

SCRUTINY BOARD (CHILDREN'S SERVICES)

THURSDAY, 13TH JULY, 2006

PRESENT: Councillor J Bale in the Chair

Councillors J Chapman, B Cleasby,
R D Feldman, A Harrison, V Kendall,
L Mulherin, T Murray, 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 R Greaves	Parent Governor Representative (Secondary)
	Mr C Macpherson	Parent Governor Representative (Special)
	Mrs S Knights	Parent Governor Representative (Primary)
CO-OPTED MEMBERS (NON- VOTING):	Mr T Hales	Teacher Representative
	Ms C Foote	Teacher Representative
	Mr P Gathercole	NCH Representative
	Ms T Kayani	Youth Work Partnership Representative

11 CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS

The Chair welcomed all in attendance to the July meeting of the Scrutiny Board (Children's Services), especially Councillor A Harrison and Ms T Kayani who were both attending as Members of the Board for the first time. The Chair also welcomed both Executive Members for Children's Services, in addition to Mrs S Knights who had recently been re-appointed to the position of voting co-opted member, Parent Governor Representative (Primary).

12 LATE ITEMS

In accordance with his powers under Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Chair admitted to the agenda draft terms of reference for the Scrutiny Board inquiry into Adoption in Leeds, which was to be considered as part of agenda item 15. The document had been unavailable at the time of the agenda despatch.

13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following Members declared personal interests, due to their respective positions as either school or college governors:-

Councillors Bale, Cleasby, Kendall, R D Feldman, Harrison, Mulherin, Renshaw, Selby, Mr C Macpherson, Mr R Greaves, Mr E A Britten and Mrs S Knights.

Mr C Macpherson declared a personal interest in agenda item 11, due to his daughter being on the roll of the North West Specialist Inclusive Learning Centre (SILC) from September 2006 and a personal interest in agenda item 15, having been approved as an adopter. (Minute Nos 20 and 24 refer).

Professor P H J H Gosden declared a personal interest due to being a member of the School Organisation Committee.

Mr P Gathercole declared a personal interest in agenda item 14, due to being a representative for NCH which provided services to looked after children. (Minute No 23 refers).

Further personal interests were declared throughout the meeting. (Minute Nos 21 and 23 refer).

14 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence from the meeting was received on behalf of Mrs S Hutchinson.

15 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Scrutiny Board (Children’s Services) meeting held on 9th June 2006 be approved as a correct record.

16 MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 5th June 2006 be noted.

17 DISCUSSION WITH EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

The Board received a report from the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development which enabled Members to discuss the Board’s priorities for the forthcoming municipal year with the Lead and Support Executive Members for Children’s Services.

In attendance at the meeting to respond to Members’ queries and comments were Councillor Brett, Lead Executive Member for Children’s Services, Councillor Harker, Support Executive Member for Children’s Services, Rosemary Archer, Director of Children’s Services and Chris Edwards, Chief Executive of Education Leeds.

Following an overall update on children’s service provision in Leeds from both Executive Members, a question and answer session ensued. The main areas of debate were as follows:

- Members sought clarification on the criteria used to define a child as ‘vulnerable’ and the mechanisms established to prevent children from falling into that category;
- Further information was given on the proposed children’s trust commissioning arrangements and on the methods which would be used to consult Members on these proposals and various other

children's services issues on an ongoing basis, including Member seminar arrangements;

- Emphasis was placed upon the intention to increase partnership working arrangements both at local and district level when delivering children's services in Leeds.

RESOLVED – That the discussion with Executive Members for Children's Services regarding the Board's priorities for the forthcoming municipal year be noted.

(Councillor Murray joined the meeting at 10.00 a.m. during the consideration of this item)

18 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report which afforded Scrutiny Board Members the opportunity to put questions to the relevant service Director and which also sought views on how Members wished to deal with this agenda item at future meetings.

Councillors Brett and Harker, Lead and Support Executive Members for Children's Services respectively and Chris Edwards, Chief Executive of Education Leeds, were in attendance to answer Members' questions.

The Chief Executive of Education Leeds fielded a range of questions regarding the administration and serving of Fixed Penalty Notices in Leeds which had been submitted prior to the meeting. In summary, the answers submitted to the Board addressed the following issues:

- the number of Fixed Penalty Notices issued in Leeds since the introduction of the scheme;
- the protocol established in Leeds which enabled the Education Welfare Service only to issue Fixed Penalty Notices;
- the number of cases where the Education Welfare Service had refused to issue Fixed Penalty Notices despite requests from schools and the reasons for such refusals;
- the number of Fixed Penalty Notices which had been issued in respect of parents taking their children out of school during term time;
- the reasons why the Education Welfare Service had refused to issue Fixed Penalty Notices to those parents who had taken their children out of school;
- the extent of the consultation process which had preceded the introduction of the Fixed Penalty Notice scheme;
- the ways in which the monies collected by the scheme were allocated.

Members then made further enquiries into the procedures surrounding the serving of Fixed Penalty Notices. Following the submission of a specific example where the Education Welfare Service had refused to issue a Fixed Penalty Notice despite a school's wishes, the Chief Executive of Education Leeds invited the Member in question to discuss the issue further with him outside the meeting.

RESOLVED –

- (a). That the information contained within the report be noted;
- (b). That the Members' Questions item of business only be included as an agenda item if prior notice of questions has been received by the time the agenda is due for publication.

19 FORMAL RESPONSE - CHILDREN ACT INQUIRY

The Board received a report from the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development which detailed the formal response to the recommendations of Scrutiny Board (Children and Young People) which arose from its inquiry into the implementation of the Children Act in Leeds.

In attendance at the meeting to answer Members' queries and questions were Keith Burton, Lead Chief Officer, Children's Services and Louise Tonkinson, Communications and Marketing Manager.

Following a question and answer session regarding the progress being made in response to several of the inquiry's recommendations, Members proposed that the draft consultation and engagement toolkit detailed within the action plan could be submitted to the Scrutiny Board prior to it being submitted to Executive Board for formal adoption.

Members then noted that further update reports relating to the implementation of the Children Act in Leeds were intended to be submitted to the October 2006 and January and April 2007 meetings of the Board.

RESOLVED –

- (a). That the report and information appended to the report be noted;
- (b). That the draft consultation and engagement toolkit be submitted to the Board prior to it being submitted to Executive Board for formal adoption;
- (c). That further update reports on the progress of the implementation of the Children Act in Leeds be submitted to the October 2006 and January and April 2007 meetings of the Board.

20 FORMAL RESPONSE - SPECIALIST INCLUSIVE LEARNING CENTRES INQUIRY

Members received a report from the Chief Executive of Education Leeds which detailed the formal response to the recommendations made by the Scrutiny Board (Children and Young People) following its inquiry into Specialist Inclusive Learning Centres (SILCs).

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

A summary of the recently published report from the House of Commons Education and Skills Select Committee, entitled 'Special Educational Needs' had been circulated to Members for information.

Following a brief summary of the information detailed within the report, a question and answer session then ensued. The main areas of debate were as follows:

- the extent to which a coherent SILC strategy was emerging throughout the city;
- the measures being taken to improve the morale of both SILC staff and parents of children attending the centres, and the effect that uncertainty surrounding staffing levels could have on morale;
- the ways in which the funding arrangements of the SILCs were being developed to reflect the changing patterns of their service delivery;
- the methods which were being used to interact with parents, and the need for active engagement to be part of the SILCs' communications strategy;
- the actions which had been taken following a review of the SILCs' partnership arrangements in Leeds;
- timescales relating to the review of information received by parents which advised them of the SILCs' admissions procedure and the possibility of the results from such a review being circulated to Members for information;
- the measures which were being taken to ensure that adequate opportunities for staff development existed both in SILC and mainstream settings;
- the capacity of the portage service currently delivered in Leeds;
- the models of governance which had been considered to reflect the partnership nature of the SILCs in Leeds;
- the capacity that the Organisational Change Team would have to support those schools facing significant change;
- the ways in which the Making Leeds Better initiative may impact upon the health services provided to SILCs in Leeds;
- the quality of training received by staff in mainstream schools who taught children with special educational needs.

It was then proposed that given the complexity of the issue, a working group could be established to monitor the progress of the actions detailed within Education Leeds' formal response, in addition to the issues raised during the meeting.

RESOLVED –

- (a). That the report and information appended to the report be noted;
- (b). That a working group comprising of Councillors Bale, Harrison, Kendall, Mr E A Britten, Ms C Foote, Mr T Hales and Mr C Macpherson be established to monitor the progress of several actions detailed within Education Leeds' formal response to the inquiry, in addition to the issues raised during the meeting.

(Mr T Hales joined the meeting at 10.35 a.m. during the consideration of this item and Mr C Macpherson left the meeting at 11.05 a.m. at the conclusion of this item)

21 FORMAL RESPONSE - SECONDARY ACHIEVEMENT INQUIRY

A report was submitted by the Chief Executive of Education Leeds which detailed the formal response to the recommendations made by the Scrutiny Board (Children and Young People) following its inquiry into Secondary Achievement.

In attendance at the meeting to answer Members' questions were Gary Milner, 14-19 Strategy Co-ordinator and Mike Cooper, Centre Manager, both of Education Leeds.

Following a brief summary of the details contained within the report, a question and answer session ensued. The main areas of debate were as follows:

- in response to Members' concerns regarding the low number of primary schools which had uploaded teacher assessment and pastoral data for local high schools to access as of mid-June 2006, Members requested an urgent update on this issue;
- the reasons why such a modest target of 50% of all learners in year 10 to receive Individual Learning Plans by September 2006 had been set, and the methods which were being used to increase the number of learners benefiting from Individual Learning Plans;
- clarification was sought on the actions being taken to review the adequacy of the safeguarding arrangements concerning work experience and work placements, and it was proposed that an update on the issue could be submitted to Members prior to the December 2006 meeting when the Secondary Achievement inquiry was next scheduled to be considered by the Board;
- further information was provided on the progress which was being made to ensure that a range of accredited routes for demonstrating functional skills were available for learners in Leeds, including the proposed diploma pilot project;
- the mechanisms which had been established to ensure that opportunities were in place for teachers to explore and develop new methods of delivering the curriculum;
- clarification was sought on the progress which had been made in relation to an event to raise employer awareness of the benefits to be gained from providing work placements;
- Members sought assurances in relation to the lack of response timescales which had been incorporated into the report.

RESOLVED –

- (a). That the report and information appended to the report be noted;
- (b). That an update on the number of primary schools in Leeds uploading teacher assessment and pastoral data for high schools to access be provided to Members as soon as possible;
- (c). That an update on the actions being taken to review the adequacy of the safeguarding arrangements concerning work experience and work placements be submitted prior to the Scrutiny Board meeting scheduled for December 2006;

(d). That a further report updating Members on the progress made in relation to the recommendations of the Scrutiny Board (Children and Young People) be submitted to the Scrutiny Board in December 2006.

(Councillor Murray declared a personal interest in this item due to being a governor of Thomas Danby College)

22 FORMAL RESPONSE - INQUIRY INTO RECRUITMENT, RETENTION AND WORKLOAD OF CHILDREN'S SOCIAL WORKERS

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report which detailed the formal response to the recommendations made by the Scrutiny Board (Children and Young People) following its inquiry into the Recruitment, Retention and Workload of Children's Social Workers.

In attendance at the meeting to respond to Members' questions was Tony Griffin, Head of Community Services – Children, Social Services.

Having raised concerns over the payment for individual Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks, the Board was assured that employees within Social Services were not required to pay for their own checks.

In response to Members' questions regarding the time it was currently taking to recruit social workers, the Head of Community Services – Children undertook to provide Members with the relevant data.

RESOLVED – That the report and information appended to the report be noted and that a further update be provided in January 2007.

(Ms C Foote and Councillor Renshaw left the meeting at 12.00 p.m. and 12.05 p.m. respectively, during the consideration of this item)

23 MONITORING SUPPORT TO CHILDREN IN NEED AND IN PUBLIC CARE

The Board received a joint report from the Director of Social Services and the Chief Executive of Education Leeds which detailed statistics relating to an agreed framework for monitoring the provision for children who were either in need or in public care.

In attendance at the meeting to answer Members' queries and concerns were Stuart Cameron-Strickland, Senior Quality Performance Review Officer and Tony Griffin, Head of Community Services – Children, both from Social Services.

Following an enquiry from Members regarding the early availability of comparative data from those local authorities which Leeds was currently benchmarked against, the Board questioned the statistics within the report regarding the time taken to administer core assessments in Leeds. Members also commented on the progress in providing Personal Education Plans for looked after children.

Members then requested that actual figures in addition to percentages were detailed within any future reports of this nature, to enable the Board to make a more comprehensive assessment of Leeds' current performance.

RESOLVED – That the statistical information detailed within the report be noted.

(Councillor Murray declared a personal interest in this item, as his wife was employed to work with children in a similar capacity as was detailed within the report)

24 ADOPTION IN LEEDS

A report was submitted by the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development which sought the Board's approval of draft terms of reference for the inquiry into Adoption in Leeds, which had been circulated to Members prior to the meeting.

Having noted that the draft terms of reference detailed Sheffield City Council as a possible contributor towards the inquiry, it was recommended that the terms of reference were revised to enable the Board to visit the most appropriate local authority at the time.

A discussion relating to the inherent difficulties which existed when trying to adhere to timescales within the adoption process then followed.

RESOLVED –

- (a). That the report and information appended to the report be noted;
- (b). That subject to the removal of the specific reference to Sheffield City Council as a possible contributor towards the inquiry, the draft terms of reference for the inquiry into Adoption in Leeds be approved.

25 WORK PROGRAMME

The Board received a report from the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development which detailed the Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) Work Programme for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

Following a discussion relating to the current schedule of meetings, Members proposed that all sessions scheduled to consider the inquiry into Youth Services were brought forward by one month to reflect the urgency of the inquiry. It was also suggested that an additional meeting could be organised if appropriate.

RESOLVED –

- (a). That the report and information appended to the report be noted;
- (b). That the youth services inquiry be rescheduled in order to complete it earlier than proposed in the current work programme.

(Ms T Kayani left the meeting at 12.20 p.m. during the consideration of this item)

26 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday, 7th September 2006 at 9.30 a.m. in the Civic Hall, Leeds.
(Pre-meeting scheduled for 9.00 a.m.)

(The meeting concluded at 12.25 p.m.)