

SCRUTINY BOARD (CHILDREN AND FAMILIES)

THURSDAY, 18TH APRIL, 2024

PRESENT: Councillor D Cohen in the Chair

Councillors D Blackburn, E Bromley,
R Downes, O Edwards, B Flynn, Graham,
C Gruen, J Heselwood, N Manaka,
L Martin, K Renshaw, A Rontree and
R. Stephenson

CO-OPTED MEMBERS (VOTING)

Mr A Graham – Church Representative (Church of England)

Mr T Britten – Church Representative (Catholic Diocese of Leeds)

Co-Opted Members (Non-Voting)

Ms H Bellamy – School Staff Representative

Ms K Blacker

CHAIR AND EXECUTIVE MEMBER COMMENTS

Before moving into the substantive items on the agenda, the Chair of the Board put on record his thanks and the thanks of the Board to Jackie Ward who has been a board member for 14 years as a co-opted member and who has contributed significantly to the work of the Board and Council during that time. This meeting was the last Jackie would be attending before stepping down as a non-voting co-opted member.

In addition, the Chair added his thanks and those of the Board to Cllr Caroline Gruen who was attending her last scrutiny board meeting before retirement. Cllr Cohen noted the contributions made by Cllr Gruen to the Council generally but specifically in two areas, in planning and in work with children and young people. Through contributions to plans panels Cllr Gruen's contribution to scene and place will be noted by residents for years to come. In respect of children and young people it was noted that this will not be as obvious, but that Cllr Gruen has made a major contribution and impacted the lives of children and young people over many years.

Cllr Venner also recorded her thanks for the commitment Cllr Gruen has shown in her role in terms of detailed analysis of issues and providing challenge. In addition, it was noted how much Cllr Gruen enjoyed working with children and young people and the contribution made to services for them in the city both through local work such as youth summits and through work on the Children and Families Scrutiny Board.

94 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

There were no appeals.

95 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There was no exempt information.

96 Late Items

There were no late items of business.

97 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

98 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

The Board received the following apologies with substitutes listed where present:

Cllr Amanda Carter – Cllr Billy Flynn attending as substitute
Cllr Jordan Bowden – Cllr Andy Rontree attending as substitute
Anas Khitou
Jackie Ward
Laura Whitaker
Cllr Jane Senior

99 Minutes - 27 March 2024

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 27 March 2024, be approved as an accurate record.

100 Inquiry Report - Provision of EHCP Support in Leeds

The Board considered a report from the Head of Democratic Services that presented, for agreement, an inquiry report following the Board's scrutiny inquiry into the provision of EHCP support in Leeds. This also took account of comment and suggested amendments at the meeting held on 27 March 2024.

In attendance for this item were:

- Councillor Jonathan Pryor, Executive Member for Economy, Culture, and Education

Draft minutes to be approved at the meeting
to be held on Date Not Specified

- Julie Longworth, Director of Children & Families
- Dan Barton, Deputy Director – Learning
- Phil Evans, Chief Officer Transformation and Partnerships
- Rob Clayton, Principal Scrutiny Adviser

By way of introduction the Executive Member for Economy, Culture, and Education noted the ongoing work being done by the directorate to clear back logs and the wider work to improve processes in the future. The Executive Member also noted ongoing correspondence with Government around funding for children with SEND in Leeds and disparities with children living elsewhere in the country. It was highlighted that the correspondence from Government acknowledged that the funding formula being used was designed like that and that the funding disparities were a part of that and not an accident or an unintended consequence of the formula. It was agreed that the latest correspondence from Government would be shared with the Board following the meeting today.

The Board has identified funding issues as one of its recommendations in the inquiry report and it was agreed that as a follow up to that a letter from the Board would be sent to the Government setting out concerns in Leeds and the need for a review of the formula, this will be sent to Board members for comment before being issued to the Government.

The Chair noted attendance from the Leeds Parent Carer Forum (LPCF) observing the meeting from the audience, following the evidence put forward from them during the inquiry. The Chair also thanked the LPCF for their contributions and their ongoing work in this area.

Following questions and comment from Board members the following discussion took place:

- Members noted the recommendation around input and co-production from families and the need for this to be central to future work. The Chair noted ongoing plans to have a representative from the LPCF on the Board as a co-opted member.
- Board members also noted the recommendation on digital EHCPs and stressed the need for accessibility for all residents albeit that digital would be suitable for most people.
- Board members highlighted the role of the LPCF in the inquiry work and how the care they had for their children had shone through in the work carried out by the Board. It was therefore necessary for the inquiry recommendations to be focussed on and delivered sequentially to improve services for parents, carers and their children and young people.
- The Board heard of ongoing work by the directorate on communication between senior leaders and the LPCF and of the commitment to a 'you said, we did' approach to delivering change and improvement and a clear commitment to co-production of services. As part of this an event is being planned for the Summer to hear feedback from parents and carers which will inform self-evaluation processes.

- On digital approaches it was acknowledged that accessibility will be key and that digital approaches will be part of a suite of options to access services. It was also hoped that digitisation will assist the service in reducing bureaucracy and accessing real time information, but accessibility is a key consideration.
- The Board supported the parent and carer centred approach set out in the inquiry report but also noted the need for support for some parents and carers to be able to provide feedback due to, for example, language barriers. It was also noted that the recommendation around casework support could add value in terms of elected members being able to support residents.
- Board members welcomed the commitment to communication at strategic levels but also sought to ensure that communications were better at lower levels to ensure that parents and carers are aware of the process and what comes next. In response the Board heard about increased demand and the increased output from SENSAP services in terms of completions of EHCPs but even with that timescales have been a challenge. It was also noted that there is a culture issue and that parents need to be supported effectively rather than feel as though it is a battle to get an EHCP.
- The Board heard that whilst there are challenges in meeting the demand for services there is really good work and ongoing staff commitment to improve services in the SENSAP team. Whilst services will be improved it should not be forgotten that colleagues working in the team are striving to meet demand levels and are committed to their work and service improvement.
- The Board asked about availability of suitable places and support staff to support children and young people of SEND and the problems that schools have in meeting needs and resultant challenging behaviour when schools are unable to meet needs. In response the Board heard that the message from schools supports the view that there is a challenge in this area that is leading to issues with staff and teacher retention. It was noted that mainstream schools are struggling to meet needs and work is being developed to provide more specialists provision, working in partnership, to meet needs, this is being planned for availability in September which may assist in relieving some of the pressure. It was noted that a collaborative and child and carer focused approach will be important in the work moving forward. The Challenges being faced are difficult and working together in partnership, focussed on early intervention, will help in navigating the challenges being presented.
- The Board also heard that whilst it is a challenging period there is evidence of good practice as well such as work at the West SILC to prepare young people with SEND for employment and a child who had an EHCP in Leeds qualifying to go to University.
- Members also noted the difficulties being faced beyond SEND provision. In secondary schools there is a challenge around the suitability of the secondary curriculum which is leaving some children and young people feeling uncatered for and this is adding pressure to schools in terms of behaviour. It was thought that this could potentially be a piece of work in

the 2024/25 municipal year subject to limitations around what schools can do in terms of varying their curriculums.

Resolved:

The Board:

- a) Agreed the inquiry report on the Provision of EHCP Support in Leeds and;
- b) Agreed that in line with Recommendation 11 in the inquiry report ongoing check and challenge should be a work item for the successor Board in 2024/25.

101 Co-Opted Members

The Board received a report from the Head of Democratic Services on the appointment of co-opted members to the Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) following discussion of potential changes during the 2023/24 municipal year.

In attendance for this item were:

Rob Clayton, Principal Scrutiny Advisor

By way of introduction the Principal Scrutiny Adviser set out the background to this item which had arisen from board member comments on having a SEND co-opted member and a view that the Board could more formally and consistently seek the views of children and young people on the reports being put before them.

Following member comments and questions the following issues were discussed:

- It was suggested that in addition to the proposal to have a non-voting co-opted member with a SEND specialism or background that the Board should also seek to appoint a voting parent governor co-opted member from a Special School in the city. The Board also thought that the non-voting co-opted member should come from the Leeds Parent Carer Forum who had contributed significantly to the inquiry report on the Provision of EHCP Support. This was agreed to by the Board.
- In addition to this Cllr Stephenson suggested that a third non-voting co-opted member should be considered from a social work background to provide balance amongst the five non-voting co-opted members which currently has two school staff representatives, social work representing a significant element of the directorates work along with education and teaching. As part of the proposal, it was accepted that a Leeds City Council staff member could not sit on a scrutiny board.
- It was noted that, if necessary, this might involve the expansion of non-voting co-opted members from five to six through the appropriate processes which would be through the General Purposes Committee and if approved there, Full Council.

- Some Board members were not supportive of this approach setting out the difficulty in finding an individual who would be in a position to represent social work staff who was not a member of staff and due to the other forums available for staff representation such as Joint Consultative Committees (JCC) where liaison between the council, staff and Trade Unions takes place regularly.
- It was also noted that staff who regularly attend the Board as witnesses such as the Director of Children and Families and Deputy Director Social Care are social workers. Furthermore, the Board can call witnesses from the frontline to assist with work items should that be required by the Board and this would include social workers.
- Following further debate Cllr Stephenson moved a motion, seconded by Cllr Flynn to expand the number of non-voting co-opted members (Scrutiny Board procedure Rule 8.1) on the board from 5 to 6 through the appropriate channel which would be General Purposes Committee and Full Council and that if that were approved the non-voting co-opted member would have experience in or be from a social work background.
- Following a majority vote by show of hands by Board Members (excluding voting co-opted members who can only vote on matters related to education) the motion was lost.

Resolved:

The Board:

- a) Agreed to allocating a non-voting co-opted member position to a representative from the Leeds Parent Carer Forum and that the Principal Scrutiny Advisor would endeavour to find a suitable candidate.
- b) Agreed to an additional voting parent governor co-opted member to be sourced from a specialist school in Leeds and that the Principal Scrutiny Advisor would endeavour to find a suitable candidate.
- c) Agreed that the voices of children and young people should feature as part of the reporting process in the 2024/25 municipal year and that the Principal Scrutiny Adviser will build this into the Board's work programming approach in 2024/25 as well as considering attendance at Board meetings from appropriate witnesses to support this approach.

102 Children and Families Scrutiny Board End of Year Statement 2023/24

The Board considered the appended 2023/24 end-of-year statement for the Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) and agreed to its publication.

Resolved The Board approved the 2023/24 end of year statement for the Scrutiny Board (Children & Families) and agreed to its publication.

103 Work Programme

The Board considered the Scrutiny Board's work programme for the 2023/24 municipal year.

In attendance for this item was:

Rob Clayton, Principal Scrutiny Adviser

The Principal Scrutiny Adviser provided the following updates:

- It was noted that the draft dates for the next municipal year and work items to recommend to the successor board in 2024/25 are included in the report.

Resolved

The Board:

- a) Considered the Scrutiny Board's work programme for the 2023/24 municipal year;
- b) Noted the draft meeting dates for 2024/25; and
- c) Agreed the items to be recommended to the successor board in the 2024/25 municipal year

104 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Subject to the Annual Council Meeting and any other adjustments the next public meeting of the Board is initially scheduled for 12 June 2024 at 10.30am with a pre-meeting for all board members at 10.00AM. The Chair noted that this date could be subject to change.