

SCRUTINY BOARD (CHILDREN AND FAMILIES)

WEDNESDAY, 9TH SEPTEMBER, 2020

PRESENT: Councillor A Lamb in the Chair

Councillors H Bithell, B Flynn, A Forsaith,
C Gruen, M Harland, C Howley, A Hussain,
J Illingworth, W Kidger, J Lennox,
A Marshall-Katung, K Renshaw and
R Stephenson

CO-OPTED MEMBERS (VOTING)

Mr E A Britten - Church Representative (Catholic)
Mrs K Blacker – Parent Governor Representative (Primary)
Ms J Ward – Parent Governor Representative (Secondary)

CO-OPTED MEMBERS (NON-VOTING)

Ms C Foote – Teacher Representative
Ms H Bellamy – Teacher Representative

19 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

There were no appeals.

20 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There were no exempt items.

21 Late Items

There were no late items.

22 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests.

23 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies were received from Councillor P Drinkwater, and co-opted members Andrew Graham, Debbie Reilly and Emma Holmes. Councillor M Harland was in attendance as substitute.

24 Minutes of Previous Meetings

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meetings held on 8 July 2020, at 11.00 a.m. and 1.00 p.m., be approved as an accurate record.

25 Coronavirus (COVID19) pandemic - Response and Recovery Plan

The Director of Children and Families submitted a report that presented an update on the ongoing progress made by Children and Families Services, working with partners and communities, in response to the unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic.

The following information was appended to the report:

- Early Years and Childcare Data
- New advice for children and young people who have been shielding

The following were in attendance:

- Cllr Jonathan Pryor, Executive Member for Learning, Skills and Employment
- Cllr Fiona Venner, Executive Member for Children and Families
- Sal Tariq, Director of Children and Families
- Julie Longworth, Deputy Director of Children and Families
- Sue Rumbold, Chief Officer, Partnerships and Health
- Val Waite, Head of Service Learning Inclusion
- Dave Clark, Head of Service Learning Improvement

The Executive Member for Children and Families introduced the report, noting the exceptional efforts of social care teams, childcare providers and youth workers throughout the pandemic. Members were also advised that in recent months the Council has received a significant increase in foster carer applications, a capacity increase that will support the anticipated increase of children looked after due to a number of confirmed additional placements for unaccompanied asylum seeker children in Leeds.

The Executive Member for Learning, Skills and Employment also noted his thanks to the support provided to children and families in a range of settings throughout the pandemic, particularly praising the efforts of school staff to prepare over the summer for the full reopening of schools at the beginning of the academic year. The Director of Children and Families advised that some phased reopening had been necessary due to positive COVID-19 cases, but confirmed that all schools will reopen fully on the week commencing 14th September 2020.

Members discussed a number of matters, including:

- *Attendance monitoring.* In response to a query, Members were advised that local arrangements have been put in place to monitor attendance across school settings in Leeds, which, along with the Governments' centralised system, will produce a clear data set and understanding. This information will be provided at the next meeting of the Board.

- *Shielded cohorts.* Members sought clarity in relation to shielded groups, whether they are being encouraged to return to school, or if not appropriate, the home learning packages made available to them. Members were advised that children who have health conditions that make them more vulnerable if they were to contract COVID-19, or have a family member who is shielding, are all assessed on an individual basis by a paediatrician and their GP and providing that their needs can be met and are considered as part of a risk assessment, many have been encouraged to return to school this September. Additionally, members of staff in schools who are part of a shielded cohort are able to return to school upon the completion of a comprehensive risk assessment.
- *Maintaining 'bubbles' in school transport for SILCs.* Members sought clarity on whether a 'bubble' is able to be maintained when transporting pupils to and from school. Members were advised that maintaining pupil 'bubbles' in their journey's to and from school remains a challenge, but provided assurance that in the few cases where this is not possible, social distancing measures and PPE are used.
- *Electronic equipment for home learning.* In response to a query, Members were advised that over 1200 donated and refurbished laptops have been delivered by social workers to families in need for home learning as part of a national scheme.
- *Increased demand for mental health services.* Members noted the expected increase in referrals for child and adolescent mental health services, and sought assurance that services are prepared for the rise. Members were advised that services provide information and resources online and to schools to support their learners, adapted to reflect the experiences of children throughout the pandemic, through programmes such as MindMate. It was also confirmed that notification had been received of a successful wellbeing return grant bid £96,277, which will be used to support the multi-agency working groups set up to build capacity within clusters, schools, early help hubs to build resilient communities, with a particular focus on training and upskilling staff to provide mental health support.

The Chair explained that the Board will be focusing its attention on the recovery planning of schools during its next meeting. Other suggested areas of priority for the Board to focus on included the implications and impact of Covid-19 on the Leeds Child Poverty Strategy and on the demand for mental health services for young people.

RESOLVED – That the contents of the report and appendices, along with Members comments, be noted.

Councillor C Gruen left the meeting at 11:30 a.m. during discussion of this item.

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

Draft minutes to be approved at the meeting
to be held on Wednesday, 7th October, 2020

The Head of Democratic Services submitted a report that presented a summary of evidence reflecting the position reached by the Scrutiny Board last year as part of its Inquiry into Exclusions, Elective Home Education and Off-rolling and to determine a suitable timeframe for resuming the Board's inquiry work.

The Principal Scrutiny Adviser introduced the report, noting that the pandemic had impacted a number of evidence gathering activities for the Board and therefore a decision was taken to pause the inquiry. As schools primary focus continues to be the safe return to school, resuming learning and pupil wellbeing, it was 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 the Inquiry.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the contents of the report and appendices, along with Members comments, be noted;
- b) That the Scrutiny Inquiry work be paused until at least January 2021;
- c) That the position be reviewed again in January 2021 to identify a suitable timeframe for resuming the Inquiry.

27 Work Schedule

The Head of Democratic Services submitted a report that invited Members to consider the Board's Work Schedule for the remainder of the current municipal year.

The Principal Scrutiny Adviser introduced the report and also highlighted that arrangements had been made to hold a remote working group meeting on 30th September 2020 linked to the Board's work surrounding budget saving proposals.

RESOLVED – That the work schedule for the remainder of the municipal year be noted.

28 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Wednesday, 7th October 2020 at 10.00 am (pre-meeting for all Board Members at 9.45 am)