

SCRUTINY BOARD (CHILDREN'S SERVICES)

THURSDAY, 8TH JANUARY, 2009

PRESENT: Councillor W Hyde in the Chair

Councillors G Driver, J Elliott, R D Feldman,
B Lancaster, J McKenna, V Morgan, K Renshaw and
E Taylor

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)

CO-OPTED MEMBERS (NON-VOTING):

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

62 Chair's Opening Remarks

The Chair welcomed all in attendance to the January meeting of the Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) and wished everyone a Happy New Year. In particular, the Chair welcomed Alison Ormston, KPMG, who was leading the external audit review of the Scrutiny function at Leeds City Council.

63 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations made at this point, however declarations were made at later points in the meeting (Minute No. 68 refers).

64 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted by Councillor Cleasby and Mrs S Knights.

65 Minutes - 11th December 2008

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 11th December 2008 be confirmed as a correct record.

66 Request for Scrutiny

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report which invited the Board to consider a request for scrutiny, received from Mr Shaw, Chair of Governors at Meadowfield Primary School.

The Chair welcomed Mr Shaw to the meeting to present the request to the Board.

In brief summary, the main highlighted points in submitting the request were:-

- In light of Meadowfield Primary School's experiences, the Board was asked to consider whether there was an effective mechanism for dealing with complaints by schools about the local authority.
- Members agreed to set up a working group to review the evidence submitted by Mr Shaw before deciding on whether to recommend that the Scrutiny Board conduct an inquiry. Councillors Elliott, Feldman, Lancaster, McKenna and Renshaw and Mr Britten and Mr Falkingham expressed an interest in serving on the working group.
- It was suggested that representatives of Education Leeds and the Executive Member (Learning) could be invited to provide comment.

RESOLVED – That the Board establish a working group to consider the possibility of an inquiry and report back to a future meeting of the Board.

67 Safeguarding Children In Leeds: An Overview of our Leeds Safeguarding Children Board and the wider current context

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report which provided Members with an overview of safeguarding children in Leeds.

The following information was appended to the report:

- Leeds Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) – Annual Review (July 2008); and
- Annual Review of Business Plan 2007-2008.

The following officers attended the meeting and responded to Members' questions and comments:

- Rosemary Archer, Director of Children's Services;
- Brian Gocke, Leeds Safeguarding Children Board Manager; and
- Judith Dodd, Chair – Leeds Safeguarding Children Board.

An overview of the key points detailed within the report was provided and the main areas of discussion were as follows:-

- Concern that the area of responsibility for safeguarding children had widened, and the consequent impact on the core duty of child protection.

- Concern regarding the recent Annual Performance Assessment (APA) statement on safeguarding.
- Recent national developments and the need for checks against current demands.
- The need to know more about what is being done in practice, pressures facing frontline staff, workloads and individual cases, etc.
- The role of the Leeds Safeguarding Children Board, particularly in terms of monitoring the effects of current practices, co-ordinating multi-agency work and holding agencies to account.
- The increase in Serious Case Reviews and the pressure on available resources.
- Developing the lessons of the Leadership Challenge in wedges in relation to safeguarding.
- Issues of accountability and preventative actions.

The Board agreed to consider any further work to be undertaken on this topic as part of the Work Programme item later in the agenda (Minute No. 71 refers).

RESOLVED – That the report and information appended to the report be noted.

68 Children's Services and the Children and Young People's Plan Priorities Update (Looked After Children Focus)

Further to Minute No. 37 of the meeting held on 16th October, 2008, the Board received an update report on Children's Services and the Children and Young People's Plan, with a specific focus on Looked After Children.

The following officers attended the meeting and responded to Members' questions and comments:

- Rosemary Archer, Director of Children's Services; and
- Alun Rees, Head of the Leeds Extended School for looked after children.

The Board was provided with an overview of key developments across Children's Services, together with details of progress against specific priorities contained within the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP), particularly in relation to looked after children in Leeds.

In brief summary, the main areas of discussion were:-

- The need to raise educational achievements for looked after children.
- The range of interventions being co-ordinated around young people.
- Clarification of the numbers of young people attending higher education including university, as well as the overall numbers engaged in some form of education, employment or training, especially in terms of performance against comparator authorities.

- Improvements in reducing fixed term exclusion among looked after children.
- Ongoing work within the Extended School to respond to children's individual needs.
- Development of apprenticeships and work placements.
- The effects of raising the school leaving age with regard to leaving care arrangements.

The Chair thanked the officers for their attendance at the meeting.

RESOLVED – That the report and information appended to the report be noted.

(Councillors Driver, Elliott and Lancaster declared a personal interest in this item due to being Corporate Carers).

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

(Councillor Renshaw left the meeting at 11.54 am, at the conclusion of this item).

69 Leeds Strategic Plan Performance Report for Quarter 2 2008/09

Further to Minute No. 38 of the meeting held on 16th October 2008, the Assistant Chief Executive (Planning Policy and Improvement), submitted a report which updated the Board on the revised approach to performance reporting and accountability. The report also provided the quarter two performance results for Children's Services.

The following information was appended to the report:

- Children's Services Action Tracker Summary Quarter 2 2008-09;
- Action Tracker Guidance and Children's Services Action Trackers Quarter 2 2008-09; and
- Accountability Reporting Guidance and Children's Services Performance Report Quarter 2 2008-09.

The Chair welcomed the Executive Member (Children's Services) and the following officers to the meeting:-

- Rosemary Archer, Director of Children's Services;
- Steve Clough, Head of Policy, Performance and Improvement;
- John Maynard, Strategic Leader, Children's Services; and

The Head of Policy, Performance and Improvement, presented the report and appendices to the Board. Councillor Golton then highlighted some of the key performance issues.

In brief summary, the main highlighted points were:-

- Key performance issues highlighted were NEET figures, teenage pregnancy and the number of children in care. The Director of Children's Services had action plans in place to address each of these issues.
- In relation to teenage pregnancy, it was reported that joint working with Leeds PCT was being undertaken, and that ward councillors in target wards would be involved.
- Guidance had been issued to Executive Members on how to review teenage pregnancy. It was agreed to forward the guidance to the Board for information.
- In terms of the numbers of children in care in Leeds, it was advised that greater resources were needed, especially in terms of frontline services, but also that Leeds would not be pressured to reduce numbers inappropriately.
- There was also concern about the number of unfilled vacancies in social work. In response, the Executive Member (Children's Services) reported that the vacancy rate had improved significantly from 19% to 5%.
- It was noted that the Scrutiny Board was already undertaking work in relation to most of the key areas highlighted by the report, for example the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile.
- Members thanked officers for taking on board their previous requests for numbers to be included in the report alongside percentages.

The Chair then thanked the officers for their attendance.

RESOLVED – That the report and information appended to the report be noted.

70 Recommendation Tracking

Further to Minute No. 40 of the meeting held on 16th October, 2008, the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report, which requested Members to confirm the status of scrutiny recommendations (Children's Services).

Appended to the report was the recommendation tracking flowchart and draft status of recommendations. Also appended for Members' information, was a report on progress to date regarding the Leeds Inclusive Learning Strategy.

The Principal Scrutiny Adviser presented the report and invited the Board to consider the status of recommendations.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the report and information appended to the report be noted; and
- (b) That the Board agrees the status of recommendations, subject to recommendations 1, 5, 9 and 10 on services for 8-13 year olds being given a status of 4 and continuing to be monitored, and recommendation 3 on adoption being given a status of 5 with the department being asked to bring a report to the next meeting explaining the reason for the delay in implementing the recommendation.

71 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 current municipal year.

Appended to the report for Members' information was the current version of the Board's work programme, an extract from the Forward Plan of Key Decisions for the period 1st January 2009 to 30th April 2009, which related to the Board's remit, together with the minutes from the Executive Board meeting held on 3rd December 2008.

The Board considered that there was a need to undertake further work on safeguarding, particularly around preventative work and issues such as, staff resources, workload, etc. It was suggested that 2 working groups could be set-up, one to focus on prevention and the other on resources. The Principal Scrutiny Advisor agreed to e-mail the Board to establish if there was any further interest from Members wishing to serve on the group. Members also requested that details of the Annual Performance Assessment (APA) letter be forwarded to them for their information.

The Chair reported that it was necessary to defer the second session of the 14-19 review inquiry from the February Board meeting, as the visits would not be complete.

RESOLVED – That subject to the comments and amendments raised at the meeting, the work programme be approved.

72 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Thursday 5th February 2009 at 9.45 am with a pre-meeting for Board Members at 9.15 am.

(The meeting concluded at 12.28 pm).