

# Scrutiny Board (Children's Services)



*Cllr John Bale  
Chair of Scrutiny Board (Children's Services)*

## **Membership of the Board:**

Councillor John Bale (Chair)	Mr Tony Britten
Councillor Judith Chapman	Ms Celia Foote
Councillor Brian Cleasby	Mr Paul Gathercole
Councillor Ronald Feldman	Prof Peter Gosden
Councillor Andrea Harrison	Mr Robert Greaves
Councillor Valerie Kendall	Mr Tim Hales
Councillor James Lewis (part)	Mrs Sandra Hutchinson
Councillor Lisa Mulherin	Ms Taira Kayani
Councillor Tom Murray (part)	Mrs Sue Knights
Councillor Karen Renshaw	Mr Cluny Macpherson
Councillor Brian Selby	

## ***The Chair's Summary***

Once again it has been a privilege to chair the Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) in its second full year of operation. My thanks go to all colleagues on the Board who have faced the challenge of such a huge agenda with their customary enthusiasm, good humour and rigour throughout the year.

This year the Board has sought to build on the experiences of last year, and to refine our dual approach to maintaining an overview across the whole range of services that come under the children's services umbrella, as well as tackling a small number of important issues through more in depth inquiries where we can make a difference.

One of the key features of each of our three main pieces of work this year - on adoption, youth services and trust schools - has been the involvement of stakeholders both from within the council and from other partner agencies, thus reflecting the integrated approach to the delivery of all children's services that is a cornerstone of the every child matters agenda.

In particular our inquiry about the implication of the emerging trust schools model for the local authority demonstrated the potential of Overview and Scrutiny to assist the Council and Executive with policy development, and to afford non executive Members the opportunity to shape the delivery of services.

Once again, visits have formed an extremely valuable counterpoint to the Board's questioning in formal Scrutiny Board meetings. We have been able to meet informally with front line staff and with children and young people, their parents and carers, to discuss the day to day reality as well as the strategy and policy surrounding service delivery.

I am pleased to report that the Board has once again sponsored an inquiry by the Young People's Scrutiny Forum. This year's subject - catching the bus - was again derived from the Youth Council manifesto.

My thanks to the Board's support officers and to all those witnesses from within and outside the council who have contributed their experience and professionalism to our work over the past year, helping us to make a positive contribution to a bright future for children's services in Leeds.

**Cllr John Bale**  
**Chair of Scrutiny Board (Children's Services)**

## ***Catching the Bus***

This year, the young people's inquiry was carried out jointly by Leeds Youth Council and ROAR (Reach Out and Reconnect). They decided that they wanted to help remove some of the barriers young people face when using buses.

309 young people returned a questionnaire, from which it emerged that the cost of travel was by far the biggest barrier.



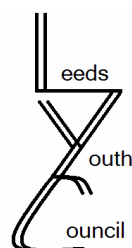
### **The Forum's recommendations**

The young people's main recommendation was

- That the Youth Council and ROAR lead a campaign with one aim- to achieve free bus travel for all young people - and that everyone who works with and for young people joins with and supports them in achieving it.

Other recommendations included

- Various proposals for improving concessionary schemes
- The ability to send complaints by text message
- CCTV with sound recording on buses
- Taking account of transport needs in all decisions about services to children and young people
- A review of how school transport money is allocated



## ***Adoption in Leeds***

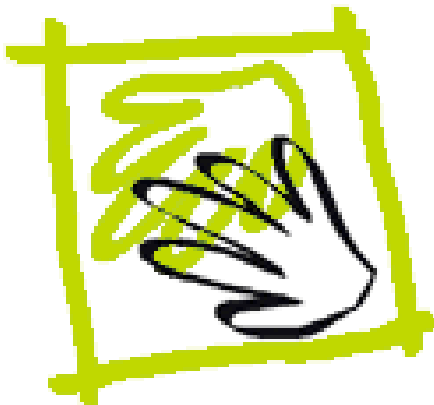
Our inquiry into adoption was sparked by concern at a decline in the number of adoptions in Leeds in recent years, and was focused on action that could be taken to avoid unnecessary delays in the adoption process, as well as encouraging more people to come forward as adopters. We heard from representatives of all stakeholders and participants in the adoption process including social services, the courts, CAFCASS (the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service), the regional adoption consortium, voluntary agencies, other local authorities and the Adoption Panel, as well as adoptive parents and adopted children themselves.

We were very pleased that, by the time we completed our inquiry, agreement had been obtained for medical support to enable a third Adoption Panel to be set up, which will help to speed up the approval process.

**Some of our main recommendations were:**

- **For proposals to be brought forward for further reducing administrative delays, including the possibility of cases transferring to the adoption team earlier in order to avoid 'drift', and meeting court targets for dealing with adoption cases;**
- **To examine the case for change in the adoption process to make more effective use of combined inter-agency resources**
- **To raise awareness of the range of people who can adopt and to challenge lingering public misconceptions**
- **To develop arrangements for keeping prospective adopters engaged while they wait to adopt**
- **To improve the education support for adopted children and their families**

**make a real  
difference**



**foster or adopt with  
Leeds Social Services**

*“Leeds has made great strides in providing an adoption service that works in the best interests of children and adoptive parents. Nevertheless, more remains to be done.*

*Red tape and delays in the system are distressing for adoptive parents and prolong the period some children have to remain in less than ideal environments.*

*This valuable report will, I hope, assist all involved in the adoption service to help more children and young people in Leeds to find contentment with their adopted families.”*

*Councillor Bale*

## **Youth Services**

All Children's Services authorities will be obliged to produce a 'youth offer' this year to provide sufficient educational leisure time activities and facilities for young people's personal and social development. Our inquiry was designed to inform the development of the youth offer in Leeds.

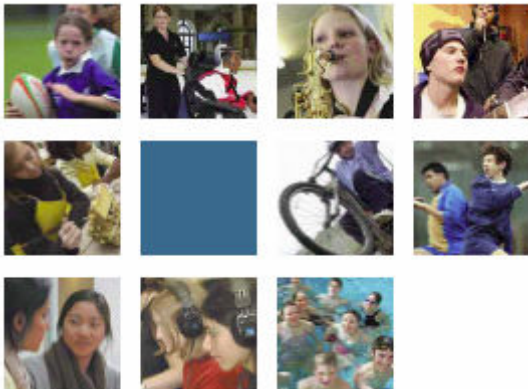
We spoke to representatives from a range of providers of services for young people, including the council's youth service and other providers of youth work, as well as partners in community safety and information, advice and guidance services, and universal providers such as leisure services. Members of the Board visited a wide range of different types of youth provision, and talked to young people about their views and experiences of the current service and ideas for the future.

**Our main recommendations were:**

**(To be added following agreement of the report.)**

## Youth Matters: Next Steps

Something to do, somewhere to go, someone to talk to



## **Trust Schools**

With one of the pilot Trusts being developed here in Leeds, we decided to look at the implications of the implementation of Trust Schools for the local authority. We looked not just at the educational consequences, but also the wider community implications for the children's services authority.

This inquiry has provided an opportunity for the Scrutiny Board to contribute to the development of a proactive approach to the development of Trust Schools in Leeds, as an example of scrutiny's role in shaping policy.



**Our main recommendations were:**

**(To be added following agreement of the report.)**

### **The Board's full work programme 2006/07**

#### Review of existing policy

Inquiry into Adoption in Leeds

Catching the Bus Inquiry (conducted by the Young People's Scrutiny Forum)

Departmental Communications

Library Charges

#### Development of new policy

Youth Services Inquiry

Inquiry into the implications of Trust Schools for the local authority

Review of 14-19 education and training provision in Leeds

Corporate consultation and engagement

#### Performance Management and Monitoring

Overview of Children's Services

Monitoring support to children in need and in public care

Performance Management information

Standards in Leeds schools and Ofsted inspections

Children's Services performance and inspection

Monitoring of recommendations from previous inquiries including:

- Implementing the Children Act
- Specialist Inclusive Learning Centres (SILCs)
- Secondary Achievement
- Transfer from primary to secondary school
- Recruitment, Retention and Workload of Children's Social Workers

#### Budget and Policy Framework

Children and Young People's Plan

#### Briefings

Safeguarding Children

Extended Schools

School admissions and appeals