

SCRUTINY BOARD (CHILDREN AND FAMILIES)

WEDNESDAY, 6TH JANUARY, 2021

PRESENT: Councillor A Lamb in the Chair

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

CO-OPTED MEMBERS (VOTING)

Mrs K Blacker – Parent Governor Representative (Primary)
Ms J Ward – Parent Governor Representative (Secondary)

CO-OPTED MEMBERS (NON-VOTING)

Ms C Foote – Teacher Representative
Mr C Dixon – Young Lives Leeds Representative
Ms D Reilly – Looked After Children / Care Leavers Representative

48 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

There were no appeals.

49 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There were no exempt items.

50 Late Items

There were no late items.

51 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests.

52 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Wyn Kidger and Co-opted Members Tony Britten, Andrew Graham and Helen Bellamy.

53 Minutes - 25th November 2020

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held 25th November 2020 be approved as an accurate record.

54 Performance Update for September 2019 to September 2020

The Director of Children and Families submitted a report which provided an overview of outcomes and service performance related to Council priorities and services within the remit of the Scrutiny Board (Children and Families).

The following were in attendance:

- Councillor Jonathan Pryor, Executive Member for Learning, Skills and Employment
- Councillor Fiona Venner, Executive Member for Children and Families
- 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
- Chris Hudson, Planning, Policy and Procedures Lead

The Director of Children and Families introduced the headline performance issues, as set out in the report. While recognising positive performance across a number of areas despite the COVID-19 pandemic, Members discussed a number of specific matters, including:

- *Structure and quality of online learning.* Members recognised the significant challenge faced by schools in relation to providing online home learning packages for pupils as a result of school closures and bubble collapses, however also noted the variance in approaches between schools, and sought clarity on how the Council will continue to monitor the quality of online learning moving forward. Members were advised that the Department for Education (DfE) have released further guidance around expectations for the structure and quality of online learning, for school leaders and governors to continuously monitor throughout the school year, along with support and sharing of ideas through the COVID-19 Bronze Group meetings.
- *Availability of devices to support home learning.* Members noted reports of schools unable to provide devices to children for the purposes of home learning due to insurance restrictions, and sought clarity on whether this is a widespread problem across Leeds. Members were advised that maintained schools are usually insured under the Council's "Balance of Risks" insurance scheme which covers all devices, including off the premises. However, academies may have their own insurance policies which may not protect devices outside of school.
- *Vulnerable children and safeguarding.* Members expressed concern for the wellbeing of children during periods out of school, and sought clarity as to whether reduced numbers of referrals to social care are as a result of the reduced contact with children and their families. Members were advised that referrals increased when schools reopened in September which shows the importance of vulnerable

children attending school. However, Members were also advised that identifying vulnerable children continues to be a constant priority as vulnerability is not static, and during periods of school closure, a multi-agency approach is taken with early help services, the voluntary sector and other key agencies to ensure that families are identified and supported.

- *Early Years and other childcare provision.* Members recognised the challenges faced by Early Years providers throughout the pandemic to continue to be viable with declining numbers of children attending. Members were advised that the decline in the Early Years sector will disproportionately impact employment rates of women, and that a research study has been launched by the University of Leeds, with a particular focus on the impact on women. Related to this, Members also noted the concerns of other childcare provision such as childminding services, in relation to supporting school aged children with home learning.

RESOLVED – That the contents of the report, along with Members comments, be noted.

55 Financial Health Monitoring 2020/21 - Month 7 (October)

The Head of Democratic Services submitted a report that introduced information regarding the projected 2020/21 financial health position of those service areas that fall within the Board's remit at Month 7 (October 2020).

The following were in attendance:

- Councillor Jonathan Pryor, Executive Member for Learning, Skills and Employment
- Councillor Fiona Venner, Executive Member for Children and Families
- 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
- Louise Hornsey, Head of Finance

The Chair noted that aspects of the Financial Health Monitoring report would be discussed as part of the following item, the Initial Budget Proposals for 2021/22 (Minute 56 refers.)

RESOLVED – That the contents of the report be noted.

56 Initial Budget Proposals for 2021/22

The Head of Democratic Services submitted a report that introduced the Executive Board's initial budget proposals for 2021/22 for consideration, review and comment on matters and proposals that fall within the Scrutiny Board's remit.

The report acknowledged that Scrutiny Boards had already considered the proposed budget savings proposals that were approved by Executive Board in September, October and November and that a composite Statement summarising Scrutiny feedback during this first phase of consultation was presented to the Executive Board during its meeting on 16th December 2020 for consideration.

However, a further £5.2m of potential savings across the Council were also approved by the Executive Board during its meeting on 16th December 2020 and subsequently submitted for wider consultation with stakeholders, including Scrutiny. A copy of the relevant Executive Board report was therefore appended for the Scrutiny Board's consideration.

It was noted that any additional comments or recommendations made by the Scrutiny Board would inform a further 'phase 2' composite Statement by Scrutiny to be submitted to the Executive Board for consideration at its meeting in February 2021.

The following were in attendance:

- Councillor Jonathan Pryor, Executive Member for Learning, Skills and Employment
- Councillor Fiona Venner, Executive Member for Children and Families
- 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
- Louise Hornsey, Head of Finance

The Chief Officer introduced the report and set out the £2.5m of proposed savings relating to the Children and Families Directorate, as detailed in the Executive Board report considered in December 2020.

Members discussed a number of matters, including:

- *Staffing reductions.* The Board again sought assurance that staffing levels within the Children and Families directorate would remain sufficient in light of the current budget savings proposals. Some Members also expressed concern regarding the wellbeing of the remaining staff who may need to take on more responsibilities and workloads to mitigate the impact of having a reduced workforce. A query was also raised as to why such staffing reductions had been regarded as 'Business as Usual' proposals given the potential significance of their impact.
- *Approach taken to identify budget proposals.* In response to a request for clarity, Members were advised that services within the Children and Families directorate, as well as the Adults and Health directorate, had

continued to be prioritised as much as possible by the Council in view of the need to protect the most vulnerable people in the city.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the 2021/22 budget proposals as presented be noted;
- b) That the Board's comments are reflected as part of the Scrutiny submission to Executive Board for its consideration.

57 Plans for Statutory Pupil Assessments during 2021

The Head of Democratic Services submitted a report that presented information on the national position relating to plans for statutory pupil assessments during 2021 for the Board's consideration.

The following were in attendance:

- Councillor Jonathan Pryor, Executive Member for Learning, Skills and Employment
- Sal Tariq, Director of Children and Families
- Dave Clark, Head of Service Learning Improvement
- Val Waite, Head of Service Learning Inclusion
- Erica Hiorns, Senior Secondary Improvement Advisor

The Executive Member introduced the report, noting that subsequent to agenda publication and correspondence between the Board and the Secretary of State for Education and Ofqual, the Government announced on 4th January 2021 that summer exams would now be cancelled and an alternative approach would be taken to assess pupils fairly. Members were advised that further announcements from Government were expected to clarify alternative methods of assessment as well as arrangements for SATs in primary schools, along with the launch of a formal consultation on these matters.

Members discussed the potential merits of the Scrutiny Board holding a further working group meeting to consider the detail of this consultation and agreed to await the launch of the consultation before determining an appropriate way forward. However, the Chair proposed that the Board does receive a general update during its next formal meeting, with particular focus on how schools are managing during this latest lockdown period, as well as sharing details of any further announcements and guidance issued by the Department of Education and Ofqual.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the contents of the report be noted;
- b) That a further update report is scheduled for the next meeting of the Scrutiny Board.

58 Work Schedule

The Head of Democratic Services submitted a report which invited Members to consider the Board's Work Schedule for the remainder of the current municipal year.

The Chair reminded Members that the Board had agreed to use its January meeting to consider a suitable timeframe for resuming its inquiry into Exclusions, Elective Home Education and Off-rolling, after agreeing to temporarily pause its inquiry work and review the position again at this stage. Under the current circumstances and also following advice from the Children and Families directorate around data availability, Members agreed that the inquiry would continue to be paused until the next municipal year, when the position would be reviewed once again.

With regard to the Board's formal meeting in March, the Chair proposed that this meeting be themed around the potential long term impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on children and young people and consider what actions need to be taken by the Council and its partners to begin tackling such impacts. This proposal was agreed by the full Board.

RESOLVED – That the draft work schedule be updated to reflect the Board's discussions during the meeting.

59 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Wednesday, 3rd February 2021 at 10 am (pre-meeting for all Board Members at 9.45 am)