

SCRUTINY BOARD (CHILDREN AND FAMILIES)

WEDNESDAY, 7TH SEPTEMBER, 2022

PRESENT: Councillor A Lamb in the Chair

Councillors H Bithell, J Bowden, E Bromley,
A Forsaith, J Heselwood, Z Hussain,
L Martin, D Ragan, K Renshaw, L Richards
and R. Stephenson

CO-OPTED MEMBER (VOTING)

Mr E A Britten - Church Representative (Catholic)

Mrs K Blacker – Parent Governor Representative (Primary)

Ms J Ward – Parent Governor Representative (Secondary)

CO-OPTED MEMBERS (NON-VOTING)

Mr N Tones – School Staff Representative

Ms H Bellamy – School Staff Representative

Ms L Whitaker - Young Lives Leeds

OPENING REMARKS

At the start of the meeting, the Chair welcomed the attendance of Sal Tariq and in acknowledging his new role as Director of the Strengthening Families Protecting Children Programme, the Chair took the opportunity to also pay tribute to Sal for his achievements in his previous role as Director of Children and Families. The Chair also relayed his thanks to Sal for the support he had provided to the work of Scrutiny over the years.

24 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

There were no appeals against the refusal of inspection of documents.

25 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There were no exempt items.

26 Late Items

There were no late items of business.

27 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

28 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor C Howley, Councillor J Senior and co-opted member Andrew Graham.

29 Minutes - 6th July 2022

A Member of the Board requested that the draft minutes be amended in relation to Minute no. 20 (Ofsted Inspection Report) so that further clarity is provided surrounding the personnel query that had been raised i.e. that a Board Member had sought confirmation of the existence of a collective grievance by social work staff.

RESOLVED – That, subject to the amendment reflected above, the minutes of the meeting held on 6th July 2022 be approved as an accurate record.

30 New Co-opted Member

The Head of Democratic Services submitted a report which explained that the appointment of non-voting school staff representation has been a longstanding approach adopted by the Children and Families Scrutiny Board and following the retirement of Celia Foote in July, the School Staff Joint Consultative Committee had nominated Mr Nick Tones to replace Celia's position on the Scrutiny Board for this municipal year. The Board was therefore asked to formally approve the appointment of Mr Tones as a non-voting co-opted member to the Board.

The Principal Scrutiny Adviser also highlighted to the Board that another co-opted member – Kate Blacker – would also be coming to the end of her 4-year term as a parent governor representative on the Scrutiny Board on 26th September. Linked to this, processes are in place to find a replacement parent governor representative to join the Scrutiny Board from October.

However, it was proposed that the Board considers appointing Kate as a non-voting co-opted member for the remainder of this municipal year. This is in view of the experience and professional knowledge that Kate has brought to the Board over the last 4 years, as well as the benefit of membership continuity with regards to work that the Board is following up on this year.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the Board approves the appointment of Nick Tones as a non-voting co-opted member to the Children and Families Scrutiny Board
- (b) That the Board approves the appointment of Kate Blacker as a non-voting co-opted member to the Children and Families Scrutiny Board as from 26th September 2022.

31 Refresh of the Children and Young People's Plan - update

The Board received the report from the Director of Children and Families on the refresh of the Children and Young People's Plan, and were invited to give views, specifically in three areas;

- a) The content of the plan, especially the vision and the obsession.
- b) The consultation and timetable for developing and approving the plan.
- c) The implementation and monitoring of the plan

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Councillor Jonathan Pryor, Executive Member for Economy, Culture and Education
- Councillor David Jenkins, Deputy Executive Member
- Sal Tariq, Director Strengthening Families Protecting Children Programme
- Ruth Terry, Chief Officer for Social Work
- Chris Hudson, Policy, Planning and Procedures Leader
- Dave Clark, Head of Service Learning Improvement
- Erica Hiorns, Leadership and Management Lead

The following issues were raised during the Board's discussion:

- *Revisiting the wording of the Vision* – reflecting on its discussion in July, the Board particularly welcomed the proposal to change the wording of the vision to reference 'play' and 'fun'. In welcoming the new reference made to children living in 'loving and nurturing' families, it was suggested that this could be extended to include communities more broadly too. Members also discussed the removal of the original reference made to improving outcomes faster for children and young people from vulnerable and deprived backgrounds, with some acknowledging that a perceived stigma of poverty may deter people from accessing services that would be beneficial to them.
- *Impact of poverty* - the Board discussed the impact of poverty on the children of Leeds and how the emerging cost of living crisis will compound existing inequalities within the city. Particular reference was made to taking a Marmot approach to supporting families to give children the best start in life linked to the commitment of Leeds becoming a Marmot City. It was noted that the Adults, Health and Active Lifestyles Scrutiny Board would be receiving an update surrounding the Marmot City commitment in October.
- *Refresh of the obsessions* – the Board noted the proposed merging of two obsessions (improve achievement, attainment and attendance at school; reduce the number of young people not in education, employment or training) into a new learning destinations obsession, and the introduction of a health-focused obsession. The children looked after obsession would remain unchanged.
- *Supporting families in encouraging a love of reading* – the Board discussed initiatives for supporting parents/carers – particularly those who are lacking in confidence with reading – to read with their children. Reference was also made to maximising the use of technology and signposting families to free online services too.
- *Library provision* – the Board recognised the importance of schools providing a library service for pupils and where this is not provided on site, then links with nearby library services should be made accessible. It was noted that partnerships have been made with the Leeds Libraries Services.

- *Reflecting and addressing the varying needs of children and young people across different community groups and areas* – the Board stressed the importance of not adopting a ‘one size fits all’ approach and for the Plan to be reflective of the varying needs of children and young people across different community groups and geographical areas.
- *Formal consultation process* – the Board learned that the formal consultation exercise will commence in October 2022. This will be an online questionnaire that will be shared with all Elected Members, as well as children and young people, council officers, members of the children’s partnership in Leeds and the general public. The Board also encouraged direct engagement with Community Committees and Cluster Partnerships and advised that such engagement is tailored to identify and address the needs of their relevant areas.

Reflecting on the feedback of Board Members, the Chair concluded that the Board was broadly supportive of the proposed direction of travel for the refreshed plan and that it would continue to maintain a watching brief, with the draft plan expected to come back to the Board at its January 2023 meeting.

RESOLVED: That the report and comments raised by the Board be noted.

32 Schools Bill

The Board considered the report of the Director of Children and Families regarding the government’s recently published Schools Bill.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Councillor Jonathan Pryor, Executive Member for Economy, Culture and Education
- Councillor David Jenkins, Deputy Executive Member
- Dave Clark, Head of Service Learning Improvement
- Val Waite, Head of Service Learning Inclusion
- Erica Hiorns, Leadership and Management Lead

The Executive Member for Economy, Culture and Education and the Head of Service Learning Improvement gave a brief introduction to the report and in doing so, had reminded the Board that the Schools Bill remains subject to amendment as it continues its journey through Parliament. It was also noted that the council is still awaiting more detailed information from the Department for Education, particularly in terms of academisation plans locally.

The Board discussed several aspects of the Schools Bill, including:

- *Academisation and the Leeds specific picture* – It was noted that, while it will no longer be a mandatory requirement, the government still had ambitions for all schools to be part of a strong multi-academy trust by 2030. Linked to this, the Executive Member for Economy, Culture and Education had referred to councils being able to initiate academy

conversion (subject to parliamentary approval) but informed the Board that he would not be inclined to use this power.

- *A register of children not in school* – linked to the Board’s earlier inquiry work which had focused on elective home education, Members noted the government’s intention to legislate a duty on councils to keep a register of children not in school. While the council has historically aimed to maintain such a register, the proposed new duty on parents and out-of-school education providers to provide information to the council should help improve the accuracy of this register. However, it was noted that the council is still awaiting further details surrounding this matter.
- *Defining what is suitable education* – while acknowledging that the council has always sought to provide support to registered home-educating families in delivering a suitable education for their child, forthcoming legislation will be making this requirement. The Board therefore asked whether further clarity was expected in defining the term ‘suitable education’ and was informed that there had been no suggestion from the government that this would be forthcoming.
- *Appropriate Bodies* – linked to the DfE plans to make Teaching School Hubs the main providers of Appropriate Body services to replace the role of local authorities, it was felt that this removal of local authority oversight may lead to conflicts of interest.
- *Funding implications for existing maintained schools* – the Board was assured that work is already underway by the council’s finance team in considering any potential funding implications stemming from this new piece of legislation.
- *Penalties for breaching attendance orders* – while it was noted that the maximum penalty for breaching an attendance order will increase to a £2,500 fine or up to 3 month’s imprisonment, the Board was assured that the council would firstly look to offer support to families and that the use of such penalties would be aimed at those who do refuse to engage.

In conclusion, the Chair thanked everyone for their contributions at this stage and suggested that a further update is brought to the Board’s February 2023 meeting, when the Board will also be receiving an update on the Leeds 3As Plan.

RESOLVED -

- (a) That the report and the Board’s comments be noted.
- (b) That a further update report on the Schools Bill be scheduled for the Board’s February 2023 meeting.

33 Work Schedule

The Head of Democratic Services submitted a report that presented the Board’s latest work schedule for the forthcoming municipal year.

With regard to the Board's forthcoming inquiry into Children's Services Workforce Planning, the Principal Scrutiny Adviser highlighted that it is now proposed that a working group meeting be held to discuss the potential scope for this inquiry, with a view to bringing the draft terms of reference back to the Board in October for approval. The date of this working group meeting was confirmed as Wednesday 28th September at 10 am.

In consideration of the Board's latest work schedule, a Member of the Board referred to the planned work item in October relating to the Notification of Serious Child Safeguarding Incidents Review Findings. Linked to this, a request was made for the Board to also receive the findings of the Child A review, which relates to the case that had led the Leeds Safeguarding Children Partnership Executive to undertake a review of the notifications process.

RESOLVED – That the work schedule be updated to reflect the above updates and comments.

34 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Wednesday, 12th October 2022 at 10.00 am (pre-meeting for Board Members at 9.45 am)