

SCRUTINY BOARD (CHILDREN AND FAMILIES)

WEDNESDAY, 29TH NOVEMBER, 2023

PRESENT: Councillor D Cohen in the Chair

Councillors D Blackburn, J Bowden,
R Downes, O Edwards, Graham, C Gruen,
J Heselwood, N Manaka, L Martin,
K Renshaw, D Seary and R. Stephenson

CO-OPTED MEMBERS (VOTING)

Mr E A Britten - Church Representative (Catholic)
Mr A Graham – Church Representative (Church of England)
Mr A Khitou – Primary Parent Governor Representative

CO-OPTED MEMBERS (NON-VOTING)

Ms H Bellamy – School Staff Representative
Ms K Blacker – Co-Opted Member
Ms J Ward – Co-Opted Member

49 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

There were no appeals.

50 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There was no exempt information considered by the Board.

51 Late Items

There were no late items.

52 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

53 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

The Board received the following apologies:

Cllr F Venner - Executive Member for Children's Social Care and Health Partnerships

Cllr S Arif - Executive Member for Adult Social Care, Public Health and Active Lifestyles, under item 7.

Cllr J Senior – Board Member

Nick Tones - School Staff Representative

Ms L Whitaker – Young Live Leeds

Julie Longworth – Director of Children and Families

54 Minutes - 4 October 2023

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 4 October 2023, be approved as an accurate record.

55 Impact of Vaping on Children and Young People

The Board considered an update report from the Head of Democratic Services on youth vaping setting out recent policy developments at Government level that have impacted on the work of the Board in this area. In addition, included as an appendix to this item was a proposed consultation submission to the 'Stopping the start: our new plan to create a smokefree generation' for board comment and approval. The consultation response was based on previous discussion at the Board when considering this item in July and October 2023.

The Principal Scrutiny Advisor noted that questions 1 to 4 of the Government consultation focussed on smoking which does not come under the remit of the Children and Families Board and had not featured in previous consideration of this work item, as a result those question were not answered in the draft submission and it was agreed that those would not be completed due to restrictions in time to formulate a response and because of the issue regarding remit, the Board's work on this was focussed on youth vaping.

The following were in attendance for this item:

Kathryn Ingold – Chief Officer Public Health

Helen Goddard – Advanced Health Improvement Specialist

Cllr Andrew Scopes – Chair Adults Health and Active Lifestyles Scrutiny Board

Cllr Sandy Lay – Otley and Yeadon Ward

Following questions and comments from members the following discussion took place:

- Noting the planned action by the Government through the Tobacco and Vapes Bill that featured in the King's Speech, the Chair suggested that by submitting a response to the consultation the Board could conclude their work on youth vaping for the moment and then await further developments through the planned Government legislation before considering any further action through an update item to the Board at its first meeting in the new municipal year in June 2024. The submission to the consultation would act as the Board's recommendations or views on this matter and would contribute to the Government's final legislative proposals. Whilst noting potential issues with timing on the legislation this course of action was agreed to.
- In addition to national activity on youth vaping, the Council's Public Health Service has been active in taking local action to prevent children and young people from vaping. This has included ongoing work with West Yorkshire Trading Standards (WYTS), posters, leaflets, animations and lesson plans provided to schools to raise awareness of the dangers of vaping and wide ranging communications and PR through social media and press coverage on the front page of the Yorkshire Evening Post. In terms of current compliance levels based on the work being done in partnership with WYTS there is clearly an issue with illegal vape sales and compliance. In two days of activity visiting retailers in Leeds the following was reported; Day One 18 retailers visited in total, 13 in the city centre where just 3 were compliant and 5 in Morley where 3 were compliant; Day Two 18 retailers visited in the LS10/LS11 area where just 4 retailers were compliant. This was largely linked to over sized vapes and also there was significant evidence of adults buying vape products for children and young people. This initial work has generated important intelligence that will inform phase 2 of this work in the New Year.
- Discussion moved on to specific details in the draft consultation submission. The Board thought that Question 7 in the draft consultation response should restrict fruit flavours as well as menthol and tobacco flavoured products. A key issue in relation to flavours is around adults accessing fruit flavours as they seek to quit smoking and the risk that if these were removed as a flavour option adults may return to smoking. However, the Board believed that children and young people should be discouraged at all costs from vaping and given the popularity of fruit flavours and the associated advertising, Option B was the better option which would see the Board support limiting flavours to tobacco, mint and menthol only.
- The Board also wanted some additional comment adding on question 11 in the consultation which focussed on specialist vape shops and where they are located. Some in Leeds are located too close to schools and with bright coloured advertising these can be hard to miss and appear to be targeting young people.
- Noting the comments made on action being taken locally board members wanted more focussed work on tackling youth vaping to continue and for communication with partners that the Council is concerned about the prevalence of youth vaping and wanted action to continue to be taken in this interim period before any new legislation is passed.

- On question 13 the Board thought additional comments on the vape devices themselves could also potentially dissuade young people from using them. In addition, on the same question, Board members believed that images on packaging should be aimed at children to prevent usage, like there are with cigarettes aimed at adults and the health impacts that cigarettes have.
- The Board also sought additional comment on Question 27 around looking at stronger punitive measures or fines for parents whose children are caught using vapes to make clear that parents have a role in prevention and that they have parental responsibility for this activity.
- The Board were clear that disposable or single use vapes should be restricted and no longer be legal due to both their popularity with young people and the environmental impact they are having.
- In relation to disposable vapes currently members sought clarification on whether these were available as part of smoking cessation programmes. The standard approach is to provide re-usable devices to those who are seeking to quit smoking but in some cases due to dexterity issues around using rechargeable devices, disposables are made available.
- In relation to the overall approach being taken by Government some members thought that the prescription only approach being taken by other countries could be considered by Government, although at the moment it does not feature in the proposals. Whilst this is a viable approach the Board heard that there are concerns about growth in the illicit vape market which is already growing and could grow further if such an approach were taken.

Resolved

Board Members:

- a) Noted the smokefree generation policy announcement and the analysis of the Call for Evidence on youth vaping and the impact they have had on the work of the Board.
- b) Agreed, subject to the amendments noted above, to submit a Board response to the smoke free generation consultation by the closure date on 6 December 2023. This response would not provide a submission on the questions related to smoking.
- c) Agreed to recommend to the successor board that youth vaping should form an update item at the June 2024 meeting of the Board.

56 Children and Families Transformation Agenda

The Board received a report from the Director of Children and Families providing an overview of the work being done within the Children and Families Directorate on the transformation agenda. The report outlined the resources available for delivery, the workstreams of current and potential activity and the opportunities and challenges presented in delivering this work.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Councillor Jonathan Pryor, Executive Member for Economy, Culture and Education
- Farrah Khan, Deputy Director of Children and Families – Social Work
- Phil Evans, Chief Officer Service Transformation and Partnerships
- Sandra Pentelow, Programme and Partnership Manager

The following issues were raised in discussion:

- Board members welcomed plans to work more closely with colleagues in Adults Services on commissioning to assist with problems that can occur when individuals transition from children's services to adult services and plans to lever resources on commissioning across both directorates to maximise resources and conduct joint commissioning, including with the Integrated Care Board (ICB).
- Board members raised concerns about some of the experiences that CLA go through in Leeds following attendance at a recent takeover event focused on care leavers and those in care. Often highlighting instances of bullying, lack of knowledge amongst professionals and feeling singled out at times through their lives in care. In response the Board heard that there is priority around social work culture and social work practice to get service delivery right for those in care and care leavers not just within the Children and Families directorate but also across the partnership and other public sector organisations.
- The Board welcomed plans for eight additional places in smaller accommodation in Leeds particularly in the context of increased costs and profits made in the private sector through fostering services and wanted to know more about plans to enhance the offer for Leeds in house foster carers. The Board were informed that a 'mixed economy' on foster placements was being pursued and where there is capacity in house to meet specific complex needs a targeted approach will be developed to match needs to placements. In addition, further training and support is being considered to meet complex needs that would enable more placements to meet needs whilst reducing costs and also accommodating more children and young people in the city. Increased payments to foster carers are also being considered as part of this approach.
- Members raised questions in respect of EHCPs and legal fees that can arise through tribunals. In response members were informed of the ongoing work on EHCPs which the Board is also carrying out an inquiry on. A request was made by the Chair on legal/tribunal costs associated with EHCPs and also the percentage of tribunal cases that are won by families. It was agreed that this would be provided outside of the meeting.
- Members referred to previous inquiry work done by the Board on transport costs within the directorate, it was agreed that a written response will be provided on this.
- The turning the Curve work stream was mentioned by Board members with reference to a renewed scoping exercise that is taking place. It was agreed that a further update would be provided on this and that it could come back to the board at a future meeting by way of update.

Resolved

The Board noted the contents of the report and asked for:

- a) The legal/tribunal costs associated with EHCP tribunal cases in Leeds and the percentage of these cases that were won by families
- b) Further details on transport costs and the work previously undertaken by scrutiny in this area
- c) A report or additional details on the 'turning the curve' work stream at a future meeting of the Board.

57 Refresh of the Leeds 3As Strategy

The Board received a report from the Director of Children and Families that presented an update on the refreshed, draft 3A's plan following previous consideration by the Board in March 2023.

This report summarised the new 3As plan which covers 2024-2026 and has been developed following wide-ranging consultations with school leaders and review of the previous plan by service providers. Appendix 1 to the report outlined full details of the five priorities, actions and impact measures contained in the plan.

In attendance for this item were:

- Councillor Jonathan Pryor, Executive Member for Economy, Culture and Education
- Farrah Khan Deputy Director of Children and Families – Social Care
- Cath Lennon, Chief Officer Learning Capacity and Development
- Dave Clark, Chief Officer Learning Improvement
- Liz Canning, 0-19 Consultant

Cllr Pryor introduced the report setting out the long standing aim to improve attainment, attendance and achievement in the city which was established through the first strategy in 2018. Post covid the 3As strategy has been re-evaluated and schools are still reporting that Covid is impacting pupils in Leeds in terms of enhanced support needs particularly amongst SEND children and young people. The new strategy sets out priorities for 2024-26.

It was emphasised that the document is very much focused on feedback from schools and academic leaders and is a delivery plan for the Council to deliver against using existing resources as opposed to a plan for schools to deliver, the aim is to support educational settings to deliver their priorities.

The following discussion points were raised under this agenda item:

- Members were interested in Action 5 in respect of secondary schools being offered KS3 reading reviews to ascertain progress in reading skills in Year 8. A question was raised in relation to students who were not at the higher levels at secondary schools but were able to 'de-code' and have functional

literacy. Reassurance was provided that this was still part of the action to ensure that children and young people at all levels leave school with the ability to read effectively which would help them gain employment or progress into further and higher education.

- Responding to a question around attendance and the rising number of suspensions, Board members were informed that suspensions have increased in response to some of the more challenging behaviours that are being experienced following Covid and that this was a concern within the service in terms of reducing those numbers and re-engaging children and young people in education. As discussion developed on this subject it was suggested that an update report could feature in the future on this following past Board interest in fixed term exclusions and off rolling. Leeds has consistently been an authority with one of the lowest rates of suspensions and exclusions compared to other local authorities. It was also noted that this is an issue being experienced nationally and is not unique to Leeds.
- The Board wanted to know more about the link attendance officer in terms of how many schools they had responsibility for and how they worked geographically in the city. It was agreed that further information on the deployment of the service will be provided in writing. In terms of geography the officers work on a wedge or area basis to enable relationships to be formed and more effective working. In addition, the board were informed that significant absence panels work on a similar basis but more detail could be provided as part of the Board's wider interest in attendance in Leeds which has already featured on the work programme this municipal year.
- The Board emphasised the importance of attendance particularly after the pandemic and suggested that alternative models of curriculum delivery could be considered to tackle a different cohort of children and young people with a focus on being less conventional where that is appropriate to address young people whose lives have been significantly disrupted. Responding to this point, it was noted that schools and academies were responsible for their curriculum policy and for setting specific curriculum delivery methods. The Local Authority could support schools in reviewing their curriculum and provision. The newly devised SEND curriculum audit tool was noted as an example of where the Local Authority could work alongside settings to review their curriculum offer.
- Members also suggested a whole school approach to well-being to maximise available support and ensure that children feel safe and are having their needs met in school. By ensuring a really strong well-being offer it was thought that issues around attendance may also be resolved. The Board welcomed the development of an online well-being gateway which is being deployed and used by staff and is part of developing a whole school approach to well-being.
- Board members were keen to see a stronger emphasis on children in care and care leavers in the strategy. By way of an example of the challenges faced by children in care, in respect of bullying in secondary schools from the my health, my school survey, 68% of children in care reported being bullied compared to 35% who were not in care. It was suggested that when the impact of the strategy is assessed children in care and care leavers are a focus in terms of outcomes and performance.

- A question was raised in relation to Priority 4 and feeling safe at school particularly with regard to the increase in knife crime and how that is dealt with. The Board believed that safety at school is a key area to ensure regular attendance and tackling issues of self-esteem. The Board were informed that knife crime is a priority after increases in reports of that type of crime. Work is ongoing city wide to tackle this by identifying patterns of behaviour and preventing knife crime by sharing information and making early interventions. The link between gangs and knife crime is clear and it is important to target those that are exploiting children and young people through gang activity by joint working with Safer Leeds, Youth Services and West Yorkshire Police. The Board were assured that this is a key priority with the development of a new portal by the Police to enhance reporting and intelligence sharing given as a positive example of recent service improvement.
- The Board also suggested that drug trafficking and county line gangs should be referenced in the strategy as often the link to gangs and violence comes through drug use and drug dealing.
- The Board were also informed of established education programmes on knife crime and the dangers of carrying knives both generally and for self-defence purposes.
- The Board noted that NEETS has been a problem that has been difficult to resolve for a number of years and it still remains a problem. Whilst noting that the 'not known' category forms a significant part of NEET statistics it remains a challenge to keep young people engaged in education as they approach the end of compulsory education. There remains a focus on broadening the offer to young people and focussing on those children who may be the most likely to slip through the net. It was noted that the Not Known category can involve students who have moved settings during the academic year and who are in fact still engaged in full-time education, employment or training.
- Members were keen to ensure that issues such as cyber bullying which is a newer form of bullying and continues to be a problem in schools is also part of the approach and remains on the agenda in terms of issues to tackle and support schools with.
- The Board highlighted the possibility of children, particularly those from a SEND background but also more widely, moving to secondary school struggling to adapt to new teaching techniques in Maths and Science. In response the Board heard that work is ongoing to ensure that it is understood how children and young people learn effectively. The Board heard about how the focus in primary school is on pictorial and developing relational understanding in Maths and that in secondary there is more of an abstract focus to enable A-Level and higher education learning. The Board suggested wider use of materials to support learning for those that have moved from primary to secondary school to ensure that base understanding is still developed in secondary school and to ensure that children of all ability levels are able to progress.
- As a final point it was noted that the report uses the term 'Sendco' as opposed to the more commonly used 'Senco' to describe the school based SEND co-ordinators. The point being that there are quite a lot of abbreviations used in education and that consistency on this role in terms of the abbreviation used would be helpful. This observation was noted.

Resolved

- a) The content of the report and strategy was noted and the Board provided feedback to decision makers on the various actions and priorities contained within them.

58 Work Programme

The Board considered the latest position on the Board's Work Programme for 2023/24 through the submitted report from the Head of Democratic Services.

The Scrutiny adviser highlighted the following points in relation to changes since the last iteration and other relevant information:

- The planned EHCP inquiry session has now moved to the January meeting and will include the working group summary note from November and a planned Executive Board report on EHCPs scheduled for December.
- There is a remote Budget Working Group for all Board members to consider the budget proposals for 2024/25 on 19 December at 1.30PM.
- Responding to a question related to the impact of asylum changes on children and young people in Leeds, the adviser and the Chair confirmed that discussion was still ongoing in relation to the timing of it but that it was still planned to be brought back to the Board.

The Chair also noted that following the recent work on EHCPs it had become clear that the voice of parents and carers of children with SEND is an area that the Board could consider in terms of having representation in the future. It was agreed that this will be taken forward and could be considered as part of the co-opted members report in June 2024.

The meeting closed at 12.25PM.

59 Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next public meeting of the Board will take place on 24 January 2024 at 10.00am. There will be a pre-meeting for all board members at 9.45am.