

SCRUTINY BOARD (CHILDREN'S SERVICES)

THURSDAY, 17TH JANUARY, 2008

PRESENT: Councillor W Hyde in the Chair

Councillors C Campbell, J Elliott, R D Feldman,
R Harington, A Lamb, B Lancaster, T Murray and
K Renshaw

CO-OPTED MEMBERS (VOTING):

Mr E A Britten	- Church Representative (Catholic)
Mr I Falkingham	- Parent Governor Representative (Special)
Prof P H J H Gosden	- Church Representative (Church of England)
Mrs S Knights	- Parent Governor Representative

CO-OPTED MEMBERS (NON-VOTING):

Ms C Foote	- Teacher Representative
Mrs S Hutchinson	- Early Years Development & Childcare Partnership Representative
Ms J Morris-Boam	- Leeds Voice Children and Young People Services Forum Representative

78 Chair's Opening Remarks

The Chair welcomed all in attendance to the January meeting of the Scrutiny Board for Children's Services. The Chair also wished to place on record his thanks to Councillor J Chapman who had previously served as a Member on the Board and wished her every success in her new role as Chair of the Scrutiny Board for Health and Adult Social Care.

79 Exclusion of the Public

The Chair reported that appendices 1 and 2 of agenda item 8 in respect of the David Young Community Academy – Confirmed Permanent Exclusions – was considered exempt, although it was not considered that the item would be dealt with in exempt session.

80 Declaration of Interests

Councillor Murray declared a personal interest in relation to agenda items 9 and 10 entitled 'Services for 8-13 Year Olds' and 'Education Standards Inquiry' on the basis of being Chief Executive of Learning Partnerships (Minute No's. 85 and 86 refer).

Further declarations of interest were made at later points in the meeting (Minute No's. 84 and 85 refer).

81 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted by Mr T Hales and at the meeting on behalf of Ms T Kayani and Councillors S Hamilton and J Langdale.

82 Minutes of Last Meeting - 6th December 2007

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 6th December 2007 be approved as a correct record.

83 Minutes of Overview and Scrutiny Committee

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings held on 6th November 2007 and 11th December 2007 be noted.

84 David Young Community Academy

Further to Minute No. 60, 8th November 2007, when the Board received a report in relation to how the David Young Community Academy fitted into the provision of children's services in Leeds, the Board considered issues raised within the various briefings, which had been submitted together with a note of the Board's discussion in November 2007 and a report produced by Education Leeds. Ros McMullen, Principal of the David Young Community Academy (DYCA) was in attendance at the meeting to provide information about the DYCA and highlight some of the key issues, which it was intended would address some of the Board's previous concerns.

The Principal of the Academy informed the Board that the DYCA had 'started from a blank piece of paper' and had developed a unique approach to the curriculum, focussing on vocational and academic opportunities and introducing a 3 year Key Stage 4 programme.

Some of the main issues discussed were as follows:

Admissions

- The Board was informed that DYCA was exempt from accepting in-year admissions during its first full two years of operation due to the potential de-stabilising effect. The Board noted that the exemption ceased to apply after 31st August 2008. Members also noted that the DYCA had admitted a number of unaccompanied asylum seekers as in-year admissions.

Exclusions

- Members of the Board expressed concern regarding the high number of permanent exclusions and the effect that transferring students had on the other schools in the area.

Support for Learning

- The Board was advised that the DYCA provided a professional pastoral support system, referred to as 'support for learning', which considered the whole needs of the students and relied on a dedicated staff of Team Leaders. Members were interested in the success of this approach compared to those mentoring systems being adopted by other high schools and including all staff.

Supporting students

- The Board acknowledged that DYCA had a large number of challenging students, including many that had been excluded from predecessor schools and some that had not attended school for a long time.

School Year and Timetable

- It was reported that DYCA had introduced a shift in the start of their school year, from September to June, which was different to other schools in the community.
- The Board considered the effect this had on parents who had children that attended a school with different arrangements.
- It was acknowledged that free-time was only provided to students when a high level of supervision could be maintained.

Targets

- The Board considered that DYCA had set some challenging targets, in particular the target for all students to achieve 5 GCSE's at A*-C (not including Maths and English) by 2011. The Board also considered interim projections.

Other Issues and Comments

- The Principal of the Academy invited Members of the Board to visit DYCA at the start of the academic year to talk to new pupils about the transition process.

(Councillor Lancaster declared a personal interest in this item due to her being Vice-Chair of Carr Manor High School)

85 SCRUTINY INQUIRY – Services for 8-13 Year Olds

Further to Minute No.76, 6th December 2007, the Board received a report from the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development, which requested the Board to consider whether it had sufficient information to complete its Inquiry into services for 8-13 year olds in Leeds.

Appended to the report were the agreed terms of reference for the Inquiry. In addition, Members also considered information in relation to notes of the visits that had been undertaken, and 2 case studies from extended schools.

Sally Threlfall, Acting Chief Officer for Early Years and Youth Service, and Salena Riley, Cluster Manager for Education Leeds, attended the meeting to discuss emerging issues and respond to Members' questions.

The Chair invited Mr Britten to update the Board on some of the recent visits that had taken place with relevant service providers. The Board noted the findings and the range of activities that had taken place.

Some of the main areas of debate were as follows:

Access to Services

- Members noted the lack of available transport provision for 8-13 year olds. It was stated that public transport for older children should be safe and accessible.

Funding

- The Board was advised that funding was required to help develop services to meet children's needs.
- Members considered various funding options, including the Children's Fund and the Sure Start grant.

Information

- Members discussed information and publicity relating to the range of services available for 8-13 years olds and the importance of keeping the information up to date.

The Principal Scrutiny Advisor summarised the main issues, which the Board had considered. It was reported that the next step would involve producing a draft Inquiry report, which would be considered at the meeting in March.

In conclusion, the Chair thanked Sally Threlfall and Salena Riley for attending the meeting and for their contribution to the Inquiry.

RESOLVED – That the Board note the emerging conclusions and recommendations and that these be reflected in the draft report of the Board's Inquiry.

(Mr Falkingham declared a personal interest in this item due to being a Parent Governor of North West SILC Parents Forum)

86 Education Standards Inquiry

Further to Minute No. 74, 6th December 2007, a report was submitted by the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development, which requested the Board to consider the issues raised by the first session of the Inquiry.

Appended to the report were the draft terms of reference for the Inquiry, together with a report in relation to Education Standards and other supporting information.

The Board was provided with an overview of the main developments and challenges associated with young people at risk of not engaging in education, employment or training.

Gary Milner, 14-19 Strategy Co-ordinator, together with Dorothy Smith and Mary Brittle from Education Leeds and Cristina George, Learning and Skills Council, Area Director for Leeds, attended the meeting to present information and respond to Members' questions and comments. Members were particularly referred to Appendix 3 - Leeds NEET Strategy (2007-2010) and Appendix 4, which contained information relating to the destinations of Year 11 leavers.

The main issues discussed were as follows:

- The volatile nature of the NEET group at this age.
- Members noted the greater use of vocational qualifications and the positive impact this had had on students disengaged with the traditional academic curriculum.
- The Board discussed targets for Maths and English and incorporating elements of it through the vocational curriculum.

The Chair advised that the next step would involve Members of the Board undertaking visits with relevant service providers and reporting back to the Board. Professor Gosden, Mr Britten, Ms Foote, Councillors A Lamb and B Lancaster agreed to assist with this.

RESOLVED – That the Board note the issues raised at the first session of the Inquiry.

87 Leeds Strategic Plan

Further to Minute No. 45, 11th October 2007, the Board considered a report on the Revised Draft Strategic Plan. The Plan had been submitted in order for the Board to see how its comments had been taken into account.

Appended to the report was a summary of the comments made by the Scrutiny Board together with the Revised Draft Strategic Plan and Council Business Plan: Outcomes and Priorities and the Leeds Strategic Plan – Consultation report.

Jane Stageman, Senior Project Manager, and Heather Pinches, Performance Manager, attended the meeting to update the Board and answer Members' questions.

The main areas of debate were as follows:

- The Board expressed concern that there was no explicit reference to the 'Every Child Matters' agenda and improved outcomes for Looked After Children.
- The Board suggested strengthening the referencing in both these areas.

The Performance Manager introduced the Draft Council Business Plan 2008-11, which set out the business outcomes and improvement priorities for the next three years. Members' views and comments were sought. It was agreed that the Principal Scrutiny Advisor would e-mail all Members of the Board with the information and that Members would respond with their views and comments at their earliest convenience.

RESOLVED -

- a) That subject to the above comments the Board notes the revised strategic outcomes and improvement priorities for the Leeds Strategic Plan.
- b) That the Draft Council Business Plan 2008-11 be forwarded to Members for further consideration.

88 Work Programme

A report was submitted by the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development, which detailed the Scrutiny Board's work programme for the remainder of the municipal year.

Appended to the report was the current version of the Board's work programme, an extract from the Forward Plan of Key Decisions for the period 1st January 2008 to 30 April 2008, which related to the Board's remit together with the minutes from the Executive Board meeting held on 19th December 2007.

The Principal Scrutiny Advisor reported an amendment that the Leeds Strategic Plan would next be considered at the meeting to be held on 13th March, 2008 and not 14th February, 2008 as previously stated.

RESOLVED – That subject to the amendment above, the Board’s Work Programme, as appended to the report, be approved.

89 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Thursday, 14th February 2008 at 10.00 am in the Civic Hall, Leeds.
(Pre-meeting scheduled for 9.30 am)

(The meeting concluded at 12.45 pm)