

**Draft Scrutiny Inquiry Final report
Outdoor Education Centres
January 2011**

Draft



Introduction and Scope

Introduction

1. The Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) decided in June 2010 that it wished to look at outdoor education facilities supported by the council. The possibility of scrutinising this area had initially been raised towards the end of 2009/10. In addition, Councillor Atkinson made a request for scrutiny of Herd Farm in June 2010. This request was accepted by the Board and incorporated into the work on outdoor education centres.
2. It was agreed that this work would be undertaken by a working group of the Board. Membership was confirmed at the new Board's first meeting in June.
3. The working group's findings, which were endorsed by the full Scrutiny Board, are presented below.

Scope of the Inquiry

4. The purpose of our work was to consider the value for money of the council's funding of the three centres.
5. It was agreed that the work would specifically cover Herd Farm, Lineham Farm and Silverdale Holiday Camp. At the first meeting of the working group, members received a summary report on the operation of each of the three centres.
6. Members of the working group visited both Herd Farm and Lineham Farm in north Leeds. They also visited Nell Bank in Ilkley, a centre run by Bradford Council, as a comparison.
7. It was not possible for practical reasons to visit Silverdale Holiday Camp, which

is located on Morecambe Bay in Lancashire. However the working group were able to see a CD picture tour of the facilities and the two members of the working group who had visited Silverdale previously were able to share their knowledge of the centre and its facilities with the other members.

Anticipated Service Impact

8. We hope that the working group's findings, and the Scrutiny Board's recommendations, will have a positive impact on the service by encouraging significantly more joint working to maximise available resources and to improve the service provided.
9. We also hope to see more Leeds schools considering using the centres as a resource for their pupils.



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Silverdale Holiday Camp

10. Silverdale Holiday Centre is a purpose built residential centre located in an area of outstanding natural beauty overlooking Morecambe Bay. It is wholly owned and maintained by Leeds Children's Holiday Camp Association.
11. Leeds Children's Holiday Camp Association is a registered charity that was founded in 1904 to provide free residential holidays for disadvantaged and socially excluded children from Leeds. The Silverdale centre was completed in 1954.
12. Application forms are sent out at the beginning of each year to all primary schools and cluster groups in order to obtain referrals of children aged 7-11. Further applications are received from Social Care to accommodate vulnerable children at short notice. Residential experiences are offered free of charge.
13. The net cost to Leeds City Council in 2010/11 is £69,670 in the form of a grant. Unlike the other provisions they do not receive benefits in kind from Leeds City Council. Considerable additional income is generated by Leeds Children's Holiday Camp Association. 350 disadvantaged children benefited from a free holiday at Silverdale in the 2009 holiday season.
14. In addition a further 444 children and young people benefited from using the centre as a base for walking, cycling, bird watching, Duke of Edinburgh Award and many more activities. These users will not have been from Leeds in the main.
15. During the course of our inquiry we were made aware of an in year cut of £8,746 (12.5%) in the grant to be paid to Silverdale. The cut was a result of the in-year reduction in Area Based Grant to the council announced by the new government. The Integrated Youth Support Service strategy had been to spread the cuts across all grant-funded organisations.
16. It was confirmed that no further in-year cuts were currently anticipated for any of the centres. The position for next year and the longer term would depend on the impact of the comprehensive spending review due to be announced in October.
17. Members asked about the impact of the anticipated in-year cut at Silverdale. They were reassured that the Centre should be able to manage this through other funders and the income generation referred to above.
18. We learned that an officer from the Early Years Service had been acting as Business Support Adviser for Silverdale for the past three years. Commercial use of the centre included hiring it out to groups such as Scouts, walkers and bird watchers during the winter months when schools seemed reluctant to book the centre. There had recently been a wedding at the centre. Silverdale's marketing strategy had raised £17,000 over the last year and had already exceeded that target this year. Silverdale was intending to approach Bradford schools to try to drum up custom for the autumn and spring terms.
19. It was confirmed that schools have first refusal on use of the centre, but choose not to do so during the autumn term and most of the spring term.



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20. We also learned that Silverdale has a link with Leeds Metropolitan University media students, and also with a French school. The university's student volunteer body is looking to help Silverdale further.
21. We learned that Silverdale has 1 full-time and 1 part-time manager plus a site manager as the only permanent staff. This is supplemented by 6 qualified staff, a cleaner and 3 on-site volunteers as the seasonal staff. Further local volunteers are used as and when required.
22. We were impressed by the centre's success in reducing costs and developing marketing opportunities, as described by the Business Support Adviser based in the Early Years Service. We felt that similar approaches could be usefully explored and adopted at Lineham Farm and Herd Farm.

Recommendation 1
That the Director of Children's Services considers extending the role of the Business Support Adviser to include Herd Farm and possibly also Lineham Farm, and reports back to us in 3 months.

23. We were not able to get accurate figures on the current use of Silverdale by Social Care, other than a statement that 13 children had visited in the recent past. We were however advised that Silverdale would be willing to be used more extensively by Social Services, including for emergency placements, although the costs for this would need to be negotiated.
24. We have been made aware during our regular overview of Children's Services

that the greatest pressure on the existing budget is the rising number and cost of social care external placements. We therefore think that this opportunity needs to be explored in more detail as a possible viable option to help address in small part the financial problem of placements.

Recommendation 2
That the Director of Children's Services explores the scope for children's social care to make more effective use of Silverdale Holiday Camp, and reports back to us in 3 months.

Lineham Farm

25. Lineham Farm is a renovated 17th century farm complex with its own woodlands, wetland and surrounding farm land, including livestock. It is run through partnership arrangements between Lineham Farm Trust and Leeds City Council. The Trust provides the residential facility itself and holds a 110 year lease on the farmstead and paddock. The Council provides a staff team and revenue support.
26. Lineham Farm, situated three miles from Herd Farm, was converted and renovated in the early 1990s as a major initiative of the Lord Mayor's Charity appeal at the time.
27. The Centre is used mostly by primary schools and by groups of children aged below 11.
28. Schools accessing experiences at Lineham Farm have done so free of charge up until September 2010 at which point a subsidised fee was



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introduced in line with the position at Herd Farm.

29. The net cost to Leeds City Council in 2009/10 was £245,000 with significant additional funding invested and secured by the Lineham Farm Trust. 1400 children benefited from Lineham Farm in 2009/10.
30. Lineham Farm was reported to have a successful approach to accessing funds through the Trust arrangement. The centre is also hired out privately at weekends to generate income.
31. We learned that in previous years, the Council has left the Lineham Farm Trust and the staff team based at Lineham Farm largely to its own devices. This now needed to be revised into a proper service level agreement in the near future, in consultation with the trustees. Some of the issues being debated and indeed resulting in change are causing tensions for all concerned.
32. Officers confirmed that the 2010/11 budget setting process had included a statement on efficiencies to be made at Herd Farm and Lineham Farm including the introduction of charges at Lineham Farm. In addition it had been proposed to merge the staffing structures across the two centres. However, following constructive discussions with the trustees of Lineham Farm, this proposal was no longer being pursued.
33. The working group visited Lineham Farm on 30 September, where they met with the Manager and one of the trustees.
34. It was acknowledged that savings needed to be identified from other sources as a result of dropping the proposed staffing merger. This included more effective working practices to reduce over-time. Lineham Farm considered that it was about 80% of the way to meeting its target savings for the current year.
35. The present arrangement is that Leeds City Council funds the cost of food and staffing for the residential provision. The Trust covers other costs, and also has its own employees and volunteers. It was explained to us that the Trust aspired to be a model of governance in line with the new government's vision of greater public/private partnership.
36. The Manager confirmed that all schools were made aware of the eligibility criteria for Lineham Farm. Bookings were then offered on a first come, first served basis. Some schools do not have a big enough group of children (24) who meet the criteria.
37. It was confirmed that charges for use of Lineham Farm had been introduced from September this year. This was the result of the budget setting process for 2010/11, confirmed by a delegated decision of the Director of Children's Services on 1 July 2010. The charge is £1,800 for a four and a half day residential for up to 24 pupils (the centre's capacity).
38. In particular we learned that a hardship fund of £50k had been set up for 2010/11 which can be used to assist any school which genuinely cannot afford to send its pupils to Lineham Farm.
39. Currently Children's Services administer the hardship fund. The criteria being used is any school with a year end balance of less than £10k. At the time



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that we met no school had met this criteria so no waiving of the charge had been applied. However, we were alerted to one potential case where this may happen.

40. All schools that had made bookings for this term had been notified of the charges by the Manager of the centre. Two schools had cancelled their bookings because of the charges; they had not met the criteria to have charges waived. Alternative schools had taken up the places.
41. We did discover that some schools had only learned very late on that a charge was being introduced for Lineham Farm from September 2010. We understand that there were some delays and uncertainties around the introduction of the charges. Nevertheless we feel it is regrettable that the schools concerned did not receive a clear early indication that charges may apply to help them in their own planning.
42. Members were given a tour of Lineham Farm. They had the opportunity to see a primary school residential group having breakfast and taking part in various activities, as well as noting that a group of volunteers from a Leeds employer was working in the garden. Cllr Atkinson, chair of the trustees, joined members to tour the site.

Herd Farm

43. Herd Farm is an 18th Century Grade 2 listed farm which was converted into a residential education centre in 1999. It opened in 2000 and is wholly owned and operated by Leeds City Council. Herd Farm is an integral aspect of Leeds Youth Service. It can accommodate up to 40 people at a time on a residential basis.
44. Herd Farm, adjacent to Eccup Reservoir and the Harewood Estate, is situated in 16 acres of land and has retained much of its original character. The capital funding for the major conversion and restoration work was provided by the Council.
45. The Centre is used mostly by high schools and by youth groups within the Youth Service age range of 11-19. This includes an allocation to each ward of at least one residential per year at Herd Farm. Herd Farm is used as a base for Duke of Edinburgh expeditions.
46. Some primary schools also use the centre, for example those whose pupils do not meet the criteria for Lineham Farm.
47. Schools accessing experiences at Herd Farm have paid a subsidised fee since 2002.
48. The net cost to Leeds City Council in 2009/10 was £127,000 with 3,900 young people benefiting from visits to Herd Farm. Significant additional infrastructure and capital asset costs are also met by the council.
49. It was confirmed that Herd Farm needs to be close to fully utilised in order to guarantee the required level of income. The key target at present is to increase the number of day bookings that can run alongside existing residential programmes.
50. There are fewer residentials during the week in term-time. In addition to the residentials, Herd Farm has a sessional rate of £9.50 per pupil per hour.



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51. The VINE service - for young people aged around 20-24 with physical disabilities and learning difficulties - uses the site for accredited courses about twice a week.
52. Herd Farm is looking to develop as an off-site provider of alternative education programmes for pupils struggling at school. This will generate additional income from Education Leeds. They provide a 12 week accredited course including elements of literacy and numeracy for pupils who are out of school. There is a benefit to having youth work staff involved as they have specific skills in engaging these young people.
53. We were told that Herd Farm did introduce a policy on private use some years back but unfortunately this had resulted in complaints from neighbours due to excessive drinking and therefore this had ceased. The working group suggested that consideration be given to reintroducing private use on a similar footing to that described at Silverdale.
54. It was noted that there was a balance to be struck with regards to accessibility, if wider marketing takes place. For example, Herd Farm was currently booked every weekend except one up until Christmas; there was a risk of private bookings reducing availability for the key target groups.
55. Schools from outside Leeds pay twice as much as Leeds schools, although this is still a subsidised rate. Provision for Leeds schools remains a priority, with alternative sources of local income being sought (such as the off-site provision) rather than being tempted to give preference to non-Leeds schools.
56. It was suggested that there may be an opportunity to explore external bookings in December/January when school bookings are lower.
57. As a user of Herd Farm, one of our teacher representatives confirmed that the range of unusual activities available on site is part of the attraction for schools. There is also the added bonus that all risk assessments are in place so that school staff do not need to do these.
58. The working group visited Herd Farm on 30 September, where they met with the Manager. The manager of Lineham Farm and one of the trustees accompanied the working group, as they had not visited Herd Farm previously.
59. Herd Farm has also been exploring opportunities for providing respite care for children with disabilities, as well as discussing opportunities with the SILCs and the Pupil Referral Units (PRUs). A SILC residential is to be tried before Christmas. John Jamieson and PHAB already use the centre.
60. Herd Farm is open for 50 weeks of the year. They are looking at ways to encourage Leeds schools that don't currently use Herd Farm to attend, possibly including taster sessions.
61. Staffing costs include maintenance, administration and ancillary services such as cleaning. There can be up to three changeovers per week. The distinction needed to be made between 'youth work' and activity work in terms of staffing required.
62. Herd Farm does attract volunteer help through business in the community, but does not have access to the



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sponsorship that Lineham Farm gets as a charity. It was suggested that contact be made with the Grammar School at Leeds, as their sixth form pupils undertake a year's community service.

63. Savings are being made through better procurement, and also by only buying essential equipment rather than funding new developments. Whilst understanding the reason for this decision in the current climate, we were concerned about the potential long-term impact on quality of the provision.
64. There was a possibility of Herd Farm being able to bid to provide residentials for the government's Citizens' service programme.
65. Officers confirmed that an interim 'emergency' structure was currently operating at Herd Farm. Changes had been made in anticipation of the proposed staffing merger with Lineham Farm which was now not going ahead. However, the appropriate numbers of qualified staff were in place for all activities.
66. The key staffing change that had taken place was that Activity Workers were replacing Youth Workers. This saves money as Youth Workers are paid more in part due to the fact that they are normally expected to work some unsocial hours. Youth Workers from Herd Farm had been deployed elsewhere within the youth service.
67. It was confirmed that Herd Farm does not have any staff specifically responsible for fundraising. The centre has raised money through the Youth Capital Fund in the past.

68. Members felt that Herd Farm would benefit from wider 'ownership' than the youth service in terms of promoting and supporting its activity. This could draw in councillors, but also potentially the universities and colleges, employers and schools.

69. We discussed the potential establishment of a 'Friends of Herd Farm' organisation to support the centre. We learned that this had been considered in the past but had never been set up.

70. We also discussed the potential for Herd Farm to become a Trust as Lineham Farm and Nell Bank currently are. This could open up additional opportunities for fundraising, but we were warned that this could place Herd Farm in direct competition with Lineham Farm for funds and trustees with the required expertise if a separate trust was established.

71. We believe that Children's Services should consider the future governance arrangements for Herd Farm, but we have no preconceived view of the outcome.

Recommendation 3
That the Director of Children's Services considers future governance options for Herd Farm's long term sustainability, including the establishment of a 'Friends' organisation or exploring a Trust option, and reports back to us in 3 months on any avenues to be pursued in more depth.



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Nell Bank

72. Councillor Coulson shared some of his experience with the working group, having represented Leeds City Council on various outdoor education centres over the past 15 years, including Ingleborough and Buckden in the Dales, and also Nell Bank near Ilkley where he is a trustee. Nell Bank is run by Bradford Council. All of these centres are used extensively by Leeds schools.
73. Councillor Coulson facilitated a visit for the working group to Nell Bank on 13 October where members met with the Centre Manager.
74. The visit started with a presentation and discussion in the new residential building funded by Aiming High for Disabled children government funding to provide access for all. It includes a range of bedroom and bathroom facilities such as hoists and adjustable equipment. The accommodation is used for children with autistic spectrum conditions as well as those with physical disabilities.
75. The Nell Bank Trust are responsible for the land and buildings. Staff costs are met by Bradford City Council. They fund 60% of the salary by top-slicing the base budget, and the rest comes from fees.
76. The centre's philosophy is focused around ensuring access for all, especially those who would not otherwise be able to come to such a facility.
77. The centre provides for about 20,000 visitors per year. About 80% of this is day visits and 20% residential. The capacity for residential provision is a maximum of 64 pupils when the inclusion unit is in full use. At one time the centre could only accommodate a maximum of 24, but this is less than a full class group which was considered a distinct drawback.
78. Nell Bank charges £17 per night residential stay and instruction per pupil. The groups bring their own bedding and food which cuts down on costs, including cleaning. A commercial rate would be closer to £200. The day visit charge is £8.50 (£6 up to 7 years). The centre operates a policy of accommodating as many requests as possible to tailor programmes to individual requirements. The centre also operates on a Saturday morning.
79. There will be up to four different groups on day visits in the summer, with up to 200 children on site. The centre increases its capacity by having the residential groups doing some activities off-site. In the winter there may only be one group visiting per day.
80. There is an annual Family activity day for 400 people, which is oversubscribed. This raises about £1,500 - £2,000 for the centre.
81. The centre is also available on a commercial basis, and is used by the council as a training venue as well as by private companies, for example for team building sessions, and for weddings.
82. 81% of Bradford primary schools attended the centre last year. 19 Leeds schools used Nell Bank last year.
83. Usage last year included approximately 1,000 Foundation stage pupils; 4,000 Key Stage 1; 5,000 Key Stage 2; 4,000 secondary and adults; 3,500 residential visits and 3,000 others.



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84. The centre incorporates good environmental features wherever possible to assist with costs.
85. There is a small permanent staff – Centre Manager, resident warden, senior training officer, instructor. There is also 15 hours of admin time per week. The centre employs 4 students at a time for a period of 1-2 years on a salary of £9,000 to assist with activities.
86. The use of students on placement from university to complement the permanent staff was put forward as an example of good practice.

Recommendation 4
That the Director of Children’s Services explores the potential to use students on a similar basis to Nell Bank in order to reduce costs, and reports back to us in 3 months on a decision whether or not to proceed.

87. The centre assumes responsibility for children’s safety during activities and carries out all the risk assessments. They also provide information on links between the centre’s activities and the curriculum. Members felt that this would be particularly attractive to schools. More detailed publicity information was circulated.
88. Councillor Coulson reported that he had arranged for all schools in Leeds to receive information about Nell Bank through the weekly ‘school envelope’ delivery.
89. Members of the working group then had the opportunity for a tour around the site before leaving. There were a number of activities taking place with groups of children.

90. The Centre Manager at Nell Bank offered to work further with youth service staff and continue to exchange ideas and good practice.
91. Members were pleased about the opportunities for co-operation, and that the variation in offer along with the levels of local demand mean that the centres do not need to feel that they are in direct competition with one another to the detriment of each other’s viability.

Recommendation 5
That the Director of Children’s Services ensures that the links established with Nell Bank are maintained to maximise joint benefits for the centres.

School Funding

92. Members and officers confirmed that they valued the provision offered by the centres very highly. In consequence we wish to stress that any move towards self-financing must not lose sight of the principle of ensuring that those pupils whose families cannot afford to pay still get access to these opportunities. This is a particularly strong theme of all the centres considered.
93. Funding for the use of outdoor education facilities is included as part of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). Schools are empowered and indeed positively encouraged to use funds for residential and non-residential activities of the type offered by the centres involved in this inquiry.
94. There is no specific allocation within the funding allocated to schools for residential activities but any of the resources that schools have can be



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used to support this type of expenditure as it would certainly be expected to provide an educational benefit.

95. School governing bodies are also empowered to spend any resources available to them supporting any activity that they feel will bring an educational benefit to pupils. New regulations allow schools to spend any of their resources on an even wider remit, any purpose connected with the function of the Children's Trust Board. The new regulations effectively mean that schools can apply any of the £480m in support of such activity, but it is a governing body decision, and must take into account any charging policy of the governing body. Some schools also pass on the costs of these activities to parents.

96. The formula allocations to schools are generally based on a series of indicators of need that are used to distribute all of the available resources to schools.

97. Many of the resources delegated to schools are allocated based on levels of deprivation, hence schools serving more deprived communities will have access to higher levels of funding. However, it falls to the governing body/headteacher to determine how resources are deployed, and to determine the relative merit of spending resources on one activity compared to any other.

98. Responsibility for support for outdoor education and school visits primarily rests with the governing bodies of schools and over the past few years schools have received large increases in funding directed at personalisation and the provision of extended services, including the deprivation subsidy grant that totals over £2.5m in 2010/11.

99. The costs of provision at Herd Farm and Lineham Farm are still being subsidised, so are significantly cheaper comparative to many alternative providers, especially private sector centres.

100. The Scrutiny Board intends to circulate its report to all schools and also to all councillors who are school governors to encourage them to promote use of the facilities.

Recommendation 6
That the Director of Children's Services ensures that all schools are reminded of the value of outdoor education activities for pupils, and of the value for money offered by Lineham Farm, Herd Farm and Silverdale Holiday Camp.

Joint Working

101. Throughout our meetings, and during our visits to Lineham and Herd Farms, we discussed the proximity and complementary objectives of the two facilities.

102. Having had the opportunity to see the facilities at first hand, and to learn about the services they provide in more detail, we support in principle the continued operation of the two facilities.

103. However, we agree with officers that, in order for this to be a sustainable approach in the longer term, significant savings need to be achieved, and the most effective way to do this would appear to be through greater co-operation between the two facilities on both a formal and informal basis. This



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includes the streamlining of costs where possible.

104. We were disappointed that it has taken so long for council officers and the trustees of Lineham Farm to establish a realistic dialogue about the future. We hope that the conversations that are opening up between the trustees and Youth Service officers, which both parties assured us were very positive, will enable both facilities to enjoy a successful future.
105. We identified a number of areas that we would encourage the two centres to pursue together. These include the sharing of skills and experience; making best use of the facilities and activities that are available across both sites; administration costs; procurement; marketing; and fund raising.
106. In particular, we felt that Herd Farm and Lineham Farm could learn from some of the examples of entrepreneurial practice that we heard about from Silverdale and Nell Bank and which are listed in the relevant sections above.

Recommendation 7
That the Director of Children's Services and the trustees of Lineham Farm explore opportunities for greater co-operation between Herd Farm and Lineham Farm with the aim of securing the long term sustainability of both centres in the current economic climate.
That the Director of Children's Services and the Lineham Farm trustees be asked to confirm their commitment to this recommendation and that the Director of Children's Services reports back to us regularly on progress.

Conclusion

107. Members were concerned that their experience of being lobbied by the individual centres suggested they each saw themselves in competition with the others for a diminishing pot of financial support, and that this competition prevented them from working together and sharing successful practice in maximizing income.
108. However, we were also very impressed with the experiences on offer to the children of Leeds through the four centres that we have studied. In particular we were very pleased to see that inclusive provision is available for those with additional needs.
109. We believe that each of the centres offers a different focus, and that their future would be best served by closer co-operation in the terms that we have outlined in our recommendations.
110. We would like to conclude by thanking the officers, centre staff and trustees for their co-operation with our work and for their continued commitment to providing exciting experiences for Leeds children and young people.



Evidence

Monitoring arrangements

Standard arrangements for monitoring the outcome of the Board's recommendations will apply.

The decision-makers to whom the recommendations are addressed will be asked to submit a formal response to the recommendations, including an action plan and timetable, normally within two months.

Following this the Scrutiny Board will determine any further detailed monitoring, over and above the standard quarterly monitoring of all scrutiny recommendations.

Members of the working group

Councillor Judith Chapman (Chair)
Councillor Mick Coulson
Councillor Bob Gettings
Councillor Alan Lamb
Councillor Pat Latty
Ms Natalie Cox
Ms Celia Foote
Ms Claire Johnson

Reports and Publications Submitted

- Report to Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) working group for Outdoor Education Centres – 21 September 2010
- Summary of Herd Farm provision
- Summary of Silverdale provision
- CD tour of Silverdale
- Delegated Decision report – 1st July 2010 – Lineham Farm Charges 2010-11
- Report to Executive Board – 23 September 2010 – Reductions in Funding – Contracts/SLA/Grant Variations
- Lineham Farm Children's Centre Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2009
- Herd Farm bookings 2010
- Silverdale staffing, income and external use
- Staffing structure for Lineham Farm
- Staffing structure for Herd Farm
- Nell Bank leaflets and information sheets



Evidence

Witnesses Heard

John Paxton, Head of Integrated Youth Support Service
Vicky Fuggles, Senior Youth Officer
David Ball, Business Adviser, Early Years
Jean Davey, Principal Youth Officer
Steve Hannaby, Manager, Lineham Farm
Mark Lumley, Trustee, Lineham Farm
Councillor Denise Atkinson, Chair of Trustees, Lineham Farm
Denise Ragan, Youth Work Manager, Herd Farm
Bruce Fowler, Centre Manager, Nell Bank Centre, Ilkley

Dates of Scrutiny

21 September 2010
30 September 2010 – visit to Lineham Farm and Herd Farm
13 October 2010 – visit to Nell Bank Centre, Ilkley
20 October 2010

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Report author: Kate Arcott**