

SCRUTINY BOARD (CHILDREN AND FAMILIES)

MONDAY, 11TH NOVEMBER, 2024

PRESENT: Councillor D Cohen in the Chair

Councillors J Bowden, R Downes,
O Edwards, E Flint, T Goodall, Graham,
D Jenkins, R Jones, N Manaka, L Martin,
K Renshaw, R. Stephenson and
E Thomson

CO-OPTED MEMBERS (VOTING)

Mr A Graham

Co-Opted Members (Non-Voting)

Ms S Gul

59 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

There were no appeals.

60 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There was no exempt information considered on the agenda.

61 Late Items

There were no late items.

62 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

63 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies were received from:

Cllr Jools Heselwood, with Cllr Eleanor Thomson attending as substitute
Kate Blacker
Tony Britten
Helen Bellamy
Maria Adams
Nick Tones

64 Minutes - 9 October 2024

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the previous meetings held on 9 October 2024 be approved as an accurate record.

These were unanimously approved, proposed by Cllr Renshaw and seconded by Cllr Stephenson.

65 Work Experience Accessibility

The Board considered a report from the Director of Children and Families and the Director of City Development that provided a summary and introduction to work experience accessibility in Leeds.

In attendance for this item were:

- Councillor Helen Hayden, Executive Member for Children and Families
- Julie Longworth, Director of Children & Families
- Dan Barton, Deputy Director – Learning
- Cllr Jonathan Pryor Executive Member for Economy, Transport and Sustainable Development
- Gillian Wallace, Head of Service Employment & Skills
- Tracey Greig, Employment & Skills Senior Manager
- Hannah Lamplugh, Children's Strategy and Influence Lead
- Rob Clayton, Principal Scrutiny Adviser

The Chair of the Board and Executive Member for Children and Families introduced the report and highlighted the differences in experience that children gain when trying to access work experience and for many finding a placement can be a significant challenge.

It was noted that work experience can play a crucial role in shaping careers and in preparing young people for the future. Those from disadvantaged backgrounds, including those who are care experienced, often find accessing placements more challenging and more generally it can be a case of who you know not what you know when it comes to finding work experience placements.

The Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) was noted by the Director of Children and Families with Wish 11 being focused on accessing work experience, employment and volunteering opportunities and that listening to and responding to the voice of the child is a key focus in the CYPP and is exemplified in this workstream.

In response to comments and question from Board members the following was discussed:

- The Board asked about the pilot programme which is being developed to support care experienced children and young people to access work

experience placements in terms of numbers and securing employers and businesses to offer placements. In response the Board heard that resourcing is an issue in terms of meeting all demand for placements in Years 10 and 12, which would be into thousands of placements, so the focus is on care experienced children/Looked After Children for who the Council is the Corporate Parent. This would involve brokering support and working in partnership with anchor organisations and Child Friendly Leeds partners to offer placements. It was highlighted that this is a proposal at this stage with work to do to develop and launch the planned approach as opposed to a guarantee of a placement to all children and young people with care experience or who are looked after children.

- This work is being led as part of the wider commitment on care as a protected characteristic which has a number of priorities and is being led by Cllr Venner (Executive Member for Equality, Health and Well-Being) following a deputation to full Council earlier in the year. Key priorities are housing and employment and skills with the latter containing themes around apprenticeships, internships and work experience.
- The Board suggested that more could be done to sell the benefits of work experience placements, so examples of positive contributions made by previous placements to try to increase take up. The Board also noted the paternalistic approach to work experience, and it should be considered to be genuinely valuable to employers as well as them fulfilling their own social responsibility aims.
- Members noted that some of the placements offered through the Council develop organically and are offered through contacts as opposed to a more coherent system where placements are advertised to potential candidates. It was also suggested that council services could 'adopt a school' and focus on making placement offers to students at those schools.
- Universities were highlighted as a possible opportunity building on the students into schools approach, could students and graduates go into schools and talk about their career experiences, for example.
- The Board discussed development of 'speed dating' or taster sessions for employers to visit schools and it was noted that this does already take place as part of work related curriculum in schools, albeit there is potential for this to be audited to understand if there are any gaps in the city where this does not take place as frequently.
- The Board focussed on support available to students when accessing placements. If families are well networked, it is often possible for parents to support young people into a work experience placement. However, it was noted that this tends to favour well networked or wealthier families and could leave those from more disadvantaged backgrounds missing out on placements. It was suggested that a 'bank' approach could be adopted through which placement availability and knowledge of networks to get placements is stored in each school to support placements and prevent young people missing out.
- It was noted that some of the issues highlighted are in lieu of no longer having the Education Business Partnership model in place which did much of the organisational work associated with matching young people to placements and managing work experience processes. Resourcing

therefore is a key limiting factor in what can be done moving forward, albeit it was accepted that more can be done to use available resources in different and more innovative ways.

- Board members highlighted the feedback received from the Leeds Youth Council and the benefits that allowing time off from school to attend careers fairs might bring to young people in the city. Members also noted that the traditional two week window to carry out work experience placements may need to be adjusted to reflect modern, more flexible working patterns. Volunteering with local groups was also noted as a possible area through which work experience can be gained and that it might be appropriate to recognise volunteering activity as valuable work experience. In response the Board heard that flexibility is something to be focussed on but also needs to be balanced against other timetabling responsibilities that schools face and the need for appropriate supervision of young people in their placements. However, it was noted that a menu of experiences could be developed in council services where it is appropriate for children to do work experience and that this can then be consistently offered through a carousel type approach with candidates receiving a range of work experience in different services and settings.
- The Board acknowledged that ongoing budgetary challenges would mean that there is a limit to how many placements can be taken as supervising a placement could mean that a staff member is diverted away from other tasks.
- A Board member highlighted the need to better advertise work experience on the Council's website as currently when searched for on the website there are no results. In addition, a suggestion was made of using templates to ease some of the processes associated with work experience placements, so for example a risk assessment template was suggested. The Board were informed that each work placement does have to have a formal risk assessment which comes at a cost of approximately £45 per assessment, these are currently conducted by another local authority on the Council's behalf.
- The Board noted the potential for procurement to lever in work experience opportunities through social value in procurement approaches. Where organisations contract with the Council it might be that work placements form part of that contract. The Board heard that this does take place already, but it might be possible to do more through that to drive up the number of placements delivered through the Council and the wider supply network.
- The Board were informed that the Voice, Influence and Change Team are also involved in delivering experiences of the workplace which are shorter day long sessions as opposed to a two week placement. It was also noted that HR manage the work experience email address in the Council and that resources are stretched with it being a small part of a team's wider role. Perhaps clearer reporting of placement to this team would assist in getting a true understanding of the volume of placements delivered through the Council.
- Members discussed the importance of the Year 10 work experience offer due to timing in a young person's life as they begin to make decisions about future careers and what future education they would like to pursue.

- The meeting was informed about the Compass House project which sees work done in partnership with Kirkgate Market to facilitate work experience opportunities for children and young people at SILCs. This sees them develop and make things to sell through a unit at the Market each December.
- The Executive Board Member for Economy, Transport and Sustainable Development emphasised the difference in terms of resources between now and 20 years ago and that now, due to resourcing, there is a need to prioritise resource which the Council is going to do through its planned focus on care experience and children looked after. It was also noted that pulling together the work already done by the Council is important. Things like improving information on the website and seeking to deliver more placements through anchor institutions and other employers to focus on care experience and children looked after initially but also to look to broaden that and build up the systems to offer it more widely to more children and young people over time.
- Members noted the Careers for All approach taken by the Museums and Galleries Service and how that might be expanded to other services. A key focus in this is making the placements suit both the organisation and the candidates. In response the Board heard that this would be shared, along with other points raised on SEND, with the SEND Employment Forum.
- The Chair noted that positive discussion around a carousel offer where a two week period is shared across services could be developed further. In addition, it was also noted that some of the admin and required forms and assessments associated with placements can be a perceived barrier by employers and where possible the Council could look to provide support and to also co-ordinate its offer more effectively.
- The Board agreed that this should feature as a further update item at a future meeting to report back on progress.

Resolved - The Children and Families Scrutiny Board noted the contents of the report and requested that this is brought back as a future update item to report on progress made at a future board meeting.

(Proposed by Cllr Jones, seconded by Cllr Goodall and supported unanimously)

66 Little Owls Nurseries Review

The Board considered the report from the Head of Democratic Services which provided an update following the decisions taken by Executive Board in October 2024 as part of the Little Owls Nurseries Review.

In attendance for this item were:

- Councillor Helen Hayden, Executive Member for Children and Families
- Julie Longworth, Director of Children & Families
- Phil Evans, Chief Officer Resources, Transformation & Partnerships

Draft minutes to be approved at the meeting
to be held on Wednesday, 29th January, 2025

- Vicky Fuggles, Head of Early Help Services
- Kev Shillitto, Legal Officer – Section Head

The Executive Member for Children and Families introduced the report highlighting that it provides the Board with an update on the October Executive Board decision on the progress made on the Little Owls Nurseries Review. Key elements of the approach being taken are: an update on the market sounding exercise which could see four (of the twelve) settings taken over by nearby schools, ongoing consultation and engagement with parents, carers and families, a focus on high quality future provision with an appropriate level of fees and a focus on being able to cater for vulnerable children if this is not met then the default position would be for the Council to continue to deliver provision at the setting. It was noted that the Council will retain nine nurseries that are all rated as good or outstanding which is more than comparator authorities and in retaining these nurseries Leeds is an outlier and highlights the commitment made by the authority to early intervention and delivering the best start to children in the city.

In response to comments and questions from board members the following points were covered:

- The Chair asked about fees when an alternative provider takes over the provision and whether these fees will be higher and more challenging for families to afford. In response the Board were informed that at this stage it is unknown as to whether fees will be higher when an alternative provider takes over. Based on the market sounding exercise there is a range of potential fees between £40 and £66 per session. At this stage though it is too early to know what the charging will be once a new provider takes over the setting.
- Members asked about feedback from parents and careers following the withdrawal of services at four settings in the Summer months and it was noted that many of them were able to obtain a place at their first preference. In response the Board heard that parental feedback had been positive both in terms of the provision offered at the nurseries and the move with the majority of families being able to move with their key worker also moving and to their first preference. It was also noted that the service worked closely with each family to ensure they were supported during the move.
- Responding to a question on training and support to staff at any new providers the board were assured that analysis of this will be part of the process in terms of assessing the expression of interest in taking on the provision. It was also noted that many existing staff will transfer to the new providers and therefore this will offer continuity in terms of the relationships that have already been developed with children, parents and carers.
- On Trade Union liaison the board were informed that the Trade Unions are kept informed of developments and are met with regularly to update them on progress and to ensure that the authority is doing the very best for the staff involved and that everyone is kept informed of developments.

- The Board heard about the overall strategy through the Children and Young People's Plan to ensure that children get the best start in Leeds. There is an early years improvement model which is driven by consultant teachers and there is also an Early Years network which meets regularly and includes all sectors. The early years gateway also provides curriculum support to increase the quality of provision across Leeds.
- Members sought an update on childcare fees in the city and whether it is possible to get a better rate than £40 per day for nursery provision in Leeds. It was noted that this was asked for at a previous meeting and that the information was still required. This will be provided to members as quickly as possible through the scrutiny advisor.
- A member asked about possible impacts of the review on more disadvantaged areas of the city in terms of potential increased costs. The member was informed that ensuring that disadvantaged areas with vulnerable children will be a priority in terms of getting the process right and ensuring that working parents and carers are accessing the enhanced free childcare offer. In addition, the settings will be assessed on a case by case basis with SEND and deprivation factors key elements of the planned work.
- The Director added that the review of nursery provision is driven by budgetary pressure and the need to make savings and be financially sustainable. In 2022/23 nurseries overspent by approaching £2m in 2023/24 it was £840K which highlights the efficiencies made but there is still a need to make savings to meet the financial challenge. It was noted that no one wants to take these difficult decisions, but the budgetary pressure has left no other options.
- In response to a question on the market sounding exercise members were informed that this was an open process to determine what interest there was in the settings in the market. This revealed that there was significant interest from a variety of backgrounds including third, education and private sectors. The next stage will be formal with tighter questions and more detail expected on fees, workforce development and meeting the needs of those with additional needs. Parents and carers will also play a part with their priorities built into the process and potentially some involvement or influence over the provider that is chosen, albeit that final decision will rest with council officers.
- In terms of partnership working the Board were informed that this element of the process will ensure that alternative providers are experienced or able to work in partnership to deliver services as this is a key element of early years provision.

Resolved - The Board noted and commented on the report and the appendices on the Little Owls Nurseries Review.

(Proposed by Cllr Edwards, seconded by Cllr Thomson and supported unanimously)

67 The Leeds 3As Strategy - Update

The Board received a report from the Director of Children and Families that presented an update on the refreshed 3A's plan 2024-2026 following previous consideration by the Board in November 2023.

In attendance for this item were:

- Councillor Helen Hayden, Executive Member for Children and Families
- Julie Longworth, Director of Children & Families
- Dan Barton , Deputy Director – Learning
- Rebecca McCormack, Head of Service Vulnerable Learners

The Executive Member for Children and Families introduced the report which focused on Attendance, Attainment and Achievement and was launched in the Summer Term. The plan has five priorities: communication, language and literacy, attendance, SEND and wellbeing and transition to positive post-16 destinations. It was also noted that further information can be found on the Leeds for Learning website.

The Deputy Director for Learning emphasised that this is a system piece of work with key contributions from the Council but with contributions and delivery responsibility with the Leeds system overall.

In response to comments and questions from the Board, the following areas were discussed:

- Members asked about post 16 provision at level 2 in outer areas of the city and also transport challenges. In response the meeting heard that the January meeting of the Board will consider further education in more detail through a dedicated report. In terms of sufficiency challenges and balance of placements across the city, the authority has been successful in securing 900 additional places, funded through the DfE, for the 2025/26 academic year.
- In respect of transport challenges, it was acknowledged that a lot of the Level 1 and 2 provision is located in the city centre which creates challenges for those in outer areas accessing the places. Work is developing on provision in outer areas in collaboration with partners in the FE sector.
- In response to a question on universal free literacy training in early years settings and how this might be extended outside of statutory settings such as into faith and belief settings, the Board heard that language and literacy was selected as a priority because of the impact of covid on children and young people coming through settings and who had been impacted by the pandemic in terms of language and literacy. Opportunities to spread awareness through faith settings was considered to be a potentially positive idea and could be developed to increase the reach of the free offer, which is available to all registered early years provision. This will be taken away to potentially develop.

- The Board discussed 100% attendance rewards and certificates and whether the Council should encourage this given the possible impact on students who suffer from illness and those who have a disability that impacts their attendance rates. The Board heard that the commitment is to make every school day count and that school is hugely important and a protective factor for children and young people. Attendance is encouraged but there is an awareness that for some it is not possible due to health conditions or disability, and it can be difficult to balance messaging on attendance. It was noted that there is a difference between classes receiving awards as a whole and how that can be divisive, and individuals receiving a reward. Members highlighted the positives of rewarding individual attendance for those who attend school every day and the legal requirements on the local authority to drive up attendance levels. It was noted that for those who do not achieve academically it can be a real achievement to attend school every day and that it should be celebrated whilst acknowledging those who cannot always be there for health issues or disability.
- The Board asked about Priority 3, Actions 4 and 5 on EHCP needs assessments and progress made on EHCP backlogs linked to the concurrent changes to Funding For Inclusion (FFI) and possible impacts on capacity in the system to conduct needs assessments. In response the Board heard about the additional resource to deal with backlogs which includes both educational psychologists and plan writing resource. 240 backlog cases have gone out to the additional resource to be assessed with more than 40 now returned which have gone through the multi-agency decision making panel and now back to the plan writers to be finalised. In terms of seeing the impact of this work this will start to come through in around 5 weeks' time with some of the children being allocated with completed plans.
- It was noted that communication to parents, carers, SENCOs and schools can be more proactive, particularly to settings around expected timescales and this will be done to ensure that all stakeholders are fully informed.
- In terms of FFI this work has commenced with a commitment to ensure that if an assessment has not been done, and the resource is not ready, then the FFI model will continue with the existing resource still in place.
- Members asked about the multi-agency partnership meetings and decision making panel and whether this will be a possible bottleneck in the process. Members were assured that the panel is working effectively and whilst members of the panel are working extremely hard, they are making decisions speedily albeit with a commitment to extensive reading and work outside of the meetings themselves.

Resolved – The Chair noted that this item does not have an action in the recommendations other than to discuss the issues presented. However, it was noted that this item will be brought back to the Board in the future including with information on how much of the backlog has now been addressed.

68 Work Programme

The Board considered the Scrutiny Board's work programme for the 2024/25 municipal year.

The Principal Scrutiny Adviser introduced the report setting out the Work Programme at Appendix 1 and September Executive Board minutes at Appendix 2 for member comments.

As part of discussion on this it was agreed that a working group will be formed in the New Year to discuss youth violence and youth criminal justice in more detail, to include consideration of mental health and the impact it has in this area.

Resolved - Members noted the Board's work programme for the 2024/25 municipal year and agreed to the forming of a working group on youth violence and youth criminal justice in 2025.

In addition to this the Chair informed the Board that as part of the responsibility that the School Organisation Advisory Board (SOAB) had to consider objections in relation to statutory notices on school organisation matters, in line with established process, he had received details of two objections in relation to the rebuild and expansion of the Broomfield South SILC and the establishment of a permanent satellite site at Arlington Business Park.

The procedure for considering objections of this nature sets out that, following consultation with the Executive Member and subject to the Board's views on the objections, the Board could consider them in detail at an extraordinary meeting except where the objections relate to planning and highways matters, which are dealt with separately through the planning process.

Following a briefing with the Executive Board Member for Children and Families prior to the meeting, in line with the established procedure, to consider the objections it was the view of the Chair that the objections fall within the remit of the planning process and can be dealt with through objections and the established planning process.

Board members had been supplied with details of the objections in advance of the meeting and in line with process were asked to make any comments on this matter. None were made.

Resolved – That the objections received relate purely to planning matters and therefore do not fall within the scope of the scrutiny board to consider under outstanding duties retained from the SOAB arrangements.

(This was proposed by Cllr Cohen, seconded by Cllr Jones and agreed unanimously.)

69 Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Children and Families Scrutiny Board is scheduled for Wednesday 29 January 2025 at 10.00am (pre-meeting for all Board Members at 9.45am).