

SCRUTINY BOARD (CHILDREN AND FAMILIES)

WEDNESDAY, 3RD FEBRUARY, 2021

PRESENT: Councillor A Lamb in the Chair

Councillors H Bithell, P Drinkwater,
B Flynn, A Forsaith, C Gruen, 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 H Bellamy - Teacher Representative
Ms C Foote – Teacher Representative
Mr C Dixon – Young Lives Leeds Representative
Ms D Reilly – Looked After Children / Care Leavers Representative

60 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

There were no appeals.

61 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There were no exempt items.

62 Late Items

There were no late items.

63 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary or other interests.

64 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies were received from co-opted member Andrew Graham.

65 Minutes - 6th January 2021

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 6th January 2021 be approved as an accurate record.

Matters arising

Minute 56 - Initial Budget Proposals for 2021/22

Further to the last meeting, it was noted that a 'phase 2' Scrutiny Statement had been produced in consultation with Scrutiny Chairs and now forms part of the latest Budget Report that has been prepared for the Executive Board's next meeting on 10th February 2021. The Chair then invited the Director of Children and Families to confirm the current position of the Children and Families directorate. Members were advised that no additional proposals or significant changes had been made by the directorate since the Board considered the budget proposals last month.

66 Coronavirus (Covid-19) Pandemic - Response and Recovery Planning Update

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 Covid-19 pandemic.

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
- Tim Pouncey, Chief Officer, Resources and Strategy
- Val Waite, Head of Service Learning Inclusion
- Dave Clark, Head of Service Learning Improvement
- Erica Hiorns, Senior Secondary Improvement Advisor

The Executive Member for Children and Families introduced the report, noting her thanks to those working to support children and families across the city during very challenging circumstances, and provided assurance that the directorate will continue to support the wellbeing of staff. Members were advised that Early Years providers have reported concerns about staff safety at work, and as a result, the Executive Members and the Leader of Council have written to Government on behalf of the sector, recommending that all provision is closed to most children in line with schools, and that all education staff are considered for the next phase of the vaccination programme.

The Executive Member for Learning, Skills and Employment highlighted continued conversations with schools, during which, schools have reported a greater number of parents requesting a place for their child on the grounds that they are a critical worker. This has led to concern from school leaders

that they cannot safely accommodate the high numbers of children whose parents require a place nor reduce the likelihood of transmission of the virus if large numbers of children remain in school. Additionally, schools have reported pupil anxiety around exams in 2022, which colleagues are working to address alongside the support for schools with assessments this academic year. The Executive Member recognised the recent media attention of the differential provision for free school meals during school closures and assured the Board that Leeds City Council is providing food support to all children living in food poverty in Leeds over February half term (this is around 35,000 children).

Members discussed a number of matters, including:

- *Vaccinations for school and early years staff.* Members recognised the importance of school and early years staff feeling safe whilst working, and sought more information on the recent request to Government seeking consideration of priority vaccination. Members were advised that in line with the scientific evidence, the request did not dispute that groups most at risk of fatality should remain top priority for vaccination. However, it was noted that education and child care staff are a relatively small cohort in comparison to the scale of the current vaccination roll-out, as well as the impact of transmission from schools to the wider community, and therefore should be considered as early as possible in the vaccination programme to enable educational settings to function more smoothly.
- *Resources for school staff and pupil mental health and wellbeing.* In response to a query, Members were advised that a number of initiatives were in place to support wellbeing in school for both staff and pupils, including online sessions with school leaders to provide tools for supporting their own workforces, working alongside health and wellbeing service and clusters to provide wrap-around care for pupils who are struggling, and recently launched teacher training with educational psychologists to support staff and pupil wellbeing.
- *Virtual curriculum offer.* In response to a query, Members were advised that remote learning packages have generally improved since the initial period of school closure in 2020, however it was recognised that quality of provision remains varied between schools. Related to this, Members were advised that a recent survey has indicated that the number of children across the city who do not have access to a personal device for remote learning could be as high as 10,000, and colleagues are working to urgently address this, utilising a range of funding schemes and support from local businesses.
- *Elective home education.* In response to a query, Members were advised that although there had been an initial rise during the pandemic of parents choosing to electively home educate their children, this trend has slowed down. It was noted that quality of education plans have improved for those who continue to electively home educate, and that attendance orders can be issued where appropriate due to safeguarding concerns.

- *Children's homes.* Members recognised the extreme challenge faced for staff working with some of the most vulnerable children in children's homes throughout the pandemic, and sought assurance that teams are supported in terms of their own wellbeing, as well as the children's. Members were advised that the wellbeing of children and staff in children's homes is a key priority, and teams are working closely with academic partners to develop innovative provision during periods of closure of schools and other services.
- *Support for Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) parents and their children.* Members were advised that a range of support is available for families, including additional online resource packages and delivery of materials for home learning, as well as virtual support sessions for parents. Members were also advised that early help hubs and short breaks service remain open for children with additional needs.
- *'Long Covid' and extended staff absences.* Members recognised the impact of extended staff absences due to the longer term health implications of Coronavirus on the children and families workforce. Members were assured that occupational health support is provided in such circumstances, and the impact continues to be assessed by HR.

At the end of the discussion, the Chair noted that the Board's views were reflected in the Council's submission to the recent Department for Education consultation on how GCSE, AS and A level grades should be awarded in summer 2021.

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

67 Leeds Child Poverty Strategy Update

The Director of Children and Families submitted a report, which presented a brief overview of 'Thriving – The Leeds Child Poverty Strategy'.

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
- Tim Pouncey, Chief Officer, Resources and Strategy
- Val Waite, Head of Service Learning Inclusion
- Dave Clark, Head of Service Learning Improvement

The Executive Member for Children and Families introduced the report, highlighting the summary of work set out in the report. Members were advised that pre-pandemic, there were approximately 34,000 children living in poverty in the city. It was also reported that the Children's Commissioner has estimated that, as a direct result of the pandemic, 300,000 additional children have been pushed into poverty nationally. Members were advised that

throughout the pandemic, the Child Poverty Impact Board have continued to develop the six work streams set out in the report and that a detailed update on the Strategy is scheduled for submission to the Executive Board in April 2021 and then again in October 2021.

Members discussed a number of matters, including:

- *Lead officer for child poverty.* It was confirmed that Julie Longworth had been appointed as the lead officer with responsibility for overseeing the child poverty agenda in Leeds, and that experienced leads have also been identified for each of the Child Poverty Impact Board's work streams across the Council.
- *Council housing.* Members recognised that a broader approach is necessary to improve the quality of life of the most deprived families in Leeds, and that good quality social housing is fundamental to this approach. Members were advised that the Council house building programme is ongoing and that good-quality affordable housing continues to be a key priority.
- *Climate emergency.* In response to a query, Members were advised that the climate emergency is a feature of all work streams and is recognised as essential to the whole child poverty agenda.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the contents of the report, along with Members comments, be noted;
- b) That a more detailed report be scheduled for consideration at the Scrutiny Board's meeting in September 2021 to enable the views of Scrutiny to be reflected as part of the planned update for the Executive Board in October 2021.

68 Work Schedule

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

RESOLVED – That the work schedule be approved.

69 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Wednesday, 3rd March 2021 at 10.00 am (pre-meeting for all Board Members at 9.45 am)