

Report of Head of Democratic Services

Report to Scrutiny Board (Children and Families)

Date: 9th September 2020

Subject: Scrutiny Inquiry into Exclusions, Elective Home Education and Off-rolling – summary of evidence to-date.

Are specific electoral wards affected? If yes, name(s) of ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Has consultation been carried out?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Will the decision be open for call-in?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, access to information procedure rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1 Last year the Children and Families Scrutiny Board commenced an Inquiry into Exclusions, Elective Home Education and Off-rolling. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic emergency, the Board's Inquiry work has now paused temporarily.
- 1.2 This report presents a summary of evidence reflecting the position reached by the Scrutiny Board as part of this Inquiry, which will also be a helpful reference document once a suitable timeframe for resuming the Board's inquiry work has been agreed.

2. Background information

- 2.1 During its October 2019 meeting, the Children and Families Scrutiny Board received a report from the Director of Children and Families setting out national concerns regarding the rising level of exclusions and elective home education (EHE) numbers, as well as reflecting the position in Leeds linked to school based data.
- 2.2 The Board particularly acknowledged the national focus surrounding the issue of exclusions, EHE and off-rolling, which stemmed from the findings of national reviews undertaken by the former Minister of Children, Edward Timpson, and the Children's Commissioner, Anne Longfield.
- 2.3 As well as welcoming the national focus surrounding the issue of exclusions, elective home education and off-rolling, the Scrutiny Board acknowledged the Council's own commitment towards addressing such matters as one of the eight priority areas within the new 3As Strategy. The Scrutiny Board therefore agreed to undertake further work

to assist in the effective delivery of the Council's own Strategy, as well as exploring whether Leeds as a city will be in a position to respond effectively to any future reforms and expectations stemming from the recent national reviews by Timpson and the School Commissioner.

- 2.4 Having agreed the terms of reference for this Inquiry in November 2019, the Board held two evidence gathering sessions during February and March 2020. While a further evidence session was being planned for April, the Board had also acknowledged the need to continue its Inquiry into the next municipal year.

3. Main issues

Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic

- 3.1 On 16 March 2020, in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council took the necessary step to cancel a number of planned meetings of various Committees, Boards and Panels. This included all Scrutiny Board meetings and any joint scrutiny arrangements where the Council acts as the lead authority.
- 3.2 With Council services focused on the urgent pandemic response and subsequent city recovery plan, the usual collaborative process of annual work programming for Scrutiny Boards was suspended. As public meetings of Scrutiny Boards began to recommence in June 2020, albeit remotely, each Board focused its attention on the ongoing progress made by the council working with partners and communities in response to the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic.
- 3.3 Throughout the 2020/21 municipal year, the Children and Families Scrutiny Board will be continuing to focus its attention on how the Council and its partners are working collaboratively to support all children and their families during such an unprecedented and difficult period. This has therefore resulted in the Board's Inquiry work being paused temporarily.
- 3.4 A summary of evidence document has been produced to reflect the position reached by the Scrutiny Board as part of this Inquiry. This is set out in Appendix 1. This will also be a helpful reference document once a suitable timeframe for resuming the Board's inquiry work has been agreed.

Research findings by the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA).

- 3.5 The Scrutiny Board had planned to use its meeting in April 2020 to primarily consider the research findings of the RSA (Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce) who had undertaken its own research on school exclusions, with Leeds City Council and local schools being key partners in this research project. The Board was informed that the findings of this research would be reflected in a report of the RSA, expected to be available on 16th March 2020. The RSA had also arranged to launch its report as part of a joint free event in Leeds on 19th March 2020. Scrutiny Board representatives were also invited to express an interest in attending this event.
- 3.6 While the RSA event and the Scrutiny Board's meeting on 1st April had been cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the RSA still published its research findings. A copy of the RSA report is therefore attached as Appendix 2 for the Board's

information and will remain a key part of the evidence base when the Board's Inquiry work does formally resume.

Determining a suitable timeframe for resuming the Board's inquiry work

- 3.7 The ongoing pandemic response and the city's initial recovery plan remain the primary focus for the Council as decisions taken during this period will have a substantial, long-term impact on communities, partnership arrangements and public services in Leeds. All Scrutiny Boards therefore remain committed to adding maximum value to the organisation during this unprecedented period of change and challenge, with a view to supporting a robust and resilient recovery.
- 3.8 While the Scrutiny Board also remains committed in completing its Inquiry work into issues surrounding exclusions, elective home education and off-rolling, the pandemic response has also clearly had a profound impact on local schools too and will continue to do so over the coming months as their primary focus remains on building the confidence of staff and families in managing an effective and safe return to school.
- 3.9 In view of this, it is proposed that the Scrutiny Board's Inquiry work is paused until at least January 2021 and for the position to be reviewed again at that stage to help identify a suitable timeframe for resuming this Inquiry.

4. Corporate considerations

4.1 Consultation and engagement

- 4.1.1 Appendix 1 provides a summary of the evidence gathering sessions held during February and March 2020 as part of the Board's Inquiry, which included the engagement of lead Executive Board Members, the Director of Children and Families and other senior officers and members of the Leeds Youth Council.

4.2 Equality and diversity / cohesion and integration

- 4.2.1 The publication of exclusions and elective home education data, coupled with challenging the practice of off-rolling puts a strong focus on protecting some of the most vulnerable children and young people in the city and ensuring they are being educated in the settings most appropriate to their needs.

4.3 Council policies and the Best Council Plan

- 4.3.1 Ensuring children and young people "do well at all levels of learning and have the skills they need for life" is a key outcome of the Best City Council Plan and improving Attendance, Attainment and Achievement levels amongst all children is the aim of the new 3As Strategy within Children and Families Directorate. To achieve these objectives, it is imperative that children and young people remain in school.
- 4.3.2 These priorities are also reflected in all city strategies contributing to a strong economy and compassionate city including the Best Council Plan 2018/19 – 2020/21, The Best City for Learning 2016-2020, the priority around being a Child Friendly City, Best Start in Life Strategy, Leeds SEND Strategy, the Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2016-2021 and Thriving - The Child Poverty Strategy for Leeds 2019-2022.

Climate Emergency

4.3.3 There are no specific climate emergency implications linked to this report.

4.4 Resources, procurement and value for money

4.4.1 This report has no specific resource implications.

4.5 Legal implications, access to information, and call-in

4.5.1 This report has no specific legal implications.

4.6 Risk management

4.6.1 This report has no specific risk management implications.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Due to the Covid-19 pandemic emergency, the Board's Inquiry work into Exclusions, EHE and Off-rolling has now paused temporarily. A summary of evidence reflecting the position reached by the Scrutiny Board as part of this Inquiry has been provided to Members, which will also be a helpful reference document once a suitable timeframe for resuming the Board's inquiry work has been agreed.

5.2 While the Scrutiny Board remains committed in completing its Inquiry work, the pandemic response clearly had a profound impact on local schools too and will continue to do so over the coming months as their primary focus remains on building the confidence of staff and families in managing an effective and safe return to school. In view of this, it is proposed that the Scrutiny Board's Inquiry work is paused until at least January 2021 and that the Board reviews the position again at that stage to identify a suitable timeframe for resuming this Inquiry.

6. Recommendations

6.1 That the Scrutiny Board:

- (a) Notes the content of this report and the summary of evidence document at Appendix 1;
- (b) Notes the content of the RSA research report at Appendix 2
- (c) Agrees to pause its Inquiry work until at least January 2021 and reviews the position again at that stage to identify a suitable timeframe for resuming this Inquiry.

7. Background documents¹

7.1 None.

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.