

SCRUTINY BOARD (CHILDREN AND FAMILIES)

THURSDAY, 13TH DECEMBER, 2012

PRESENT: Councillor J Chapman in the Chair

Councillors B Gettings, C Gruen,
A Hussain, A Khan, A Lamb, M Rafique,
K Renshaw and B Urry

Co-opted Members (Voting) – E A Britten, A Craven and J Ward

Co-opted Members (Non Voting) – C Foote, C Raftery, S Hutchinson,
T Kayani and J Morris-Boam

81 **Late Items**

No formal late items of business were added to the agenda however the following supplementary documents had been despatched to the Board:
Item 8 Financial Health & Budget proposals – a copy of a letter dated 7th December 2012 sent to Mr M Gove, Secretary of State for Education from the Leaders of the three main political groups on Leeds City Council in respect of Early Intervention Funding (minute 86 refers)
Item 10 Children's Social Work: Improvement Plan – Appendix B of the report (minute 88 refers)

82 **Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests**

There were no declarations of interest

83 **Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P Latty and Sobel and also from Ms N Cox (Parent Governor Representative)

84 **Minutes - 8th November 2012**

Minute 72 – The Board noted a request to delete reference to the declaration of interest recorded in the minutes as Councillor Urry stated he was not a Governor of Roundhay St Johns C of E School

RESOLVED – That, subject to a revision to minute 72 to read “there were no declarations of interest”, the minutes of the meeting held 8th November 2012 were agreed as a correct record

85 **The Implications of Academies for the Local Authority and Education in General**

The Board received the report of the Director Children's Services in response to a request to provide information on the impact of academy school developments upon the work of the Local Authority and education in general. The report set out the current position in the primary and secondary school phases both in Leeds and nationally and provided details on how academies differ from local authority maintained schools, associated corporate implications and raised awareness to the Board for other options for structural change of schools

Minutes approved as a correct record
at the meeting held on Thursday, 17th January, 2013

The Board welcomed Councillor J Blake, Executive Member for Children's Services and the following officers to the meeting to present the report:
Mr N Richardson, Director of Children's Services
Ms I Atraszkiewicz – Lead officer, Schools Facing Challenging Circumstances
Ms G Webb – Head of Learning Improvement

Details were provided in respect of Government Policy which supports academisation, the number of schools in Leeds and the proportion of those which were Academies, (219 Primary Schools, including 6 Academies and 38 Secondary Schools including 8 Academies) and academy types.

(Councillor Khan joined the meeting at this point)

The following key issues were discussed:

Information and data sharing – highlighting the need to encourage academy schools to provide relevant data to the authority

The Freedoms afforded to academies to determine curriculum and the length of school day and whether there was any evidence to suggest that academies employed curriculums which were significantly different from the National Curriculum; and whether this improved performance and outcomes for the pupils

Funding and resources – in terms of conversion costs, the Board was aware that Academy Schools were funded directly from Central Government however were surprised to learn the associated costs to the Local Authority (LA) of the conversion process and the fact that a schools' deficit budget balance was assumed by the LA, but a surplus balance was carried forward to the new Academy. Members were pleased to note that officers were in discussions with the DofE regarding the possibility of reclaiming some of the costs of conversion and also to request a percentage of the £25k funding given to schools which have achieved academy status towards conversion costs.

In terms of Services - Academy Schools could engage with the open market.

Members were pleased to note that Children's Services had established a strong service delivery and marketing position with the Leeds academies

In terms of the impact on clusters – Academy Schools could choose whether to sign up to the local cluster partnerships which could have an impact on cluster funding

(Councillor Hussain joined the meeting at this point and Councillor Khan withdrew for a short while)

Policies and Admissions – the need for Academy Schools to fully participate with the LA in terms of school admissions, Fair Access and Exclusions policies

Land and Buildings – the status of land and buildings utilised by Academy Schools and schools with Trust status

Leeds Sponsors - the aims and philanthropic/business background of the Leeds external sponsors

Partnership Working – the links established with the academies and the 8 Leeds Academy sponsors. A sponsor network had been established to promote partnership working.

The Board agreed that further investigation was required in order to assess the impact of school status changes on children and the community, and agreed to incorporate further scrutiny of Academy Schools into the Work Schedule for the new Municipal Year

RESOLVED –

- a) That the information contained within the report be noted.
- b) That, Children’s Services officers are requested to undertake further investigations which take into account all options for schools considering or being expected to consider becoming an academy and the impact upon the school and the wider community that it serves in order to:
 - appreciate the full implications of costs and resources on Leeds Children’s Services
 - inform the development of a comprehensive Leeds position statement on structural change that guides improvements in schools’ standards and effectiveness and meets the needs of all young people educated in Leeds.
- c) That a further session to consider the outcome of investigations as detailed above relating to Academy Schools be incorporated within the Scrutiny Board Work Schedule, to commence early in the New Municipal Year

86 Financial Health and Budget Proposals 2013/14 - Children's Services

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report advising the Board of the financial health of Children’s Services after seven months of the current 2012/13 financial year. The report also presented the initial 2013/14 budget proposals relevant to this Scrutiny Board which were due to be considered by Scrutiny Board (Resources and Council Services) on 17th December 2012. Observations and comments from the Board were sought which could be reported to Executive Board in due course where the final decision would be made.

The following officers attended the meeting to present the report:

Mr N Richardson – Director, Children’s Services

Mr N Warren – Head of Finance, Children’s Services

Mr S Darby – Team Leader, School Funding and Initiatives

The following key issues were noted:

- The department had maintained a balanced budget and was in a stronger position than the same period last year
- The budget challenges ahead in terms of maintaining service delivery and the initiatives to mitigate against the likely impact of the local government financial settlement
- The intention of central government to directly fund all schools by 2015 and the impact of the national schools funding formula

The Board raised concerns in respect of the involvement of Private/Voluntary sector in service provision, the funding available to them and the impact of budget constraints on youth service provision and transport services,

(Councillor Khan withdrew from the meeting for a short while at this point)

The Board noted receipt of a letter dated to Mr M Gove, Secretary of State for Education in respect of cuts to the Early Intervention Grant. Referring to the letter, Members went on to discuss the impact of the loss of this funding alongside the implementation of the Welfare Reform changes and the impact this would have on those families and children in greatest need.

In conclusion the Board thanked officers for the approach taken in presenting the information contained in the report

RESOLVED –

- a) To note the projected financial position of Children's Services after seven months of the financial year 2012/13
- b) To note the contents of the initial 2013/14 budget proposals relevant to the Scrutiny Board's portfolio
- c) To note the reformed school funding arrangement for 2013/14

(Ms T Kayani left the meeting at this point)

87 Quarter 2 Performance Report 2012/13

The Assistant Chief Executive (Customer Access and Performance) and Director of Children's Services submitted a report presenting a summary of the Quarter 2 performance data for 2012/13 which also provided an update on the progress made in delivering the relevant priorities in the Council Business Plan 2011-15, the Children and Young People Plan 2011 -15 and the City Priority Plan 2011 -15.

Mr N Richardson, Director of Children's Services; and Mr P Storrie, Head of Performance and Improvement attended the meeting and highlighted the overall positive progress made throughout the Department and the following key points:

- Improvement in Primary school attendance figures
- Reduction in the number of Looked After Children
- Information provided in respect of young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs)
- Information provided in respect of Children's Homes Inspections

In response to a query regarding complaint response times, it was noted that the statistics reflected the complexity of complaints made due to the variety of services the Department provided

RESOLVED – To Note the contents of the Quarter 2 performance report and the issues highlighted

(Councillor Renshaw withdrew from the meeting at this point)

88 Children's Social Work: Improvement Plan

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report in order for the Board to consider and identify areas of work which could provide support and challenge to the "Supporting Children, Strengthening Social Care" Action Plan. The Action Plan set out the next phase of improvement within the Children's Social Care and Safeguarding Service.

Mr S Walker, Deputy Director, Safeguarding, Specialist and Targeted Services, attended the meeting to respond to queries, with Councillor J Blake and Mr N Richardson

The Board noted the Action Plan set out the progress made and key priorities for the Service and agreed that a review of this area of work would be appropriate. The following matters were highlighted:

- The work undertaken by the Department to audit cases dealt with since January 2012 and the assurance that monitoring was undertaken regularly. The intention to present updated progress information to a future Board meeting to enable Members to undertake scrutiny of the process was noted.
- The number of social workers and issues in respect of recruitment of new and retention of existing staff. It was noted that the reliance on agency social workers had reduced

In response to a query regarding the consultation performance data, the Board received assurance that the Action Plan had ensured the idea of "voice and influence" for children and young people was promoted, however the Department needed to better articulate the work undertaken, achievements and outcomes in the future.

RESOLVED –The Board considered where work could be undertaken to support and challenge the "Supporting Children, Strengthening Social Care" Action Plan and noted the intention to present audit information to a future Board meeting to enable Members to undertake scrutiny of the process

89 Recommendation Tracking - External Placements

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report setting out the progress made in responding to the recommendations arising from a previous Scrutiny review of External Placements, published on 28th February 2012.

The tracking system affords Members the opportunity to monitor progress and identify completed recommendations. Appendix 2 of the report provided details of the progress made in responding to the recommendations made during the Scrutiny review for Members consideration. The Board noted the current Status of the recommendations and no changes to the proposed recommendation status were proposed.

Mr S Walker, Deputy Director, Safeguarding, Specialist and Targeted Services, attended the meeting to respond to queries, with Mr N Richardson and Councillor J Blake.

The Board discussed the following:

- The timescale for improvement on those recommendations indicated as Status level 4, noting that a further Tracking report would be presented in due course when the recommended Status levels could be reconsidered
- The reported decrease in the number of looked after children in external residential placements
- The fact that several external foster carers had applied to join the Leeds Foster Carers Service, and that such applications were being fast tracked

RESOLVED – To note the contents of the Tracking report and to

- a) Agree to those recommendations as set out in the report which no longer require monitoring
- b) Note those recommendations where satisfactory progress has been identified

90 Recommendation Tracking - Improving School Attendance

The Scrutiny Adviser presented a setting out the progress made by Children's Services in responding to the recommendations arising from the previous Scrutiny review of Improving School Attendance, published in April 2012. Appendix 2 of the report detailed the progress made through the responses for consideration.

Ms J Andrew, West North West Area Head of targeted Services attended the meeting to respond to queries, with Mr N Richardson and Councillor J Blake

Ms Andrew provided additional information in respect of the Family First Initiative which had enabled the service to improve information sharing with neighbouring authorities. The Board noted the progress made in respect of recommendation 9 (engaging with neighbouring local authorities) and agreed the revision of this target from Status 3 to Status 1 – no further monitoring required

RESOLVED – To note the contents of the Tracking report and to

- c) Agree to those recommendations as set out in the report which no longer require monitoring
- d) Note those recommendations where satisfactory progress has been identified

91 Work Schedule

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report which detailed the Work Schedule for the Board for the remainder of the Municipal Year. The report included minutes of the Executive Board held 7th November 2012 for Members consideration along with the List of Forthcoming Key Decisions covering the period 10th September to 3rd December 2012

The Principal Scrutiny Adviser highlighted the additions made to the schedule at this meeting in respect of:

- The implications of Academies for the Local Authority and education in general – further work to be scheduled after June 2013

- Children's Social Work Improvement Plan – report from the Director of Children's Services on the monitoring progress.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the contents of the draft Work Schedule, including the addition of a Scrutiny Inquiry "Implications of Academies" and a report monitoring Children's Social Work cases, be approved
- b) That the copy of the Executive Board minutes dated 7th November 2012 and the List of Forthcoming Key Decisions covering the period 10th September to 3rd December 2012 be noted

92 Date and Time of Next Meeting

RESOLVED – To note the date and time of the next meeting as Wednesday 17th January 2013 at 9.45 (with a pre-meeting at 9.15am)

(The meeting concluded at 12:20 pm)