

SCRUTINY BOARD (CHILDREN AND FAMILIES)

WEDNESDAY, 26TH JANUARY, 2022

PRESENT: Councillor A Lamb in the Chair

Councillors P Carlill, E Flint, A Forsaith,
C Gruen, Z Hussain, J Illingworth, S Lay,
A Marshall-Katung, K Renshaw, L Richards
and R. Stephenson

CO-OPTED MEMBER (VOTING)

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

CO-OPTED MEMBERS (NON-VOTING)

Ms C Foote – School Staff Representative
Ms H Bellamy – School Staff Representative
Ms L Whitaker - Young Lives Leeds

35 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

There were no appeals against refusal of inspection of documents.

36 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There were no exempt items.

37 Late Items

There were no late items.

38 Declaration of Interests

No declarations of interests were made at the meeting.

39 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Bithell, Councillor Senior and Co-opted Members Kate Blacker and Andrew Graham.

Councillor Peter Carlill attended as substitute for Cllr Bithell.

40 Minutes - 3rd November 2021

RESOLVED – To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 3rd November as a correct record.

41 Ofsted Focused Visit Improvement Plan

The Director of Children and Families submitted a report to further update the Board on the implementation of the Improvement Plan that was put in place in response to the recommendations stemming from the Ofsted Focused Visit to Leeds back in July 2021.

Present at the meeting for this item were:

- Councillor Jonathan Pryor - Executive Member for Economy, Culture and Education
- Councillor Fiona Venner - Executive Member for Adult and Children's Social Care and Health Partnerships
- Sal Tariq - Director of Children and Families
- Julie Longworth - Deputy Director of Children and Families
- Ruth Terry - Chief Officer Social Work

The Executive Member for Adult and Children's Social Care and Health Partnerships gave a brief introduction, acknowledging that the Scrutiny Board had previously requested to be kept regularly updated on the implementation plan.

The Director of Children and Families also introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- That the Inspectors had found no areas of serious weakness but highlighted three areas for improved practice, as set out in paragraph 3 of the submitted report. These are addressed in the action plan and referenced as recommendations A, B and C.
- In response to recommendation A around the consistency and quality of assessments, it was highlighted that the training and development offer for social workers and social work managers had been reviewed and enhanced by a programme of learning, focusing on assessment skills, report writing and decision making. A new action learning programme has been developed to support consistency in audit, supervision and planning. The service has also commissioned Professor David Shemmings to undertake sessions based around new ideas on decision making for social work leaders and practitioners; producing analytical reports and records; and new insights for practitioners on assessments and decision making.
- In response to Recommendation B around the quality and impact of management oversight and supervision, an action plan has been established at Duty and Advice which ensures all contacts to the front door are reviewed if they do not have an outcome recorded within 24 hours. All decisions will be recorded immediately by team managers and compliance with this requirement is monitored by the service delivery manager for Duty and Advice.

- In response to Recommendation C around the quality and independence of audits, the social care quality assurance framework has been reviewed with actions taken to strengthen the cross auditing of work across teams and the moderation of audits.
- The percentage of strategy discussions where all three partners have contributed had also increased since July 2021 from 45% to 71%, with work continuing to increase this further.

In response to questions and comments raised by Board Members, the following information was provided:

- *Training* – This will be focused and in-depth, with impact of this learning remaining under constant review by Advanced Practitioners and managers at all levels, including the Leadership Team. It will also be supported by a specific piece of quality assurance work that will review case files and will include survey feedback from social workers, team managers as well as from children and their families.
- *Monitoring impact and outcomes* – To help monitor overall progress of impact and outcomes, a rolling programme of audit and moderation is also underway. This includes monthly case files audits by team managers and service managers in addition to a suite of thematic audits.
- *Multi-agency strategy discussions* – Strategic discussions take place with all agencies including Health and the Police and there is usually a consensus after debate. It was acknowledged that Health is particularly complex and while there is no single point of contact, work is on-going to understand what some of the key barriers are and to look at more effective and efficient processes moving forward.
- *Visit to the Front Door Service*. The Chair acknowledged the intention for members of the Scrutiny Board to also undertake a visit to the Front Door Service, which is to be arranged over the coming weeks.

RESOLVED - That the Scrutiny Board notes the reported actions of the focused visit improvement plan.

42 Performance report for the financial year 2020/21

The report of the Director of Children’s Services provided a summary of performance information relating to outcomes for Leeds children and young people.

In attendance for this item were:

- Councillor Jonathan Pryor - Executive Member for Economy, Culture and Education
- Councillor Fiona Venner - Executive Member for Adult and Children’s Social Care and Health Partnerships
- Sal Tariq - Director of Children and Families
- Julie Longworth - Deputy Director of Children and Families
- Shaheen Myers - Deputy Director of Learning
- Ruth Terry - Chief Officer Social Work

- Tim Pouncey - Chief Officer Resources and Strategy
- Val Waite - Head of Service, Learning Inclusion
- Chris Hudson - Performance Programme Manager, Intelligence and Policy Service

The Executive Member for Adult and Children's Social Care and Health Partnerships gave a brief introduction and particularly made reference to the number of Looked After Children, which has steadily increased since March 2021 but is also reflective of the national trend. It was highlighted that there are currently 1,333 children looked after, which is a rate of 78% per 10,000. Members were informed that there was an increase both locally and nationally in the number of adolescents coming into care who have complex and challenging needs, who are often survivors of trauma. In terms of planning for the future, this links to current 'invest to save' proposals around improving fostering and residential provisions.

The Executive Member for Economy, Culture and Education and the Director of Children and Families also highlighted the following points:

- While the service remains optimistic that exams will go ahead as planned this year, it is acknowledged that the level of disruption caused by Covid and previous lockdowns will likely have an impact on exam results.
- School staffing remains a challenge in terms of managing the impact of Covid and particularly. While no schools have had to close, it was highlighted that Head Teachers are under tremendous pressure in managing more of a mix of classroom teaching and remote learning for those pupils having to isolate. While rates linked to the Omicron variant are now starting to level out, the number of infected children in the under 12 age group is still relatively high.

Members discussed a number of matters, including:

- *Exams* – Responding to Members questions in relation to digital devices it was noted that each school has different plans in place for those young people who do not have access to digital devices. During lockdown work had been undertaken to ensure that each household had access to a digital device to access learning. It was acknowledged that catch up efforts in tackling lost learning during lockdown had not been as smooth as it could have been, due to staff and pupil absence through Covid. Linked to this, it was also acknowledged that GCSE's and AS exams were not at the same levels as they were a couple of years and that this needed to be addressed at a national level.
- *NEET – Not known figures* – In response to Members questions it was noted that the figures were gathered from a variety of sources, including schools, colleges and from other local authorities bordering the Leeds boundary. Relationships with careers leaders in school is ongoing and process mapping is taking place. The service is looking to recruit someone to co-ordinate this work. Members were advised that information is on the system for individuals and work on the data is being undertaken to support these young people and secure a positive

destination. The Board was also advised that figures for NEET were higher in the inner-city areas of the city.

- *ECHP* – It was noted that there was an increase in the number of applications for EHCP. It was acknowledged that many of the pupils going on to further education whether in colleges or staying at the same school for sixth form, were applying for a EHCP. Members were advised that where the pupil was applying and remaining at the same school, they had already been receiving FFI funding. However, in year 9 they are considering destination moves and to get the additional support they need from providers, colleges and external support outside the straight-forward school system they are required to have an EHCP. It was noted that Leeds has a higher number than nationally who require an EHCP to ensure they have the right support for which ever pathway they wished to choose.
- *Infant mortality* – In response to a question about why infant mortality rates remained high, the Board were informed that nationally the figure was higher. Reference was made to studies being associated with smoking and co-sleeping, which also had links to poverty and therefore it was noted that the Child Poverty Panel were due to look at this issue.
- *Attainment* – Reference was made to the attainment indicators set out in Appendix 3 of the report and the comparative figures with other local authorities. It was noted that although other authorities were doing better than Leeds, Leeds was still improving but not at the same rate as other local authorities. It was recognised that in terms of the progress measure, Leeds is doing well. It was also noted that the Council has a strong relationship with schools and academies who have worked with the Council in creating the 3A's Plan, which has been well received across the city. It was acknowledged that this policy was pragmatic and had key actions, which can show improvements as a service, the priorities that schools are currently facing and how this links into the Ofsted Framework.
- *CPD Training and educational gap filling* –It was recognised that in terms of Covid there will be gaps in children's education. It was noted that schools have different aspirations programmes and there are opportunities for children and young people to access these through careers guidance, bespoke or national training.
- *Parental involvement* – It was acknowledged that during the pandemic work had been done to ensure that each household had a digital device so children could access learning. However, there was concern that children and young people had not been encouraged to participate in learning and that the gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged had grown wider. It was noted that schools have their own catch-up programmes and there is a national tutoring programme too. The tutoring programme offers guidance to parents to identify gaps in education and on how it can be delivered.
- *Social skills* – It was recognised that many young people had missed out on social skills due to the pandemic. However, there was the opportunity for schools to engage with the service to look at an individual's needs. There were offers of support for social and emotional needs. It was recognised that young people going into

exams would require support not only with the leaning but also with their mental health.

- *Obesity in young people* – It was acknowledged that obesity in young people had increased with a higher number of these young people living in the inner-city areas. It was also noted there is family support through the Henry Programme.

RESOLVED – To note the content of the report.

43 Best City Ambition - Initial Proposals

The Head of Democratic Services submitted a report on the initial proposals for the Best City Ambition – which will be an externally facing and partnership focused approach, intended to replace the Best Council Plan.

In line with the provisions of the Budget and Policy Framework, the Best City Ambition proposals have been referred to Scrutiny for consideration and comment. The outcome of the deliberations of the five Scrutiny Boards will be reported to Executive Board in February to inform its consideration of the final proposals.

In attendance for this item were:

- Councillor Jonathan Pryor - Executive Member for Economy, Culture and Education
- Councillor Fiona Venner - Executive Member for Adult and Children's Social Care and Health Partnerships
- Sal Tariq - Director of Children and Families
- Simon Foy - Head of Intelligence and Policy

The Director of Children and Families gave a brief introduction and advised the Board that the Best City Ambition is not intended to be another strategy or detailed delivery plan which duplicates what is in place elsewhere. Instead, it aims to provide a clear direction of travel and contain a range of high level, aspirational and ambitious goals for Leeds, aligned to the three pillars of health and wellbeing, inclusive growth and zero carbon, and all contributing to efforts to tackle poverty and reduce inequality.

The Board was also advised that the three pillars will be underpinned by existing priorities and commitments linked to the Child Friendly Leeds Ambition and the Children and Young People's Plan in terms of ensuring children in all areas of the city have the best start in life and enjoy a healthy, happy and friendly childhood. These will be further supported and delivered through existing strategies and plans, such as the refreshed 3 As Strategy and Leeds Child Poverty Strategy, both of which were recently considered and supported by the Scrutiny Board.

Reference was made to the Health and Wellbeing Pillar of the Ambition reflecting the proposal for Leeds to become a Marmot City, with a particular focus on taking a Marmot approach to giving children the best start in life. While acknowledging that the proposal had recently been considered by the

Adults, Health and Active Lifestyles Scrutiny Board, a commitment was given to also engage with the Children and Families Scrutiny Board on this matter.

Members acknowledged that young people are now being educated more about the implications of climate change, with many feeling anxious and voicing their concern about the future of the environment. As such, the Board felt that the narrative surrounding the particular ambition around Zero Carbon should be strengthened and given more prominence in terms of reflecting the urgency of tackling climate change and Leeds working towards becoming carbon neutral by 2030.

Members also recommended that the Ambition references how, as a city, the issue of sexual harassment is being addressed, particularly with young people. Linked to this, the Board was pleased to note that the final version of the Ambition will include a greater focus around domestic violence and also broader community safety matters surrounding young people as this was also highlighted as a priority during the wider consultation process.

Members raised the issue of performance monitoring and welcomed the commitment to work with the Scrutiny Board around the development of a revised set of key performance indicators relevant to the Board's remit which will better reflect the strategic direction set out within the new Ambition.

Reflecting on its earlier Scrutiny inquiry around the Child Friendly Leeds Ambition, the Board acknowledged the importance of children and young people being able to express their views, feel heard and be actively involved in decisions that affect their lives. Members therefore sought assurance that the voice of young people will be captured as the Ambition continues to be developed, as well as part of the ongoing development of other key strategies and plans that underpin the Best City Ambition.

As with the Child Friendly City Ambition, Members also felt very strongly about ensuring there is cross-directorate and partnership working and ownership of the new Best City Ambition, as well as making further strides from being an ambition to be a child friendly city to making it a reality.

RESOLVED – That the contents of the report and the Board's discussions on the initial Best City Ambition proposals be noted and be reflected in the composite report by Scrutiny to Executive Board.

Cllr Gruen left the meeting at the end of this item at 12:30 pm

44 Financial Health Monitoring 2021/22 - October (Month 7)

The Head of Democratic Services submitted a report which invited Members to consider the report of the Chief Officer Financial Services presented to Executive Board on 15th December 2021, detailing the Council's projected financial health position for 2021/22 at the end of October (Month 7).

In attendance for this item were:

- Councillor Jonathan Pryor – Executive Member for Economy, Culture and Education
- Councillor Fiona Venner – Executive Member for Adult and Children’s Social Care and Health Partnerships
- Sal Tariq – Director of Children and Families
- Julie Longworth – Deputy Director of Children and Families
- Shaheen Myers – Deputy Director of Learning
- Ruth Terry – Chief Officer Social Work
- Tim Pouncey – Chief Officer Resources and Strategy

The Board supported the suggestion made by the Chair to consider this item in conjunction with agenda item 11 ‘Initial Budget proposals for 2022/2023’ (minute 45 refers).

RESOLVED – That the contents of the report and appendices be noted.

45 Initial Budget Proposals for 2022/23

The report of the Head of Democratic Services introduced the Executive Board’s initial proposals for 2022/23 for consideration, review and comment on matters and proposals that fall within the Scrutiny Board’s remit.

In attendance for this item were:

- Councillor Jonathan Pryor – Executive Member for Economy, Culture and Education
- Councillor Fiona Venner – Executive Member for Adult and Children’s Social Care and Health Partnerships
- Sal Tariq – Director of Children and Families
- Julie Longworth – Deputy Director of Children and Families
- Shaheen Myers – Deputy Director of Learning
- Ruth Terry – Chief Officer Social Work
- Tim Pouncey – Chief Officer Resources and Strategy

This matter was considered in conjunction with the Financial Health Monitoring report (minute 44 refers).

The Chair highlighted that while the Board had already been initially consulted on the budget proposals during December, today’s meeting provided a further opportunity for Members to raise any questions and to formally capture any particular views and any recommendations that the Board may wish to make to the Executive Board.

It was noted that any comments or recommendations made by the Scrutiny Board would inform a composite Statement by Scrutiny to be submitted to the Executive Board for consideration at its meeting on 9th February 2022.

The Chief Officer Resources and Strategy gave a brief introduction and in relation to the Financial Health report, had advised of one variation which was

the pay award of £1.4m in Children's Services. Members were also advised that the projected overspend would be around £9m, with £7m relating to payments for providers of care for external residential care or private fostering.

The Board discussed the proposed budget for 2022/23, acknowledging the increasing demography and consequential demand pressures for services in Children and Families as well as in Adults and Health. Linked to this, the Board noted and welcomed the significant budget increase to the Children and Families directorate in response to the significant demand, demographic and inflationary pressures on the budget.

The Board was briefed on the specific Service Review proposal that falls within its remit. This involves investing in fostering and residential provision to create increased in-house capacity for children and young people and reduce reliance on externally commissioned fostering and residential placements.

The Board was advised that this will be achieved by reviewing the existing payment and support structure for foster placements that can manage and support the needs of more complex children. This will include the introduction of a placement type at a higher rate of fees with the expectation of returning children from residential care to family-based living. In addition, four new residential hubs will also be established to provide care for up to 16 children and will also provide additional capacity to support children with higher level needs, which in turn will create capacity in the current 4 person homes for those young people who can manage this level of care.

As a Service Review proposal, the Board noted that this will be subject to consultation and that the Council will be actively engaging with stakeholders (young people, staff and foster carers) and with communities on the potential changes, with feedback reported back to the Executive Board prior to a final decision being made.

The Board also noted the relevant Business As Usual proposals which reflected operational cost savings of £0.5m across the Children & Families directorate for 2022/23 and one off savings of £100K for 2022/23 and 2023/24 associated with schools premature retirement and FE pension costs.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the budget proposals for 2022/23 as presented be noted.
- b) That the Board's comments are reflected as part of the Scrutiny submission to Executive Board for its consideration.

46 Work Schedule

The report of the Head of Democratic Services set out the forthcoming work schedule, with the latest version appended to the report at Appendix 1.

The Principal Scrutiny Adviser introduced the report and particularly highlighted the work items scheduled in February. In response to an earlier

suggestion made by Cllr Forsaith for the Board to undertake work linked to the Climate Emergency, it was proposed that the Board initially receives a briefing note from the Chief Officer Sustainable Energy and Climate Emergency surrounding existing and forthcoming initiatives that specifically involve or impact on children to enable Members to consider where the Scrutiny Board could potentially add further value as part of its future work programme.

At this point in the meeting, the Chair took the opportunity on behalf of the Board to express appreciation to the Board's previous Governance Officer, Harriet Speight, who had supported the Board for a number of years but had now left to take up a new role within the Council.

RESOLVED –

- (a) To note the report and the work schedule attached at Appendix 1.
- (b) That the Chief Officer Sustainable Energy and Climate Emergency be asked to provide a briefing note surrounding existing and forthcoming initiatives that specifically involve or impact on children, which will enable the Board to consider where it could potentially add further value as part of its future work programme.

47 Date and Time of Next Meeting

RESOLVED – To note the next meeting of the Children and Families Scrutiny Board will be on Wednesday 16th February 2022 at 10:00am (pre-meeting at 9:45am)

The meeting concluded at 12:45 pm