

SCRUTINY BOARD (CHILDREN AND FAMILIES)

THURSDAY, 25TH JULY, 2013

PRESENT: Councillor J Chapman in the Chair

Councillors J Akhtar, J Elliott, J Jarosz,
A Lamb, P Latty, K Mitchell, M Rafique,
K Renshaw, A Sobel and C Towler

CO-OPTED MEMBERS (VOTING)

Mr E A Britten – Church Representative (Catholic)

Mrs J Ward – Parent Governor Representative (Secondary)

CO-OPTED MEMBERS (NON-VOTING)

Ms C Foote – Teacher Representative

Ms S Hutchinson – Early Years Representative

Ms J Morris-Boam – Young Lives Leeds (0-13 age group)

Ms T Kayani – Young Lives Leeds (13-19 age group)

11 Late Items

There were no late items.

12 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

In relation to agenda item 7 entitled, 'Request for Scrutiny – Transport Consultation and the Proposed Changes to the Children's Services Transport Policy', Mr T Britten drew the Board's attention to his role as a representative of the Roman Catholic Diocese. (Minute No. 15 refers)

Also in relation to agenda item 7 entitled, 'Request for Scrutiny – Transport Consultation and the Proposed Changes to the Children's Services Transport Policy', Mr J Ward drew the Board's attention to her role as a parent of children who attended a faith school. (Minute No. 15 refers)

13 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies for absence were submitted by Councillors C Gruen and B Urry and Co-opted Members, Ms A Craven and Mr A Graham. Notification had been received that Councillor C Towler was to substitute for Councillor C Gruen and Councillor J Jarosz for Councillor B Urry.

14 Minutes - 28th June 2013

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 28th June 2013 be approved as a correct record.

15 Request for Scrutiny - Transport consultation and the proposed changes to the Children's Services Transport Policy

The Board considered a request for scrutiny from Mr Tom Casey in relation to proposed changes to the Children's Services transport policy.

The Board noted that this request arose from a report to the Executive Board in June 2013.

In attendance to address the Board and answer Members' questions were:

- Tom Casey – presenting the request
- Helen Edwards – accompanying Mr Casey
- Elizabeth Lock – accompanying Mr Casey
- Councillor Judith Blake, Executive Member (Children's Services)
- Sarah Sinclair, Chief Officer (Strategy, Commissioning and Performance)
- Gerry Hudson, Strategic Business Development Service Lead
- Allan Hudson, Senior Contract Manager.

Tom Casey presented the request to the Board outlining the key concerns identified in his request. He indicated that he was speaking from an updated version of the document circulated to the Board and agreed to provide the revised version to the Principal Scrutiny Adviser for use in any work going forward.

The key issues raised included:

- The quality and inclusivity of the consultation process
- The quality of the supporting financial information
- Poor quality assurance and analysis in the proposals
- Equality and diversity issues
- Traffic and environmental concerns
- Consequential costs of implementing the decision
- Hardship for vulnerable residents
- That the proposals went against the city's aspirations to be a child friendly city and the vision to be the best city in the UK by 2030.

In response, officers and the Executive Member stressed the following points:

- The significant financial pressures facing the authority as a general context to the review of the transport policy
- Specific concerns about the rising costs associated with the children's services transport policy, particularly in the context of the rising school population
- The extension of the consultation period for a further month
- The level of responses to the consultation, but also acknowledgement that, with hindsight, improvements could be made in informing parents of the consultation

- Acknowledgement of some of the comments concerning potential bias or inconsistency in relation to the policy for mixed and single sex education
- That many other authorities had already reviewed or were reviewing this provision in the light of the ongoing financial pressures
- The phased implementation of the new policy
- The good working with partners to take forward the implementation of the changes
- That statutory entitlement would continue to be funded for all those receiving qualifying benefits, protecting the most vulnerable
- That young people had been specifically involved in the consultation process and that their priority for transport was not confined to school transport
- That the Executive Member would welcome the Scrutiny Board's involvement and contribution to the implementation phase.

In discussing the request the main points considered were:

- Clarification that the petition referred to in the report had now been signed by around 3,000 people, but that it only dealt with one aspect of the consultation
- Potential impact on parental choice of schools and potential knock on implications for faith school provision in the future
- The role of all partners, including schools, colleges, Metro, bus providers, the dioceses in the detailed implementation of the new policy
- The fact that the Executive Board decision was still subject to the Call In period.

Members decided that they wished to undertake a scrutiny inquiry in response to the request from Mr Tom Casey and to contribute to the ongoing work on implementation of the changes in the transport policy. It was agreed that the Principal Scrutiny Adviser would draft the scope of the inquiry and circulate proposals to all Board members for comment. It was further agreed that, should the Executive Board decision of 17 July be Called In, that the scope of the inquiry would not be finalised until after the Call In meeting, in order to take account of issues considered at such a meeting.

RESOLVED – That the Principal Scrutiny Adviser draft the scope for an inquiry on the Children's Services transport policy on the basis set out above.

16 Draft LSCB Annual Report on the Effectiveness of Safeguarding Arrangements for Children and Young people in Leeds (July 2013)

The Independent Chair of the Leeds Safeguarding Children Board submitted a report which provided an update on the progress being made by and through the LSCB to improve safeguarding children practice in Leeds. The report also provided the a progress update relating to recommendation 1 of the Scrutiny Boards inquiry into Private Fostering.

The following information was appended to the report:

- LSCB Annual Report 2012/13 Draft (2) 11.07.13.

The following representatives were in attendance and responded to Members' queries and comments:

- Councillor J Blake, Executive Member (Children's Services)
- Steve Walker, Deputy Director (Safeguarding, Specialist & Targeted Services)
- Sarah Sinclair, Chief Officer (Strategy, Commissioning and Performance)
- Bryan Gocke, LSCB Manager

The key areas of discussion were:

- The effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements for children and young people and the good progress made so far
- Areas identified for improvement as identified by Ofsted in February 2013
- The Private Fostering update report from Children's Services received by the LSCB in June 2013
- Eastmoor Ofsted report.

RESOLVED – That the Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) notes the content of the draft LSCB Annual Report and the challenges for 2013/14, including those accepted by the Children's Trust Board.

17 Response to Scrutiny Inquiry Report - Private Fostering

The Director of Children's Services submitted a comprehensive progress report in response to the Scrutiny Boards inquiry report into Private Fostering.

The following information was appended to the report:

- Draft Private Fostering Communications Strategy 2013/14 Version 4.

The following representatives were in attendance and responded to Members' queries and comments:

- Councillor J Blake, Executive Member (Children's Services)
- Steve Walker, Deputy Director (Safeguarding, Specialist & Targeted Services)
- Sarah Sinclair, Chief Officer (Strategy, Commissioning and Performance)
- Val Hales, Fostering and Adoption, Children's Services

The key areas of discussion were:

- Raising the profile of Private Fostering and reporting pathways

- The number of reported cases were still low and the fluctuating numbers of children who were in a private fostering situation
- The benefit of care being provided from within the family
- The value of the inquiry and the inclusion of recommendations in the communications strategy.

RESOLVED – That the Scrutiny Board approves the proposed responses as outlined in the report.

18 Director's Response - Scrutiny Inquiry into Increasing the Number of Young People in Employment, Education or Training

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report which outlined the formal response to the recommendations of the Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) inquiry into increasing the number of young people in employment, education or training.

The following representatives were in attendance and responded to Members' queries and comments:

- Councillor J Blake, Executive Member (Children's Services)
- Sarah Sinclair, Chief Officer (Strategy, Commissioning and Performance)
- Gary Milner – Lead Officer, Skills for Life

The key areas of discussion were:

- The acceptance of recommendations and intention to report back to Scrutiny Board in October 2013
- The recognition of the size of the NEET problem and greater partnership approach to tackling this
- Barriers such as maths and English GCSE attainment, and interview and presentation skills, SEN and poverty that impact on the employability of young people
- The growing interest of companies in working with the Council to get young people work ready
- Youth Contract and access to support and information advice and guidance.

RESOLVED – The Scrutiny Board notes that the Director of Children's Services accepts the 13 recommendations stated in the inquiry report.

(Councillor J Jarosz left the meeting at 12.00 at the conclusion of this item.)

19 Financial Health Monitoring Children's Services- Budget Update Quarter 1 2013/14 and Outturn summary for 2012/13

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report to facilitate the provision of budget information.

The following information was appended to the report:

- Financial Dashboard – 1st Quarter April to June 2013
- Children's Services – 2012/13 Financial Outturn report

The following representatives were in attendance and responded to Members' queries and comments:

- Councillor J Blake, Executive Member (Children's Services)
- Sarah Sinclair, Chief Officer (Strategy, Commissioning and Performance)
- Neil Warren, Head of Finance (Children's Services)

The key areas of discussion were:

- The significant financial pressures facing Children's Services particularly with regard to the budget reduction in 2013/14.
- Current year £1.15m overspend and the work currently being done to mitigate this over the remainder of the financial year.
- Turning the curve on external placements continues to be a priority

RESOLVED – That the contents of the report and appendices be noted.

20 Work Schedule

A report was submitted by the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development which detailed the Scrutiny Board's work programme for the current municipal year.

The draft Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) work schedule for 2013/2014 was appended to the report.

Sandra Pentelow, Principal Scrutiny Adviser, presented the report and responded to Members' queries and comments. Members were advised that the work programme would be updated following the outcome of any call-in meeting should any arise following the publication of the Executive Board minutes on the 19 July 2013.

RESOLVED – That the contents of the report and appendices be noted.

21 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Thursday, 19th September 2013 at 9.45am in the Civic Hall, Leeds
(Pre meeting for Board Members at 9.15am)

(The meeting concluded at 12.15pm)