust Schools could have in Leeds.

A question and answer session concerning the evidence which had been submitted then followed. The main areas of debate were:-

- Members made enquiries into the impact on a school if the school's Trust status was terminated;
- Having raised concerns relating to the possible impact that the **admissions policies** of Trust Schools could have upon children with learning difficulties and the extent to which the Local Authority would have control over such policies, Members noted that Trust Schools would be bound by the School Admissions Code;
- Clarification was sought on several issues including the provision of **safeguards** relating to the establishment of Trust Schools, the number of Trust School pilots which were located in **inner city areas**, the level of restrictions which would be placed upon those looking to become partners of Trust Schools and how such partners would be restricted from promoting their own financial interests. In response the Board was advised of the legislative provisions for such concerns, and in relation to the number of Trust Schools located in inner city areas, Members noted that further information on this issue would be provided;
- Members sought further information on the **barriers to cooperation** which existed in the current model of education provision and enquired how the introduction of Trust Schools would improve provision in the future;
- The Board then discussed the proposed involvement of the Learning and Skills Council and Primary Care Trust in the **Garforth Trust School pilot** and made enquiries into the impact that such involvement would have upon other schools in the area;
- The flexibility of contracts for schools built via the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programmes and whether such schools had the potential to acquire Trust status in the future;
- Members asked to what extent the **terms and conditions of staff working** in Trust Schools would be protected;
- Members raised concerns over the implications that the potential establishment of two Trusts in East Leeds would have upon other schools in the area;

- In response to Members' enquiries relating to the **sale of land and assets** by a Trust School, Members were advised that although the regular restrictions still applied, the sale of land and assets would be permitted so long as the appropriate consultation was undertaken with the school's governing body and that any revenue received was reinvested back into the school;
- Members then made enquiries into the timescales relating to the finalisation of relevant guidance concerning Trust Schools.

RESOLVED –

- (a). That the report and information appended to the report be noted;
- (b). That the issues raised during the second formal session of the Board's inquiry into the Implications of Trust Schools for the Local Authority be incorporated into the draft version of the Board's final report.

(Mr C Macpherson, Mrs S Knights, Councillor Renshaw, Councillor Harrison, Ms T Kayani, Councillor Chapman and Councillor Feldman left the meeting at 11.50 a.m., 12.05 p.m., 12.10 p.m., 12.25 p.m., 12.30 p.m., 12.35 p.m. and 12.40 p.m. respectively)

116 Inquiry into Adoption in Leeds

A report was submitted by the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development which sought the Board's approval of the final draft version of the Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) report into Adoption in Leeds.

A final draft version of the Scrutiny Board inquiry report in addition to a summary of the evidence considered during the inquiry was appended to the covering report for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED –

- (a). That the contents of the report be noted;
- (b). That the Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) inquiry report into Adoption in Leeds be approved.

117 Work Programme

The Board received a report from the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development which detailed the Scrutiny Board's Work Programme for the remainder of the municipal year.

Appended to the report for Members' information was the current version of the Board's Work Programme, an extract from the Forward Plan of Key Decisions for the period 1st March 2007 to 30th June 2007 which related to the Board's remit, together with the minutes from the Executive Board meeting held on 9th February 2007.

Following a wide ranging discussion which related to the greater emphasis currently being placed upon a mixed economy of education provision in Leeds, Members proposed that the range of issues discussed could be considered in more detail by the Scrutiny Board's successor in the new municipal year.

RESOLVED – That the contents of the Board’s Work Programme, as appended to the report, be noted.

- 118 Date and Time of Next Meeting**
Thursday, 29th March 2007 at 10.30 a.m.
(Pre-meeting scheduled for 10.00 a.m.)

(The meeting concluded at 12.55 p.m.)