

SCRUTINY BOARD (CHILDREN AND FAMILIES)

WEDNESDAY, 3RD MARCH, 2021

PRESENT: Councillor A Lamb in the Chair

Councillors P Drinkwater, B Flynn,
A Forsaith, C Gruen, C Howley, A Hussain,
J Illingworth, W Kidger, J Lennox,
A Marshall-Katung, K Renshaw and
R Stephenson

Co-opted Members (Voting)

Mr E A Britten - Church Representative (Catholic)
Mr A Graham - Church Representative (Church of England)
Mrs K Blacker - Parent Governor Representative (Primary)

Co-opted Members (Non-Voting)

Ms C Foote - Teacher Representative
Ms H Bellamy - Teacher Representative

70 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

There were no appeals.

71 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There were no exempt items.

72 Late Items

There were no late items.

73 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests.

74 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies were received from Councillor H Bithell, and co-opted members Debbie Reilly, Jackie Ward and Callum Dixon.

75 Minutes - 3rd February 2021

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held 3rd February 2021 be approved as an accurate record.

76 Potential long term impacts of Covid-19 on children in Leeds

The Director of Children and Families submitted a report that presented some of the key areas where the pandemic has had the most significant impact and invited discussion from the Scrutiny Board as to the most appropriate distribution of resources in tackling the long term impacts of Covid-19.

The following were in attendance:

- Councillor Jonathan Pryor, Executive Member for Learning, Skills and Employment
- Councillor Fiona Venner, Executive Member for Children, Families and Adult Social Care
- Sal Tariq, Director of Children and Families
- Julie Longworth, Deputy Director of Children and Families
- Tim Pouncey, Chief Officer Strategy and Resources
- Val Waite, Head of Service (Learning Inclusion)
- Dave Clark, Head of Service (Learning Improvement)
- Karen Jessup, Principal Educational Psychologist
- Steven Ruse, Sustainable Schools Consultant
- Erica Hiorns, Senior Secondary Improvement Advisor
- Dr Jane Mischenko, Strategic Lead Commissioner, Children and Maternity, NHS Leeds CCG
- Janice Burberry, Head of Public Health
- Kathryn Ingold, Chief Officer / Consultant in Public Health
- Lyndsey Mortimer, Service Delivery Manager, Families First
- Victoria Fuggles, Youth Offer Lead
- Richard Cracknell, Area Voice and Influence, Coordinator
- Representatives of the Leeds Youth Council (Charlotte; Alannah; Attia; Ciara and Amelie)

The Director of Children and Families briefly introduced the report and particularly highlighted the importance of working collaboratively across the system to respond effectively to the consequential impacts of the pandemic.

The Chair explained that in view of the number of contributors in attendance for this item, the Board's discussions would be structured around 4 particular themes: Education; Health & Well-being; Youth Service; Voice of Young People.

Linked to each theme, the Chair asked key contributors to answer the following questions:

- What they regard to be potential long term impacts of Covid-19 on young people in Leeds from the perspective of their service area(s)?
- How they would prioritise actions to help mitigate such impacts?

A summary of the main issues arising from the Board's discussions is set out below:

Education

Members were advised that young peoples' holistic development has presented a concern as a result of the pandemic, particularly for disadvantaged groups and those who have social and emotional mental health needs. As a result of additional pressure on support services and the increase in referrals for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), targeted work is taking place with the most vulnerable learners and those who traditionally do not engage with support services. Reference was made to the Pupil Wellbeing surveys which aim to support and guide schools (and services) to identify where intervention and support is most required to best establish and support pupils' social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs following their return to school. While survey completion is voluntary, it was noted that such surveys will remain available until July 2021, as they may prove useful for supporting pupils as and when they re-integrate into school following a prolonged period of absence. While it was acknowledged that the current headline data arising from the Pupil Wellbeing survey appears to show that many young people have remained resilient during the pandemic, it was noted that the survey response rate has been relatively low during the latest lockdown period and that further engagement work with young people is therefore still needed.

In regards to lost learning as a result of school closures, Members were advised that schools are individually monitoring attainment and managing revisiting modules, with support also available for pupils from the national tutoring programme. It was also noted that pupils and teachers have identified a number of positive long term aspects of home learning, such as the availability of online material to support revision, and using remote learning for school refusers to encourage to return to education. A number of projects to provide advice and support for parents have also been introduced. Members were also advised that additional catch-up funding will be available to schools in the summer term, with an anticipated focus on education outside of classrooms and a greater emphasis around softer skills and enjoyment.

Health and Wellbeing

Representatives noted that although the direct health impact of COVID-19 on children and young people is low, there are significant indirect impacts on social and emotional mental health, evidenced by rising referrals to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and bereavement services. It was also recognised that the developmental impact of social isolation and parental stress on infants and toddlers is an area that will require attention moving forward, highlighting the importance of providing additional support to Early Years providers. Reference was made to the work of the multi-disciplinary teams within the Early Help Hubs and Members were advised that the 'Think Family' approach in terms of working with whole families to reduce impacts on the child is vital, recognising the additional pressure on parents and potential changes to family dynamics.

Acknowledging that the Scrutiny Board had already focused in depth on “The Future in Mind Strategy: Leeds Strategy Refresh” during its November meeting, reference was made to some of the additional work being undertaken and planned in association with the Strategy.

Youth Service

Members were advised that youth work aims to bring groups of young people together and providing new experiences, however guidance does not allow for this usual approach to be taken presently due to lockdown restrictions. Throughout the pandemic, teams have predominantly engaged in street based youth work to encourage social distancing and reduce offending type behaviour, alongside some programmes which have continued remotely. Some sessions had also taken place at outdoor education centres for vulnerable individuals and their families. However, feedback from young people indicates that online youth work is not preferable, particularly alongside remote school learning, and therefore teams are keen to return to youth-led programmes in the community when safe and appropriate to do so. It was noted that re-engaging with some groups may be a challenge, as restrictions are lifted and young people’s routines change.

Voice of Young People

Representatives from the Leeds Youth Council reported their experiences and those of their peers and classmates. Mental health of young people during periods of school closure and readjustment as schools reopen was identified as a key issue, as stress associated with adapting to new ways of working and reduced social contact with peers have amplified some of the problems young people were already facing. In addition, it was highlighted that young people felt that they had missed out on key experiences and milestones in their adolescence due to school closures, such as school leaver celebrations and work experience, as well as more regular social activities such as after school clubs. However, young people also reported positives as a result of the pandemic on the experiences of children and young people, such as examples of teachers who have consistently provided one-to-one support during periods of difficulty, and the benefit of online resources and recorded lessons for revision, which they hoped would continue.

In recognition of the lack of usual rituals and support during periods of transition and the difficulties this has caused young people moving on to other educational settings, representatives suggested that schools work with previous pupils to rearrange lost events and celebrations. Representatives also welcomed an approach to catch-up funding in the summer term and throughout the holidays to focus on fun activities outdoors and in the community, as opposed to additional lessons in school. In regards to mental health, young people felt that peer group sessions with pupils of a similar age to be facilitated by teachers would be of great benefit, to allow young people to discuss their experiences and concerns in a safe space.

Next steps

Following contributions from representatives of the various sectors and groups, the Director of Children and Families summarised the key issues raised and highlighted common themes to be addressed moving forward.

The Chair proposed that a Statement of the Scrutiny Board be produced on this matter, to be agreed by correspondence with Board Members unless an opportunity arises to bring it to another Board meeting before the end of the municipal year.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the contents of the report, along with Members comments, be noted.
- b) That a Statement of the Board be produced and agreed by correspondence with Board Members.

77 Work Schedule

The Head of Democratic Services submitted a report that provided an overview of the work that has been undertaken by the Scrutiny Board this municipal year. Also appended to the report was a draft work schedule of planned meeting dates for 2020/21, which included standard items of scrutiny activity linked to performance and budget monitoring and other items of work linked to commitments already made by the Board.

RESOLVED – That the current work schedule be approved and the draft work schedule for 2021/22 be noted.

78 Date and Time of Next Meeting

To be confirmed.