



SCRUTINY BOARD (CHILDREN AND FAMILIES)

Meeting to be held in Civic Hall, Leeds, LS1 1UR on
Thursday, 26th April, 2012 at 9.45 am

(A pre-meeting will take place for ALL Members of the Board at 9.15 a.m.)

MEMBERSHIP

Councillors

- J Chapman (Chair) - Weetwood;
- G Driver - Middleton Park;
- P Ewens - Hyde Park and Woodhouse;
- B Gettings - Morley North;
- A Khan - Burmantofts and Richmond Hill;
- A Lamb - Wetherby;
- P Latty - Guiseley and Rawdon;
- K Maqsood - Gipton and Harehills;
- A McKenna - Garforth and Swillington;
- M Rafique - Chapel Allerton;
- K Renshaw - Ardsley and Robin Hood;

Co-opted Members (Voting)

- Mr E A Britten - Church Representative (Catholic)
- Vacancy - Church Representative (Church of England)
- Ms A Craven - Parent Governor Representative (Primary)
- Ms J Ward - Parent Governor Representative (Secondary)
- Ms N Cox - Parent Governor Representative (Special)

Co-opted Members (Non-Voting)

- Ms C Foote - Teacher Representative
- Ms C Johnson - Teacher Representative
- Mrs S Hutchinson - Early Years Representative
- Ms T Kayani - Leeds Youth Work Partnership Representative
- Ms J Morris-Boam - Young Lives Leeds

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**Draft Scrutiny Inquiry Final report
Combating child poverty and
raising aspirations
26th April 2012**

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Introduction and Scope

Introduction

1. The Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) decided to undertake an inquiry around the themes of raising aspiration and combating child poverty.
2. In order to scope the inquiry a small working group of Board members met with key officers to consider the potential terms of reference. They considered the work of the corporate Child Poverty Strategic Outcome Group and also the background to the Child Poverty Needs Analysis arising from the Child Poverty Act 2010.
3. The following key points arose from the working group's discussion:
 - There are some systemic issues (eg regulations, protocols, existing working practices) which present barriers to practical solutions, and can stop support to families being as effective as it could be. Examples ranged from housing lettings policies to the size of school dining rooms.
 - It was suggested that the inquiry look at some case studies of clusters and/or Super Output Areas (SOAs) to get a detailed picture of how effective services are on the ground for families in areas of deprivation.
 - This approach could include case studies of families, but also talking to the relevant service providers about the common barriers, as well as good practice.
 - There are also local examples of work aimed at raising aspirations and breaking the cycle of poverty, which could be explored in the same way. The importance of empowering people was stressed.

- A particular issue was raised about transition, and the different levels of support available to children and families at different stages of their life.

4. The working group reported its discussions to the full Scrutiny Board. The Board agreed that the terms of reference for the inquiry should be based on the above issues.

Scope of the Inquiry

5. The purpose of the inquiry was to make an assessment and, where appropriate, make recommendations in relation to good practice in, and barriers to
 - The delivery of effective joined-up services and solutions for children and families in poverty
 - Initiatives aimed at raising aspirations and breaking the cycle of poverty
6. The Board conducted its inquiry over two main sessions. The first session provided members with the national and local context in relation to work on combating child poverty and raising aspirations, as well as sharing the current work on the child poverty needs assessment and draft child poverty strategy for Leeds.
7. For the second session the Board split into two groups, who each visited one of the clusters identified for detailed study. During the session, members heard from local workers, visited facilities in smaller groups and met some service users. Each session began and ended with a round table discussion.
8. We were particularly pleased at the range of people from both other partner



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organisations and departments of the council other than Children's Services who engaged with us during this piece of work. It demonstrates the importance to everyone of tackling these issues successfully in Leeds. We would like to thank everyone who took part in our inquiry for their time and insights.

9. One of the key anticipated impacts from this inquiry is on the way that Scrutiny Boards conduct their inquiries. The Board found that splitting up and conducting the majority of the inquiry in one day on site in localities was a very productive way of carrying out our work.
10. It meant that all members of the Board were included in the fieldwork and had the opportunity to meet with front-line staff and service users.

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Conclusions and Recommendations

National Context

11. The Child Poverty Act 2010 required local authorities and their partners to cooperate to reduce, and mitigate the effects of, child poverty in their local areas. This includes carrying out a child poverty needs assessment and developing and delivering a child poverty strategy.
12. Reducing the number of children in child poverty was a strategic outcome in the Leeds Strategic Plan and is a cross-cutting theme of the Children and Young People's Plan 2011-15. In 2008 (the latest year for which figures were available when we carried out our inquiry) 22.5% or 33,695 children in Leeds were living in poverty.
13. We know that poverty is the root of most poor outcomes for children and blights the life of too many children in Leeds. Poverty lies behind the common factors for poor outcomes and must continue to be addressed if we are to narrow the gap between the most and least advantaged children, young people and families in the city.
14. Against that backdrop we looked first at the national and local context to reducing poverty and also mitigating against the impact of poverty on children and families, before taking a more in-depth look at the activity taking place in two specific areas of the city – South Seacroft and Beeston and Holbeck.
15. The Child Poverty Act identified four building blocks in relation to the preparation of Child Poverty Strategies:
 - Education, health and family
 - Employment and adult skills
 - Housing and neighbourhoods
 - Financial support for families
16. The approach in Leeds is building on each of these blocks, with lead officers identified for each block. We received a summary against each of the blocks of the picture in Leeds, including evidence based best practice and emerging priorities.
17. We also learned about the child poverty 'basket of indicators' which reflects families' current situation but also the direct and indirect influences on their longer-term ability to move into sustained well paid employment. The basket of indicators is split into 4 groups:
 - Tier 1: the proportion of children in poverty
 - Tier 2: factors that directly influence families' resources and incomes today – parental employment and earnings; financial support and living costs
 - Tier 3: factors that directly influence families' ability to enter and sustain well paid employment in the short and longer term – education, adult skills, childcare, transport and job availability
 - Tier 4: factors that indirectly influence families' ability to enter and sustain well paid employment and escape poverty now and in the future – children's outcomes, financial inclusion, access to services and facilities, health, teenage pregnancy, relationship breakdown, crime, drug and alcohol use.
18. We were told about the independent review on child poverty and life chances led by Frank Field, which published its report in December 2010 "The Foundation Years: preventing poor



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children becoming poor adults”. The report concluded that life chances are most heavily influenced by experiences in the first five years of life and placed strong emphasis on investment in integrated provision for families with young children.

19. We were aware that the economic situation and proposed changes in the benefits system would also present additional challenges to achieving our objectives in the short term.

Local Context

20. Against this national background, we received a presentation on the key issues for Leeds and considered the draft Child Poverty Needs Assessment.
21. The presentation highlighted the major local issues under each of the four building blocks and identified emerging priorities.
22. In particular we noted the challenge presented by the rising birth rate and the demographic patterns across the city.
23. This information was the basis on which the city’s Child Poverty Strategy has been developed and is now being implemented.

Recommendation 1 – That the Director of Children’s Services provides us with an update on progress with the Child Poverty Strategy when he brings the formal response to our recommendations in July 2012.

Fieldwork

24. Having ‘set the scene’, the Board completed its inquiry by visiting two case study areas of Leeds, where we had the opportunity to visit local facilities and discuss with local front-line staff some of the practicalities of addressing child poverty and seeking to raise children and young people’s aspirations.
25. In each case we were provided with a detailed area profile, which starts to break down the city-wide picture to a local level.
26. During our inquiry on attendance this year – which used a similar methodology to this inquiry – we have seen how Children’s Services have continued to develop and refine cluster level data to help target services to meet the differing needs of each locality.
27. The list of witnesses and site visits at the end of this report demonstrates the range of practitioners that we spoke to on our site visits and the services that we saw at first hand.
28. Arising from the discussions that took place on the day, but also taking into account the developments that we are aware of as a result of our inquiries this year, we make the following recommendations.
29. We have directed the majority of our recommendations to the Director of Children’s Services because it is officers within Children’s Services who take the lead in supporting the Child Poverty Strategy Group, the partnership group, chaired by the Executive Lead Member for Children’s Services, responsible for driving the city’s child poverty strategy.



Conclusions and Recommendations

30. We acknowledge that the Director and his team will require the support of a wider range of partners, both within the council and across the broader city partnership, to respond to our recommendations.

31. At the time of our inquiry there was some uncertainty about the future of some debt advice services. We were pleased to learn that an extension of the service had been agreed. We are also pleased about the commitment shown by the council to credit union facilities as an alternative to 'loan sharks'. We felt that it was very important that the longer term continuation of these services was secured.

Recommendation 2 – That the Director of Children's Services reports to us within three months on how the council and its partners are seeking to ensure the continued viability of money advice and credit union facilities within the city.

32. We also discussed the role of all staff in being able to recognise where a young person or family that they are working with may benefit from support from other services besides their own service, and feeling adequately equipped to provide signposting information.

Recommendation 3 – That the Director of Children's Services reports back to us within three months on how he will ensure that workforce development plans are in place to increase front-line staff's ability to recognise needs such as debt advice and fuel poverty and signpost people appropriately.

33. We discussed information sharing and the constraints that can arise where staff have fairly 'low level' concerns about a child's wellbeing, that would not meet the safeguarding criteria, but where a shared awareness by professionals in contact with a family may lead to more effective support.

34. We felt that there needs to be greater clarity about what information can be shared in such circumstances.

Recommendation 4 – That the Director of Children's Services reports back to us in three months on how the concerns raised about information sharing can be addressed.

35. We were particularly concerned about low levels of take up of the free school meal entitlement, and some of the barriers that discourage children from claiming their entitlement.

Recommendation 5 – That the Director of Children's Services reports back to us within three months on what is being done to increase the proportion of children and young people eligible for free school meals who are registered for this entitlement.

36. We were pleased to learn about some of the work that was being undertaken in conjunction with social housing providers, in particular to tackle fuel poverty. We would like to see similar initiatives being explored with private sector landlords if possible, perhaps linked to the registration scheme.



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Recommendation 6 – That the Director of Children’s Services reports back to us within three months on the potential for the Child Poverty Strategy to engage with private sector housing providers on a similar model to social housing providers in combating the effects of poverty.

37. As we toured the One Stop Centres we noticed that there was very little information available about services for children and families in the Centres, although there were plenty of families attending for various reasons. We felt that this was a missed opportunity to raise awareness of services that may be able to support some of our families.

Recommendation 7 – That the Director of Children’s Services makes more information about services for children and families available at One Stop Centres.

Finally, our visit to RISE in particular provided us with an example of how young people with low aspirations are being supported to become ready for work. We want all children in Leeds to aspire to achieve their full potential and to receive the support and encouragement they need to acquire the basic literacy, numeracy and employability skills. We believe that this will provide them with the basic building blocks to raise and achieve their aspirations.

Postscript

38. Through our work on our three major inquiries during 2011/12 (external placements for children in care; school

attendance; and increasing the number of young people in education, employment and training) we have seen some of the work that is being undertaken to address the impact of child poverty and to raise young people’s aspirations in the city.

39. In particular we have seen how services are increasingly working in closer partnership at a very local level in clusters to target local families and tailor local solutions within a city-wide framework of outcome based accountability and restorative practice approaches.

40. We have heard about the commitment to early intervention and preventative approaches which are designed to break the cycle of disadvantage. This is particularly building on some of the initiatives that we saw during our inquiry, such as the Family Nurse Partnership.

41. We are also aware that a number of other scrutiny inquiries carried out by other Boards have related to the impact of child poverty and to raising aspirations; for example the complementary work on jobs and skills being carried out by the Sustainable Economy and Culture Scrutiny Board, the inquiry on fuel poverty by the Regeneration Scrutiny Board and the work being undertaken by the Health and Wellbeing and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board on Health Inequalities.

42. This is further evidence of the cross-cutting approach being taken to these themes across the council. We expect to see further examples in the coming year.



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.

Reports and Publications Submitted

- Extracts from IDeA toolkit for Child Poverty Needs Assessment
- Child Poverty: Highlights and Exceptions for Scrutiny to Consider
- Improvement Priority TP3b – Reduce the number of children in poverty – October 2010 accountability report
- Common risk factors for children, young people and families at risk of poor outcomes
- Child Poverty Act summary
- Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) Combating child poverty and raising aspirations inquiry – Background information
- Child Poverty Act Briefing Paper April 2010
- Child Poverty Unit – Pyramid of Factors that impact upon child poverty
- Leeds Child Poverty Basket of Performance Indicators
- The Foundation Years, independent review on poverty
- Draft Leeds Child Poverty Needs Assessment
- Presentation on child poverty
- Visit information – Beeston and Holbeck
- Visit information – South Seacroft

Dates of Scrutiny

November 2010 – working group (Councillors Judith Chapman, Geoff Driver, Alan Lamb, Brenda Lancaster, Mr Britten and Professor Gosden)

November 2010 – Scrutiny Board (Children's Services)

20 January 2011 – Scrutiny Board (Children's Services)

17 February 2011 – site visits

South Seacroft

RISE building
South Seacroft One Stop Centre
Seacroft Children's Centre
Parklands Children's Centre

Beeston and Holbeck

Dewsbury Road One Stop Centre
Dewsbury Road Library
New Beverley Children's Centre
Holbeck/Beeston Hill Jobshop, Tunstall Road



Witnesses Heard

Councillor Judith Blake, Executive Member (Children's Services)
Councillor Jane Dowson, Executive Member (Learning)
Sally Threlfall, Chief Officer for Early Years and Integrated Youth Support Service, Children's Services
John Freeman, Education Leeds
Lisa Martin, Children's Services
Dave Roberts, Senior Policy and Information Officer, City Development
Jane Hopkins, Service Manager Jobs and Skills Service, Environment & Neighbourhoods
Diana Towler, External Relations Manager, Jobcentre Plus
Liz Bailey, Health and Wellbeing Improvement Manager, Adult Social Care
Rob McCartney, Housing Strategy & Commissioning Manager, Environment & Neighbourhoods
Martyn Long
Chris Smyth, Leeds City Credit Union
Diane Lyons, Chief Executive Leeds CAB
Maggie Vantoch-Wood, Financial Inclusion Fund, Debt Caseworker
John Ashton, Dewsbury Road One Stop Centre
Linda Baldwin, Education Benefits Officer
Paul Carter, Financial Inclusion Officer, Aire Valley Homes
Simon Lonsdale, JobCentre Plus
Robert Curtis, Fuel Poverty Officer, Environment Policy Team
Jacqui Atkinson, Yorkshire Bank
Lorraine Lee, Leeds Libraries
Amanda Ashe, Head of Children's Centre Services
Christine Coopman, Children's Centre Manager
Charlotte Harker
Tammie Millar
Wendy Brown
Paul Chandler, Course Team Manager, Leeds College of Building
Robina Mir, Parenting Apart Together Manager
Kathryn Ashworth, Relate Leeds and Parenting Apart Together
Jonathan Dore, Leeds CAB
Jan Jackson, Customer Services Manager, One Stop Centre
Simon Swift, ENE Homes
Nadine Statham, Assistant Welfare Rights Unit Manager
Kam Sangra, Programme Manager, Job Shop
Sharon House
Sharon Marshall, Deputy Manager, Seacroft Children's Centre
Joanne Ingham, Family Outreach Worker
Karen Herrington, Teacher, Seacroft Children's Centre
Mark Wilson JobCentre Plus Adviser
Lynn Turner, Adviser Manager, JobCentre Plus
Joanne Ingham – Family Outreach
Cathy Brayshaw, Family Nurse
Kay Kendall, Manager, Parklands Children's Centre Manager
Alison Reddix Teacher, Parklands Children's Centre
Keith Nicholson, Leeds CAB
Jess Hawker, Leeds CAB
Viv Gibbons, Extended Services Cluster Coordinator, Seacroft
Alan Bolton, David Young Community Academy
Emma Hopkinson, Space2, Young People's Project Coordinator
Dawn Fuller, Space2, Strategic Director

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**Scrutiny Board (Children and Families)
Combating child poverty and raising aspirations Inquiry
26th April 2012
Report author: Kate Arcscott**



www.scrutiny.unit@leeds.gov.uk

**Draft Scrutiny Inquiry Final report
Improving School Attendance
26 April 2012**

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Introduction and Scope

Introduction

1. Leeds City Council has defined a vision for children and young people which states that Leeds will be a child-friendly city where the voices, needs and priorities of children and young people are heard and inform the way we make decisions and take action.

Our children will:

- be safe from harm;
- do well in learning progressing to further and higher levels so they have skills for life;
- choose healthy lifestyles;
- have fun growing up; and
- be active citizens who feel they have voice and influence.

2. In order to achieve the ambition of being a child-friendly city, we must ensure that every child in Leeds is accessing educational opportunities and that services effectively support children and families to mitigate those factors that may limit access.
3. The Leeds Education Challenge makes a city-wide pledge to ensure that successful schools are at the heart of a child friendly city. The first pledge in the Leeds Education Challenge is that 'Every child and young person of school age will be in school or in learning.' Leeds City Council's Children's Services will evidence this pledge by:
 - Reducing the unauthorised absence rate to 1% for secondary and 0.5% for primary in Leeds by 2015
 - Fully implement the Raising the Participation Age.

4. The Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) was tasked by Council with carrying out a piece of work this year on each of the three Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) obsessions. The second of these relates to school attendance.
5. Terms of reference for this inquiry were agreed at our Board meeting on the 8th September 2011 when we concluded that the purpose of the inquiry was to make an assessment of and, where appropriate, make recommendations on multi-agency efforts to address persistent absence from school.
6. We are very grateful to everyone who gave their time to participate in this inquiry and we hope that our findings will provide a timely and positive contribution to tackling this particular obsession within the Children and Young People's Plan.

Scope of the Inquiry

7. The Board conducted the inquiry over two sessions, during November 2011 and December 2011
8. In relation to this inquiry, the Board agreed to follow a similar approach to that successfully adopted for its inquiry last year on combating child poverty and raising aspiration. We identified two 'case study' areas of the city and instead of our formal Scrutiny Board meeting, half of the Board Membership went to each area for a morning. The areas visited were Rothwell and Inner East Leeds. In both areas, Members had the opportunity to talk to local practitioners and to undertake some additional visits in smaller groups, including meeting local people, before



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reconvening for a round table discussion with senior officers. We found this to be a very effective way of working.

9 Recognising the range of stakeholders involved and responsible for improving school attendance, we received a range of evidence both written and verbal from the following:

- Officers from Children's Services
- Cluster¹ Chairs and Cluster Managers
- Representatives of multi-agency partners at a local level

10 We considered that the main contributor to this inquiry would be the Children's Services Attendance Strategy Team. The team already has strong links with the clusters and the individual schools in order to monitor and improve attendance across the city.

11 In order to promote our level of understanding we received a brief strategic overview and information on the Council's vision to improving school attendance. This was provided at the initial stages of the first inquiry session.

13 The Director of Children's Services has been requested to strengthen partnership arrangements with other local authorities and schools not in Leeds City Council control.

14 We feel that communication to parents promoting the benefits of good school attendance can be expanded particularly in year 1 and pre-school.

15 There are aspects of operational and resource review requested in order to facilitate targeted support.

Anticipated Service Impact

12 Our recommendations require a number of measures which seek to improve school attendance across the city and in localities. Such measures will require resources, the cost of which may be required from existing budgets.

¹ Local groups of schools and services that work closely together to meet the needs of children and young people through an integrated approach.



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16. Information from the Department of Education states that there is a clear link between poor attendance at school and low levels of achievement. Of pupils who miss more than 50% of school only three percent manage to achieve five A* to Cs GCSE's including English and maths. Of pupils who miss between 10% and 20% of school, only 35% manage to achieve five A* to Cs.
17. Poor attendance disrupts learning and creates gaps in the knowledge and skills of children. These pupils are more likely to become 'Not in Education, Employment of Training' (NEET) when they leave school and could easily fall into anti-social behaviour and crime.
18. Information was presented to us which stated that Leeds has already chosen an approach that aims to secure the commitment of all those who work with children and families, to contribute to improving school attendance. Improving attendance will be based on:
 - strategies that have a strong evidence base of 'what works'
 - active partnership with young people and local communities
 - the involvement of parents and families in promoting and supporting children and young people's learning
 - all partners taking responsibility to promote, encourage and support children and young people's involvement in learning and their families support for learning
 - the provision of learning responding to individual needs, such as those of young carers

- the clear role of schools and their relationship with children and young people and with parents and families
- universal and targeted support being available and delivered within localities including use of the Common Assessment Framework
- more specialist support being available, prioritised to those with greatest need and the most vulnerable
- that good levels of school attendance is a measure of success applied to work with children and young people wherever possible

19. We are reassured by the objectives and desires presented to us and we will maintain a keen interest to ascertain how these objectives develop in practice.

The Current Position

20. Leeds has seen good reductions in secondary and primary persistent absence as demonstrated in the tables detailed below.²

Half-term 1-4 primary attendance

	Leeds	National	Statistical Neighbour Average
2005/06	94.30	94.24	94.36
2006/07	94.79	94.82	94.98
2007/08	94.67	94.74	94.88
2008/09	94.09	94.54	94.60
2009/10	94.26	94.66	94.72
2010/11*	94.70		

Source: DfE statistical first release; * provisional data from School Census

² Provisional 2010/11 half-term 4 attendance analysis



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Half- terms 1-4 secondary attendance

	Leeds	National	Statistical Neighbour Average
2005/06	90.58	91.76	91.67
2006/07	90.83	92.14	92.23
2007/08	91.51	92.70	92.87
2008/09	91.43	92.70	92.80
2009/10	91.60	93.16	93.18
2010/11*	92.39		

Source: DfE statistical first release; * provisional data from School Census

21. Despite the improvements demonstrated, Leeds was ranked in the bottom 10 authorities for secondary attendance levels, unauthorised absence levels and persistent absence levels in 2010. This demonstrates to us the clear need for continued improvement and the potential to learn from other Cities who are performing better.
22. We were advised that in Leeds there is a clear relationship between attendance and attainment which follows the trends defined by the Department of Education. For the years 2008 to 2010 above 60% of the pupils who attended 95% or more of school sessions achieved 5 good GCSEs including English and maths; for the groups attending less than 80% of sessions around 10% achieved this standard each year.
23. In October 2011 the Department of Education raised the threshold for persistent absence from 80% to 85%. Schools are recommended to take action when a pupil misses 15% of educational time. The Department of Education have stated that raising the threshold will ensure that schools will take action sooner to deal with absence.

When applying the new thresholds there is a significant increase in the number of children and young people reported as persistently absent. Based on 2010/11 data the change in the threshold would increase the number of pupils meeting the persistent absence criteria from 955 to 2624 for primary school pupils, and for secondary school pupils, from 2,733 to 5,285.

24. Throughout this inquiry we have been advised that early intervention is one of the most important factors in resolving poor attendance. Any initiative that drives involvement at an earlier stage should be welcomed.

Collection of Absence Data

25. We were advised that all schools are under a statutory obligation to inform the Local Authority of certain attendance information. However, the Department of Education no longer requires persistent absence data from schools although Children's Services endeavours to collect the data each half term in order to monitor performance and identify trends.
26. There was a significant amount of discussion and concern expressed relating to gathering persistent absence data from schools not in local authority control, such as Academies. We were reassured that most Academies work constructively with the Attendance Team. We acknowledge however that difficulties in data collection could occur as a greater number of schools move to Academy status. We recognise that a partnership approach between Leeds City Council and non local authority



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schools will be mutually beneficial in order to identify trends and target absence across the city.

to monitor attendance at their school and challenge unacceptable absence levels. We fully support this initiative.

Recommendation 1 - That the Director of Children's Services continues to engage with all schools not under Leeds City Council Control, including Academies to ensure continued positive working relationships and continued persistent absence data collection.

Recommendation 2 - That the Director of Children's Services engages with School Governors to establish a special responsibility for one Governor in each school which includes challenging the attendance performance of the school and maintaining a focus on reducing absence levels.

27. We were advised by officers that a technological solution would be beneficial which would enable all schools to use software in order to provide live attendance information. An option that we feel should be explored in order to retain accurate and up to date information and simplify data reporting processes for all schools.

Persistent Absence

31. We wanted to identify if there is any correlation of poor attendance within families. Particularly where siblings attend other schools. We were advised that patterns of attendance are usually replicated through families and the attitude of parents towards learning can also have a strong influence.

School Governors

28. The Chair of the Scrutiny Board stated that as Governor she receives attendance reports, but recognised that similar information was not shared with Governors in all schools. She suggested that Governors should challenge schools on their attendance performance and ask how absence is checked and monitored.

32. In addition we were advised that children who do not regularly attend primary school will often follow the same trend into secondary education.

29. We were advised that a Governor training programme is provided and to support this there is a Governor's crib sheet which can be used as a prompt when asking for attendance information.

33. Officers informed us that primary schools are usually good at picking up and acting on non attendance, and this is reflected in their attendance data. Attendance in year one however is usually the most poorly attended primary year.

30. The Executive Board Member for Children's Services suggested that there is a role for an 'Attendance Governor' in each school, who is specifically tasked

34. With regard to secondary school pupils we were advised that there were a number of characteristics which summarised those who are persistently absent:

- Pupils eligible for free school meals are four times more likely to be



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persistently absent than pupils that are not eligible.

- Persistent absence increases with age, with levels of persistent absence 4 times higher in year 11 than in year 7. Over a third of pupils that were persistently absent in 2010/11 were in year 11.
- Overall, the level of persistent absence for pupils of Black and Minority heritage is lower than for non-BME pupils. However, some ethnic groups have levels of persistent absence significantly higher than the Leeds average such as pupils of mixed heritage, White Eastern European, Bangladeshi and traveller groups.
- Pupils with special educational needs are more likely to be persistently absent, particularly those on School Action plus, a quarter of these pupils are persistently absent.

35. We consider that it is important to reinforce to parents the benefits of good school attendance at the earliest possible time in a child's education to stop the trend of increasing absence throughout their school life. There is a need to change patterns of behaviour. The merits of good attendance should be instilled pre- school in children's centres and during year 1, which has been identified as the poorest attended primary year.

Recommendation 3 – That the Director of Children's Services formulates a strategy for targeting and improving school attendance during year 1, whilst promoting pre-school the benefits of good attendance.

Recommendation 4 - That the Director of Children's Services works in collaboration with the clusters to identify the siblings of persistently absent children who are approaching school age in order to ensure support is in place from day one of their education.

36. Evidence was presented to us which identified that one of the most prevalent reason for absence in both Primary and Secondary schools is due to family holidays.

37. Those who gave evidence felt strongly that there should be clear communication to parents that removing their children from school during term time was not a right. Penalty notices are issued however families are still opting to go take their children out of school, without authorisation, to take advantage of reduced holiday costs. We were advised that some schools have adopted a zero tolerance policy to this practice, however we were not advised successful this policy is.³

Recommendation 5 - That the Director of Children's Services investigates if the impact of a zero tolerance policy to term time holiday absence has improved school attendance rates, and the potential for recommending such a policy (if successful) to governing bodies city wide.

³ Behaviour tsar Charlie Taylor announced on the 16th of April 2012 that unpaid truancy fines should be recovered directly from child-benefit payments in a crackdown on absenteeism



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38. Children on occasion are required to attend dental and medical appointments for regular checks or due to specific illness. The health service functions and provides treatment predominantly during the school day when a child is required to attend lessons. Children who require medical treatment for ongoing conditions will miss a larger proportion of educational time.
39. It was evident in the Inner East cluster that there is a lack of synergy between education and health services which warrants further investigation. We feel that there should be dialogue with health service providers to overcome this.

Recommendation 6 - That the Director of Children's Services engages with National Health Service providers and General Practitioners in Leeds to identify how absence from school for health appointments could be reduced.

Supporting Children and Families

40. During our visit to Rothwell and Inner East we focused on the targeted support provided to children and their families in order to identify underlying problems, remove barriers and improve attendance at school.
41. Officers advised us that non-attendance at school is only one symptom of other, often complex, problems. To rectify the situation is generally not a single service solution and will involve support from partners, schools, services and family members. This was evident during meetings between parents and Attendance Improvement Officers (AIO's), (which were observed by members of the Board) where experiences of domestic violence, poverty, mental health problems and language barriers were apparent.
42. Each school has its own system for following up on non attendance on a daily basis. Actions include texting or phoning parents and in some schools collecting children from their homes.
- Family Support and Attendance Improvement
43. Where is identified that a child is persistently absent and subsequent efforts by the school to rectify this have failed an AIO could become involved. Where is it identified that families needed extra support a Family Support Worker (FSW) may be engaged where appropriate.
44. AIOs or FSWs endeavour to make contact with the parents where possible to discuss the reasons why their child is persistently absent. A comprehensive assessment (CAF) would also be undertaken for the child. Other specialist services such as Child Adult Mental Health Services, Behavioural Support Workers, Parent Support Advisors or Family Outreach Workers (to name but a few) may also be engaged.
45. AIOs and FSWs liaise and work with various agencies, signposting parents and children to appropriate organisations. They work directly on the front line, visiting houses and conducting interviews with parents, getting children out of the house where necessary and to school.
46. We wanted to identify how overall family support and monitoring is achieved, for



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example where siblings attend other schools. We were advised that there are discussions about more complex family cases at a cluster level. This will focus on the child and potentially their brothers and sisters. The cluster will look at which other services are working with the family and will then decide which person is best to make contact with the family. This could be an AIO or a FSW. Where younger siblings are identified the operational processes in the cluster will ensure that the Early Years Service is involved.

47. In cases where support workers cannot engage with parents and absence levels have not improved, the necessary legal action may be taken by Leeds City Council's (LCC) Targeted Services.

48. It was very apparent that the services provided by both FSWs and AIOs are highly valued by the schools they support.

49. We were advised that 3 FSWs cover 13 schools in the Rothwell cluster. Each FSW has about 15 cases which is a manageable level. However we were made aware that Royds School would be able to make many more referrals if that were possible. Royds has also stated that it would benefit from having its own full time AIO and that extra support is needed to deal with attendance and welfare but there are budgetary constraints.

50. We were advised that the AIOs in the Inner East cover 30 intensive cases each and we expressed concern about this level of caseload.

51. Both the AIOs and FSW expressed that early intervention in cases is incredibly

important. In the cases presented to us a number of escalated problems could have been avoided if they had engaged with the family earlier. We believe that early intervention and family support is fundamental to the welfare of children and as a result improvement in school attendance. Therefore the functions of FSWs and AIOs are essential.

Recommendation 7 – That the Director of Children's Services works in collaboration with the Cluster Chairs to undertake a review of the attendance improvement and family support service configuration. The purpose of this review would be to identify if there is sufficient resource appropriately allocated to each cluster.

Youth Service

52. We were advised that the Youth Service provide targeted support, working with a number of partners such as family support and the police. They primarily look at the problems which may be causing non attendance and help children to cope or resolve those problems. It was pointed out to us that there are wider issues related to non-attendance for example where the child is involved in, or being subject to, anti social behaviour.

53. The Youth Service will try to establish if young people with attendance problems are already engaged in an activity which motivates them. Alternative educational provision such as Step Up (which provides points towards GCSE's) or an alternative education course may generate greater interest and participation.



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54. We were advised that Youth Worker support is provided from 13 years upwards. The Youth Workers reiterated that early intervention is important and therefore they should provide dedicated support from the age of 11, when young people start their education at Secondary School. We agreed that this could prevent the cycle of bad attendance developing, particularly as a child adjusts from primary to secondary education.

Recommendation 8 – That the Directory of Children’s Services establishes as part of the Youth Offer Review the possibility of providing Youth Service support for young people, who are persistently absent, from school from the age of 11 years.

Teaching Staff

55. During the session at Rodillian School we were advised that school attendance has improved since the new school building opened, therefore the improved environment is clearly helping motivate children and there is a desire to come to school. Exam results have also shown improvement.

56. We were advised that there is a need to improve the attitudes of year 10 and 11 children towards school attendance. A system of mentoring has been established for all those attending year 10 and 11 which seems to be working well. Heads of year also provide pastoral care and other support is provided by form tutors, and SENCO (supporting special educational needs coordinators).

57. We have met with a number of teaching staff who advised us that incentives

have been put into place to motivate children to attend school. To qualify to attend the Rodillian School year end prom a child must have a school attendance figure of 93% or above. St. Theresa’s Catholic Primary School provides a number of incentives for each educational year including a mention in their newsletter, stickers and certificates, stationary and an entry into a draw for Leeds United tickets. Corpus Christi Catholic College and Oulton Primary also reward good attendance.

58. We find that this approach is popular, it creates a goal on which children and young people can focus, and will provide a sense of achievement when attained. It could be argued that attending school should not need to be incentivised. We conclude however that all avenues of motivation should be explored and if it works then an incentive system should be implemented.

Area specific problems

59. Whilst there are apparent similar attendance problems in both Rothwell and the Inner East, each inquiry session identified that some of the issues were unique to their area. We therefore recognise that the methodology of managing attendance at a cluster level is a sensible approach.

Rothwell

60. The Rothwell cluster sits on the boundary of the neighbouring authority of Wakefield. We were advised that the siblings of some children attend schools that are within the Wakefield area. This causes a number of issues as school holidays do not always align and teacher training days will generally fall



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on different days. There have been examples where older siblings are taken out of school to provide childcare for their younger siblings whose schools are closed.

61. Parents have also kept children out of school for extended time covering both the holiday periods in Wakefield and Leeds, this could extend absence by one week. We believe that this problem will probably be replicated in any cluster that sits on the boundary of the city. We consider that there is potential for co-ordinated school holiday schedules to be agreed on a regional basis, which should also have a positive influence on school attendance for our neighbouring local authorities.

Recommendation 9 – That the Director of Children’s Services engages with our neighbouring local authorities and schools within Leeds not in local authority control to explore the potential for co-ordinated planned school closure dates for holiday periods and teacher training days.

62. Both the Family Support Worker and Cluster Chair advised us that Rothwell had a lack of support services in the locality to help children and their families with more specific needs such as coping with domestic violence or mental health problems. This in turn creates difficulties in signposting individuals to an appropriate and comprehensive support network.
63. We feel that the underlying cause for these difficulties need to be explored further to identify if there are gaps in the provision of support organisations in localities, or if there is simply a need to raise awareness within clusters of the

support available (which may be in a neighbouring local authority area).

Recommendation 10 – That the Director of Children’s Services works in collaboration with Cluster Chairs to identify gaps in specialist support and investigate which organisations are accessible to provide a comprehensive support network. In addition to also ensure that awareness is raised about supporting organisations in localities for relevant LCC and cluster based employees.

Inner East

64. We were advised that the inner east cluster suffered particular problems due to a transient population, with 31% of pupils moving school last year. This has knock on problems if a place at another school cannot be secured. Potentially a child could be out of the education system for 4 – 6 weeks. An additional issue is the possibility of being placed at a school which is a distance from a child’s residence, resulting in children travelling from outside a cluster to attend school. Siblings are also placed in different schools. This creates problems getting children to and from their place of education and additional expense for some of the poorest families in the city.
65. The challenge that manifests is that the basic living needs of families are prioritised before education and that there are greater social problems to tackle such as poverty, poor housing and crime. Paying for transport is an issue and there have been cases where families run out of money towards the end of the week so children will not be sent to school. On a positive note we were advised that Harehills Primary



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Schools have two members of staff who go round every morning picking up children where necessary and that Oakwood Primary School has its own bus.

Recommendation 11 – That the Director of Children’s services investigates the problems associated with transient neighbourhoods. In addition, investigates how the schools admissions system for Leeds could be adapted in our most deprived wards to ensure parents can place their children in schools close to their homes and siblings.

66. The proportion of pupils in Leeds schools that are of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) heritage has increased by more than 6 percentage points since 2005 to 22.5% of pupils in 2011. A higher proportion of primary than secondary pupils are of BME heritage. 14% of pupils have English as an Additional Language and over 170 languages are recorded as spoken in Leeds schools.
67. We were advised that there are a significant number of languages spoken in the Inner East cluster, in one school 40 languages are spoken. This can present significant barriers and children can be kept off school to translate for their parents. Schools commission translation services where parents need to be contacted because their children are persistently absent however this is very expensive.
68. We inquired if the local community could help schools to translate, however we were advised that there are confidentiality and safeguarding obligations which would prohibit this.

69. We considered that English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses for parents would be beneficial but this is a long term solution.

Improving attendance – The cluster approach

70. Each cluster in the city has either already conducted, or is committed to undertaking, an Outcomes Based Accountability workshop in order to bring a wide range of partners, agencies and services to the table to address attendance and persistent absence. We were advised that the learning from these workshops would be shared across all partnerships and will be used to inform city-wide strategy and activity.
71. A number of suggestions and outcomes from the workshops were presented to us during the first session of the inquiry some of which were reinforced during our visits to Rothwell and the Inner East. The full list of ideas and initiatives as presented to us is attached to this report as appendix 1, which we fully support.
72. We were advised that the development of cluster based resources has been effective and has enabled the commissioning of a part time counsellor in the Rothwell cluster. The cluster has developed strong links with police and other organisations who are engaged in guidance and support meetings to discuss cases and identify the appropriate package of support for families with the right services commissioned.



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73. The exchange of case information with partners involved in supporting families is currently done manually. The lack of integrated information was highlighted and we were informed that operational efficiencies could be achieved if all agencies involved in the support of families (cluster managers, family support workers, youth service etc.) could create and log their information on a shared database. This would easily enable access to the profile of children and their family to identify which organisations are already engaged in providing support.

Recommendation 12 – That the Director of Children’s service in collaboration with Cluster Chairs identifies the most effective way of sharing case information with stakeholders involved in the support of children and their families, whilst adhering to required data protection legislation and safeguarding requirements.



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.

Reports and Publications Submitted

Update on Children's Services Obsessions – Improving School Attendance Report to Children's Trust Board - 12 September 2011

Attendance Outcomes Based Accountability events reoccurring outputs and suggestions - 2011

Department for Education press notice – Government changes definition of persistent absence to deal with reality of pupil absenteeism in schools - 12 July 2011

Department for Education - Reducing absence – ensuring schools intervene earlier

Attendance Strategy persistent absence research report - 2008

Scrutiny statement on attendance - March 2010

Inner East Cluster data profile – 09 September 2011

Rothwell Cluster data profile – 09 September 2011

Attendance, A guide for Governors – November 2010



Witnesses Heard

Nigel Richardson – Director of Children’s Services
Jancis Andrew – Head of Service Attendance Strategy Team
Adele Scargill – Family Support Worker
Adrian Lee – Youth Work Manager, Youth Service
Glen O’Malley – Youth Work Manager, Youth Service
Jackie Claxton – Ruddock – Targeted Service Leader (Interim)
Melanie Robinson - Targeted Service Leader (Interim)
Jayne Bedford – Team Manager, Children and Young Peoples Social Care
Jo Shiffer – Cluster Manager
Diane Walker – Cluster Leader
Kath Bryan – Royds School
Ken Higgins – Deputy Head, Rodillian School
Rebecca Ingram – Headteacher, Oakwood Primary School
Susan Kneeshaw – Headteacher, St Patrick’s Catholic Primary School, Torre Road
David Pattison – Headteacher, All Saints CofE Primary School, Richmond Hill
Michelle Ritson – Oulton Primary School
Cassandra Grant – Attendance Improvement Officer
Vicky Wade – Attendance Improvement Officer
Joy Fry – Attendance Improvement Officer
Brenda Hogg – Attendance Improvement Officer
Graham Murley - Attendance Improvement Officer
Jane Dodds - Attendance Improvement Officer
Janine Wallace – Manager Osmondthorpe Children’s Centre
Chris Radelaar – Manager Shakespeare Children’s Centre
Debbie Gedge – Manager Gipton Children’s Centre
Anne Connor – Specialist Practitioner School Nurse Co-ordinator
Jim Hopkinson – Head of Service, Youth Offending Service
Jenny Millington – Wykebeck Attendance Team
Janet Procter – Wykebeck Attendance Team
Lynne McLaughlin - igen



Dates of Scrutiny

Scrutiny Board meeting – 10 November 2011

- The CYPP action plan relating to the Attendance obsession, as background and context to the inquiry
- Obsession progress report to the Children's Trust Board
- Information on progress against the CYPP action plan
- Data on Leeds levels of school attendance and persistent absence
- Information on the reasons for absence
- Information on local initiatives and activity to address attendance, including cluster OBA activity plans and cluster level funding
- Information on the latest changes in government requirements in relation to the definition of persistent absence
- Information on best practice from other local authorities
- The report of previous work on school attendance carried out by the Scrutiny Board in 2009/10
- Research on persistent absence commissioned by Education Leeds

Scrutiny Board meeting - 8 December 2011

The Board split into two groups, who visited one of the two identified clusters to carry out more detailed field work.

Members received information about the local context and data in relation to attendance, including information about local OBA activity.

In each area, members visited relevant local services in smaller groups (including meeting service users where appropriate).

This was followed by a round table meeting in the chosen locality in order to discuss issues arising from the visits and consider the overall impact of work in the locality.



Appendix 1

Attendance OBA events reoccurring outputs and suggestions

Data development

1. Knowing the names of children/families who are absent at a local level so that they can be targeted.
2. Improving 'coding' of attendance data / breaking down data – i.e. sickness type / the months in which holidays are taken etc.
3. Improving the quality of attendance data and recording and or improving confidence in attendance data.
4. Identifying indicators of non attendance early – i.e. through health appointments and at children's centres.
5. Identifying trends for non attendance in families.

Best ideas – what works best - ideas that regularly came up

1. Early intervention – i.e. through children's centres.
2. Taking a consistent approach to attendance e.g. treating non attendance at a health visitor appointment in the same way as a school. Also identifying trends early – i.e. in non attendance at HV apps as a precursor for non attendance at school and addressing this as an attendance issue.
3. Incentivise attendance (for children/young people and their parents – engage local businesses in doing this).
4. Information sharing – between settings/providers/agencies.
5. Targeting families early when there are indications of low / or when siblings have been low attendees.
6. Ensure the accurate and detailed recording of data – if this is already happening then we need to communicate this.

7. Ensure seamless transitions (i.e. children Centres to primary, primary to secondary, transfer of info from health etc).
8. Cluster (city) wide policy on attendance – encompassing health, children's centres, schools.
9. Closer working with the police/PCSOs – door knocking / truancy patrols/ early response
10. Using the school nurse to work with children / families where illness is a recurring problem
11. Implementing an agreement between schools (high school and primary) regarding school holiday dates including training days – at cluster level if not city wide.
12. Walking buses for children who are often late
13. Need for an integrated multi-agency early intervention response
14. Become better at engaging parents in school – open events, back to school days, open door policy, children's centres helping with the transfer from CC to primary school
15. Engaging parents generally in the agenda – helping them understand the importance of attendance.

Good or initiative ideas / off the wall ideas

- Set up contract with family when a child starts school and then develop policy around attendance and follow up on non attendance
- Use of technology – texting young people to get them out of bed
- Developing pride in the local area and the local school
- More use of Peer Support
- Change the patterns of school holidays to better suit parents needs

DRAFT

**Scrutiny Board (Children and Families)
Improving School Attendance
26th April 2012
Report author: Sandra Newbould**