

## **SCRUTINY BOARD (CHILDREN AND FAMILIES)**

**MONDAY, 10TH JUNE, 2024**

**PRESENT:** Councillor D Cohen in the Chair

Councillors J Bowden, Mr E A Britten,  
K Brooks, R Downes, O Edwards, E Flint,  
B Flynn, T Goodall, J Heselwood,  
D Jenkins, N Manaka, K Renshaw and  
A Scopes

### **CO-OPTED MEMBERS (VOTING)**

Mr T Britten – Church Representative (Catholic Diocese of Leeds)  
Mr A Khitou – Primary Parent Governor representative

### **Co-Opted Members (Non-Voting)**

Ms M Adams – Leeds Parent Carer Forum

#### **1 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents**

There were no appeals.

#### **2 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public**

There was no exempt information.

#### **3 Late Items**

There were no late items of business.

#### **4 Declaration of Interests**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **5 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes**

Apologies were received from the following:

Cllr Stephenson with Cllr Flynn attending as substitute

Cllr Martin with Cllr Brooks attending as substitute

Cllr Jones with Cllr Scopes attending as substitute

Helen Bellamy

Andrew Graham

#### **6 Minutes - 18 April 2024**

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 18 April 2024, be approved as an accurate record.

### **CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS**

Before moving on to the meeting agenda the Chair of the Board, Cllr Cohen, noted his thanks to members who sat on the Board in 2023/24 and also welcomed new members who are joining the scrutiny board for the 2024/25 municipal year.

The Chair also welcomed the new Executive Board Member responsible for Children and Families, Cllr Helen Hayden.

## **7 Co-Opted Members**

The Board considered a report from the Head of Democratic Services on the appointment of co-opted members to the Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) in the 2024/25 municipal year.

The Principal Scrutiny Adviser provided an update based on a report that was brought to the April 2024 meeting of the Board. This included the five non-voting co-opted members, 2 voting church representatives and an update position on voting parent governor co-opted members.

### **Resolved**

The Board:

- a) Approved the appointment of five non-voting co-opted members to the Children and Families Scrutiny Board and noted the position in respect of a new nominee from Young Lives Leeds.
- b) Noted the nominations of the Roman Catholic Diocese and Church of England Diocese to the Children and Families Scrutiny Board in accordance with statutory requirements.
- c) Noted the ongoing efforts to appoint parent governor representatives to the Children and Families Scrutiny Board, in addition to the Primary parent governor representative appointed in 2023/24, both from secondary schools and SILC provision in the city.

## **8 Scrutiny Board Terms of Reference**

The Board considered a report from the Head of Democratic Services presenting the Scrutiny Board's terms of reference.

**Resolved** - Members noted the Terms of Reference as they relate to the Scrutiny Board (Children and Families).

## **9 Sources of Work for the Scrutiny Board and Draft Work Programme 2024/25**

The Board received a report from the Head of Democratic Services on potential sources of work for the Scrutiny Board and presenting an initial draft work programme for the 2024/25 municipal year.

In attendance for this item were:

- Cllr Helen Hayden, Executive Board Member for Children and Families
- Julie Longworth, Director of Children and Families
- Rob Clayton, Principal Scrutiny Adviser

Cllr Hayden welcomed the work of the Board in recent years and looked forward to continuing that in the coming municipal year. The Director of Children and Families echoed those views and stressed the positive impacts that the Board has had and that it had been noted in the last inspection of Children's Services.

The Scrutiny Adviser provided a brief introduction to the report covering some of the discussion from the pre-meet. Key issues identified as areas of focus in 2024/25 were:

- Early Years and Best Start Programme
- Transition from Children's to Adult services
- Children Looked After Sufficiency and Service Transformation
- Family Help Services and preventative measures that could support challenges experienced in schools linked to attendance, curriculum suitability, behavioural challenges and availability of mental health services (CAMHS). The Board thought that this could be taken forward under an Early Help/Family Help themed approach and also include areas such as life coaches and also focussing on multi-agency approaches to delivering early intervention services.
- Accessibility of Work Experience for all children and young people, including learning from best practice such as the Spear Programme
- Performance monitoring linked to transition between different services and different ages from pre-conception to adulthood.

The Board thought this would form a positive basis for the year's work and it was agreed that this would be taken away and brought back to the board to get thoughts on timing and overall content.

**Resolved** – The Board agreed that Appendix 3 to the report (draft initial work programme) along with the suggestions noted above would form the basis of the work programme for Children and Families Scrutiny Board in 2024/25.

## 10 Youth Vaping Update

Board members considered an update report from the Head of Democratic Services on youth vaping setting out recent legislative developments at Government level and an update on local activity to tackle the issue in Leeds. This followed consideration of the issue in the previous municipal year and a request that the Board receive an update early in the 2024/25 municipal year.

In attendance for this item were:

- Cllr Fiona Venner, Executive Member for Equality, Health and Wellbeing

- Cllr Helen Hayden, Executive Member for Children and Families
- Cllr Andrew Scopes, Chair Adults, Health and Active Lifestyles Board
- Helen Goddard, Advanced Health Improvement Specialist
- Heather Thomson, Head of Service Healthy Living Team
- Anna Ross, Head of Service C&F Public Health Team
- Rob Clayton, Principal Scrutiny Adviser

The Chair highlighted the legislative background to this issue and the importance that is likely to have on the approaches taken in Leeds following the forthcoming general election. It was thought that the Board should adopt a watching brief pending the expected legislative developments through the Tobacco and Vapes Bill.

The Executive Member for Equality, Health and Wellbeing noted her past role as an Executive Board Member covering children and families and welcomed the role played by scrutiny and the challenge provided. The Executive Member wished the Board well in 2024/25 and noted the importance of the work carried out by the directorate and the board.

On the subject of youth vaping the Executive Member noted the legislative background and the importance of the growing issue of youth vaping in the city and the health consequences associated with it. The public health message on vaping was emphasised that for adults vaping is effective as a smoking cessation aid but a consequence of vapes being available is that children and young people have been able to access them and are becoming addicted to nicotine having had no intention of taking up smoking.

The Board were informed that ASH has surveyed public support for the tobacco and vapes bill and discovered that support for the bill was significant amongst the public suggesting that nationally 69% support the measures, in Leeds the figure is between 68% and 70% with between 11% and 12% opposing the policy. In respect of children and young people aged between 11-15 who will be the first generation impacted by the bill, nationally two thirds support the bill with fewer than 1 in 10 opposing.

In Leeds public health work is ongoing with partners to deliver training in schools and to sustain or increase the capacity of the cheap and illicit tobacco team across West Yorkshire. It was noted that vaping is an obvious and key focus but there are other 'novel nicotine' products that could be of concern.

The Board agreed to keep this on the Board's agenda in 2024/25 and to await legislation. It was also agreed that the correspondence and the Board's consultation response be sent to ministers once the outcome of the general election is known.

Board members also noted the need for early education approaches to tackle vaping, the issue of vaping on public transport and the prevalence of vape shops and advertising as ongoing issues.

The Chair also thanked Cllr Sandy Lay for his involvement in the work having initially brought this issue to the Board in 2023/24.

## **Resolved**

The Board:

- a) Noted the update on legislative progress linked to the smokefree generation policy announcement and subsequent Tobacco and Vapes Bill.
- b) Noted the activity taking place in Leeds on youth vaping
- c) Agreed to maintain a watching brief on the issue in light of the expected legislative changes following the general election and bring an update report back summarising the expected changes.

## **11 Performance Update**

The board received a report from the Director of Children and Families providing a summary of performance information relating to outcomes for Leeds children and young people.

In attendance for this item were:

- Julie Longworth, Director of Children and Families
- Councillor Helen Hayden, Executive Board Member for Children and Families
- Farrah Khan, Chief Officer Family Help
- Dan Barton, Deputy Director – Learning
- Chris Hudson, Policy, Planning and Procedures Leader

The Director of Children and Families introduce the item and highlighted the changes in the Leeds under 18 population as providing context to the performance data provided to the Board.

In addition, the Director highlighted areas of concern and challenge being faced by the directorate, highlighting the impact of the pandemic in terms of impact on mental health services and CAMHS and poverty with 44% of pupils in Leeds living in the most 20% deprived localities in the city. It was also noted that poverty significantly increases the likelihood of experiencing neglect and abuse and of ultimately becoming a Child Looked After. The increase in CLA numbers was noted along with the 'broken system' as highlighted by the MacAlister Review and the demand pressures for CLA services and growing costs of those services. SEND demand pressures were also noted with the report setting out the increase in demand and the need to meet needs in a timely way in line with statutory duties.

In response to comments and question the following issues were covered:

- In response to a question regarding the number of CLA looked after in Leeds provision, 64% are cared for through internal provision which

compares to a core city average of 49.6% and 49.3% average for statistical neighbours. Of those that are new to the care system between 60% and 70% are cared for in Leeds with the remaining often due to specific or specialist needs, cared for externally.

- The Board also heard about the wider sufficiency strategy which discharges the duty to provide sufficient quantity and mix of care placements in Leeds. A central theme of this is to increase and develop the Council's own provision through foster care and small group residential homes which is focused on keeping Leeds children in Leeds.
- The Board discussed EHCPs with reference to the statutory timescales and how the Council might reach 100% of EHCPs being in place within the 20 week statutory timescale. There are plans in place linked to the PwC work to improve timescales and to tackle backlogs within the next five months that should improve timeliness figures. There are some dependencies on this such as having a full staff cohort. The Board requested additional data on the specifics of EHCP timescales so how many are completed within 25 weeks, 30 weeks or more.
- The Board noted pressure points in the EHCP system linked to availability of education psychologists and the writing up of plans as the number of plans increase, additional resource will ease the pressure in these areas. It was also noted that the service dealing with EHCPs is currently dealing and finalising more cases than they ever have, and the key issue is demand pressure with the volume of cases having increased significantly in recent years.
- Members asked about FFI (Funding for Inclusion) and plans to review that system and also about how much of the EHCP forms part of the provision offered on the ground. In response the Board heard that the directorate will gradually migrate away from FFI, this will be done carefully with prioritisation of FFI transition and clear planning with schools to make sure there are no gaps in provision. This work is ongoing the directorate has and continues to work closely with education leaders in the city to secure their views and support for change. A carefully prioritised list of children is being developed with key stakeholders, mindful of managing demand and with a commitment to funding existing FFI packages until migration can take place. The principle of early intervention and the provision of early help for children with additional needs underpinned the establishment of FFI in the city. FFI has been recognised historically by the DfE and external bodies as an example of best practice, however the Local Authority and its key partners agreed that a review was necessary. The review has been undertaken with schools and other key partners with a focus on fulfilment of the Local Authority statutory duty to assess where appropriate whilst ensuring that children and families have access to timely and effective early help in education settings.
- In response to the question on provision work is ongoing to develop a strategic plan to create additional places where they will be needed working with schools to work out what the offer will be and where provision will be provided.
- The Board heard that this is a clear priority for the directorate and senior leaders have recently met with the Leeds Parent Carer Forum listening to concerns and working with them to deliver improved performance in this

area. It was also recognised that early help, family help and prevention are key elements of the ongoing approach, to identify needs and meet them at the earliest opportunity.

- The Board highlighted that the system can appear to be fragmented from a parent and carer perspective, noting that one size does not fit all and the importance of setting out clearly what the offer is in Leeds. In response the Board heard about the importance of listening to parents, carers and children and collaboration and co-production as key principles of the service. Clarity on the services available and providing support to access them were noted as key points.
- The board also heard about timeliness being important but also quality being as important. The speed of EHCP reviews were also noted.
- The Board discussed support groups and the need to make everyone aware of them and the support that can be offered by sharing experiences and discussing what is available and providing mutual support. It was acknowledged how lonely it can be when support is not available or communicated for parents and carers.
- Whilst there are issues with the system the Board also noted the efforts of staff working in the service to deal with increased demand.
- Board members asked about the number of children being re-united from care to their families. In response the Board heard of the kinship care service in Leeds, which is one of the largest in the country, this along with special guardianships keeps care arrangements within wider families. There is also an expanded team aimed at re-unifying families, this focusses on the support required for children to be re-united with their birth families and addresses the decreasing numbers of children who have been successfully reunited with family which can often be linked to the ages of CLAs with more adolescents coming into the CLA system. The Board noted the impact of more children and young people, particularly adolescents, living in areas of high deprivation and the impact that is having in terms of adolescents entering care, the highest cohort entering care in 2023 was adolescents and children aged under one. The Futures Service was referenced which is focussed on parents and carers who have had a child taken into care, unfortunately those who had a child taken into care are at higher risk of further children being taken into care.
- The Board asked about children and young people with not known status, these figures have been reduced but NEET figures have increased. In response on Not Knowns the improved relationships with settings at key time such as Year 11, was cited as a measure taken to understand more about what children and young people are doing and to target resource at NEETs to get them to re-engage with employment, education and training settings.
- The Board discussed budget gaps and business transformation. A Delivery Board, chaired by the Director, is in place to oversee service transformation and dealing with issues such as transport, CLA sufficiency strategy and demand and demography issues. All of these have strategic plans in place providing a clear framework to deliver transformation and improved services and outcomes.
- Members highlighted residents who do not speak English as a first language and how they access services as being an added complication

when parents and carers are planning to access services. This was noted as an area for constant prioritisation.

- In response to questions the board were informed of a 30% increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum seekers in the city and the knock on impacts on CLA. In addition, the number of incorrectly age assessed asylum seekers is an ongoing challenge.
- Board members highlighted re-offending rates as an area of potential concern and what might be done to tackle the cycle of re-offending. It was noted that the re-offending rate is influenced by a small cohort of frequent re-offending children and young people. Re-offending rates are a challenge, but the number of offences and seriousness of offences are reducing linked to programmes such as Turnaround.
- On school absences the Board expressed concern about the data remaining stubbornly high and that it may be an issue that is returned to in the municipal year, noting the links between persistent and severe absence and NEETs.
- In closing remarks on this item, the Executive Member for Children and Families noted the importance of the not known and NEET data and acknowledged the efforts of staff working across the directorate in a number of challenging areas and doing an excellent job.

**Resolved** - The Board considered and commented on the information contained in the report and appendices and noted the assurance provided on the performance data.

## **12 Youth Justice Plan 2024-2027**

The Board received a report on the Youth Justice Plan 2024-2027 as required by the Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules. It was therefore agreed that the Youth Justice Plan would be referred to Children and Families Scrutiny Board for consideration and comment.

In attendance for this item were:

- Julie Longworth, Director of Children and Families
- Councillor Helen Hayden, Executive Board Member for Children and Families
- Farrah Khan, Chief Officer Family Help
- Benjamin Finley, Head of Service Corporate Parenting
- Helen Burton, Youth Justice Service Delivery Manager

The Director and Executive Board Member introduced the item noting the comments made in the recent Joint Targeted Inspection in terms of the partnership working that goes on in Leeds working jointly towards delivering the best outcomes for children and young people in the Youth Justice System.

In response to comments and question from the Board the following areas were covered:



- On re-offending linked to questions under the previous performance item, the Board were informed of the first time entrant rate reducing which means that there is a small cohort of quite prolific offenders. It was also noted that the re-offending data does have a time lag. The Board heard in more detail about the Turnaround team who work with offenders to reduce re-offending and who currently have a less than 1% re-offending rate amongst the children they work with, so it is having an impact. The Turnaround Team is funded by the Ministry of Justice with the funding due to end in March 2025.
- Other approaches such as Outcome 22 were referenced which is an initiative that has been used in Bradford and works with young people on re-offending and is expected to create a downward trajectory in re-offending rates. This is targeted at children and young people who are seen as unlikely to re-offend and aims to keep them from entering the criminal justice system again.
- Members requested a breakdown of data in terms of age and gender, this will be provided to the Board outside of the meeting, but the Board was assured that the data is interrogated and is part of the work of the service.
- Serious Youth Violence was raised as an issue and it was acknowledged that in a lot of cases these are first time offences. The Board heard that frequent offenders often have a different profile to those committing more serious offences.
- The Board asked for more information on caseloads and how many in a caseload are new offenders and re-offenders. It was explained that the Turnaround offer, which works with children who would previously not have been in caseloads, has led to some of the increase.
- In response to questions on staff training and apprenticeships the Board were informed that the service is trying to grow and skill up unqualified staff into qualified staff over time.
- In respect of Priority 5 in the plan on attendance, achievement and attainment members were keen to ensure that the offer and examples set out in the report are being offered to all children and young people who the service works with. In response the board were assured that all children in the service have access to an education officer who works with the case holder to work with the child and family to ensure education outcomes. There are also plans to develop individual Education Plans targeted at those with increased risk and children in custody.
- Responding to questions linked to the experience of children and young people in custody it was noted that this is the first version of the plan that looks specifically at the experience of young people in custody, and it was recognised that it was a possible area of work on how best to support young people through what is a difficult experience for them.
- The Board heard about the impact of Early Help Hubs in terms of de-escalating, on a multi-agency basis, anti-social behaviour and targeting resources at individuals causing the most concern in specific areas.
- The Board noted the positive outcome of the recent JTAI (at Appendix 2) despite this being one of the most complex and dynamic areas of our work undertaken by the Council.

- The Board discussed Equality, Diversity and Inclusion with children and young people from ethnically diverse backgrounds being over-represented in the youth justice system and the work ongoing to ensure that services and agencies involved in youth justice work are aware of this issue and are working towards reducing this disproportionality.
- In relation to serious youth violence the Board asked about whether services have learned from experiences in other areas and how services are targeted at particular areas of the city. In response the Board were informed of both city wide approaches and resources being targeted at specific areas for example work in Harehills which is a multi-agency local approach, there are also city wide measures such as Operation Shield and approaches on child sexual exploitation which are taken forward on a trends and themes basis, city wide.
- The importance of multi-agency work was set out as a key learning point, working together on a local and regional basis through partners such as Police, Health anti-social behaviour teams, early help colleagues and the Youth Justice Service. It was also noted that the Youth Service are fully embedded in the multi-agency approach.
- In response to questions around self-harm at the Wetherby Youth Offenders Institute the Board were informed that the issues identified are being dealt with through the Leeds Safeguarding Children's Partnership Executive and involving leaders from the Youth Offenders Institute.

## **Resolved**

The Board:

- a) Acknowledged the strategic framework in place in order to prevent children from entering the youth justice system, and to support and divert those who have entered into the youth justice system in order to have a positive impact on the lives of children, their families and communities, and the work being undertaken by the council and other partners in key areas of activity.
- b) Acknowledged the need to promote the work of the Youth Justice Service Plan across the city, across council directorates and wider city partnerships in order to reduce offending behaviours in children across the city.
- c) Noted the impact of disproportionality on children from Black and Ethnic minorities within the youth justice cohort and that the Youth Justice Service seeks to address disproportionality within the youth justice system.
- d) Noted the Youth Justice Plan will be taken to Executive Board in July 2024 to recommend that it is taken to Full Council in September 2024 for adoption.

## **13 Date and Time of Next Meeting**

The next public meeting of the Board is scheduled for 18 July 2024 at 2.00pm with a pre-meeting for all board members at 1.45pm.