

SCRUTINY BOARD (CHILDREN AND FAMILIES)

THURSDAY, 18TH JULY, 2024

PRESENT: Councillor D Cohen in the Chair

Councillors J Bowden, R Downes,
O Edwards, E Flint, T Goodall, Graham,
J Heselwood, D Jenkins, R Jones,
N Manaka, K Renshaw, A Rontree and
S Seary

CO-OPTED MEMBERS (VOTING)

Mr A Khitou
Mr A Graham

Co-Opted Members (Non-Voting)

Ms S Gul
N Tones

CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS

The Chair of the meeting Cllr Cohen put on record his thanks and the thanks of the Board for the hard work carried out in Leeds during the 2023-24 academic year noting the efforts of children and young people, parents and carers school support staff, teachers and Head Teachers.

Executive Board Member for Children and Families, Cllr Hayden also noted the work carried out in schools in 2023-24 adding her thanks and support for the hard work by all those involved in learning in the city.

24 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

There were no appeals.

25 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There was no exempt information.

26 Late Items

There were no late items of business.

27 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

28 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies were received from the following:

Cllr Ryan Stephenson with Cllr Simon Seary attending as substitute

Cllr Lisa Martin with Cllr Andy Rontree attending as substitute

Ms H Bellamy

Mr T Britten

Ms M Adams

Julie Longworth, Director of Children and Families

29 Minutes - 10 June 2024

In relation to the minutes from the 10 June 2024 Board meeting members emphasised the need to provide an update on recent work done on Youth Vaping. It was accepted that this does feature in the minutes and that a report will come back early in 2025 reflecting that the King's Speech did cover this issue.

The Board also discussed the Youth Justice Plan item that featured at the last meeting. It was noted that with that item being part of the Budget and Policy Framework, correspondence will be drafted through the Chair that will pick up the general discussion and points made by the Board on that item, this will be done in advance of Executive Board considering the item later in the year.

Resolved - That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 10 June 2024, be approved as an accurate record. Following a vote this was carried unanimously.

30 Children Looked After (CLA) Sufficiency Strategy

The Board considered a report from the Head of Democratic Services setting out the Council's Children Looked After (CLA) Sufficiency Strategy that was approved at Executive Board on 19 June 2024.

In attendance for this item were:

- Councillor Helen Hayden, Executive Board Member for Children and Families
- Farrah Khan, Deputy Director Social Care
- William Shaw, Head of Comms, Marketing & Customer Services
- Benjamin Finley, Head of Service Corporate Parenting

By way of introduction the Executive Member for Children and Families highlighted that the strategy sets out how the Council will meet its statutory obligation to meet the needs of Children Looked After. A key priority for the Council is to have as many children living in Leeds as possible where it is safe and appropriate to do so. It was also noted that rising costs and increased demand for placements are also key factors.

Responding to comments and questions from the Board the following points were covered:

- In response to questions around budget pressures linked to external placements and the consequent need to reduce costs and the number of external placements as quickly as possible the Board heard that delivery of small group residential homes was now moving ahead, and significant progress has been made in delivering the planned homes. A key challenge is recruitment of staff and work is underway to speed up recruitment to optimise recruitment and retention approaches. Agency staff are no longer used in residential settings as a result of improved recruitment techniques. The Board were also told that the approaches being taken are regularly reviewed to ensure they are operating as well as they can to quickly deliver the new homes. In general terms the Board welcomed the approach to delivering new in house residential homes and the progress being made to deliver 8 new small group homes as well as two larger homes.
- The Board asked about frequency of contact for CLA with parents and carers in the context of increased numbers in care. The Board were informed that family time is considered to be very important and can take place in a variety of settings and between different family members depending on the particular case. Each CLA has an individual care plan in which family time features and the voice of the child is captured within the plan. In addition, avoiding stigma and appearing different to other children and young people is a key factor in terms of delivering family time so it is a strong theme of the social work done in Leeds. In terms of increased numbers in external placements bringing children back to live in Leeds will have a positive impact in terms of increasing opportunities for family time.
- The children and young people who will live in the new homes will largely be those that the authority is already working with and know but inevitably new CLA will enter the care system when the new homes are opening and it is likely, assuming there are vacancies in the homes, that they will be cared for in them as well.
- The Board heard about the reduced costs associated with having more residential homes and that they increase the quality of care at a reduced cost when compared to private providers, so in many respects increasing in house provision in the city has a double benefit.
- The Board inquired about placement breakdown and strategies to retain foster carers in the workforce, for example using informal support arrangements between more long standing and experienced foster carers and newer foster carers. The meeting heard that strategies are in place to prevent placement breakdown through a common practice model to strengthen relationships and placements. Work is also ongoing on a

partnership basis to develop services to support foster carers and young people in care – the aim being to get it right first time and have a placement that CLA stay in. The Board were also informed about support and placements for asylum seeking children and young people.

- The Board emphasised the importance of staff retention and the problem of higher salaries in the private sector. Members were reassured that Leeds does offer a competitive offer to staff based on training and support, competitive salaries, progression routes, local government pension, sickness pay and through training and development a stimulating and rewarding work environment.
- On specific cost differences between public and private sector the Board were informed that private placements can be 40% higher in terms of costs albeit it was noted that comparison can be difficult given the different nature of placements and care packages provided. A key driver is providing quality or better care and sometimes that commitment can lead to higher costs in some placements for example if a CLA had to be cared for on their own for a period of time. The Board acknowledged that private sector care costs have significantly increased in recent years.

Resolved - The Board noted and commented on the Children Looked After Sufficiency Strategy and unanimously supported the report recommendations.

(Moved by Cllr Cohen and Seconded by Cllr Edwards)

31 Changes to Funding for Inclusion (FFI) - Briefing

The Board considered a report from the Director of Children and Families that provided a briefing on the planned changes to Funding For Inclusion (FFI) in Leeds.

In attendance for this item were:

- Councillor Helen Hayden, Executive Board Member for Children and Families
- Dan Barton, Deputy Director – Learning

The Executive Board Member for Children and Families introduced the report setting out the legislative requirement for the Council to move from FFI to statutory assessments through the Education, Health Care Plan (EHCP) model. A key priority within the work is to ensure that the changes are not overwhelming for the existing system and that it is based on assessments being carried out within the 20 week timeframe. The initial focus is on those children going through transition years so those that are facing changes anyway and, in many cases, moving to a new setting. The additional focus being provided by scrutiny on this issue was also welcomed.

It was emphasised that this is a children and young people centred process and changes will not be made where they would be detrimental to children and young people receiving support.

Responding to comments and question from members the following discussion took place:

- Board members sought assurance on the scope of the planned changes with around 5,000 children currently accessing Funding For Inclusion. Given the wider challenges Leeds is having in terms of meeting the 20 week EHCP statutory timescales, these changes will add further pressure on to a system that is currently struggling. Noting the plan to make these changes over four years the Board thought this may be too short to deliver the changes. The Board were assured that there is flexibility on timescales.
- In addition, the Board thought that 30% of children will potentially not qualify for an EHCP due to the higher thresholds to access support through that route. A concern being that this could mean that children and young people needing support could lose it due to wider funding challenges in the sector and schools not having the resource to replace FFI.
- Noting the legislative issues faced by the Council and the FFI approach the Board heard that the risk of challenge under the present arrangements was too high and means that this work must be done, and a start made on moving from an FFI model to EHCP assessments.
- The Board also received assurances around additional recruitment plans and productivity improvement plans linked to better use of IT systems. The enhanced staffing and productivity improvements have led to the 4 year timescale for this work.
- The Board were assured that FFI funding will not be removed until EHCP assessments have been carried out. It was noted that it is difficult to project what the move to EHCP assessment will lead to in terms of numbers of children and young people having an EHCP assessment and receiving an EHCP.
- The Board were also informed that where a pupil has FFI currently and goes through the EHCP assessment and does not qualify for support funding to meet their needs should come from the school's notional funding. However, additional funding will be available to schools and settings with a higher proportion of children who have needs that are below the EHCP threshold – this is currently being developed and is known as Environmental Funding. The Board were reassured that this measure will assist those children and young people who potentially will not meet the EHCP threshold.
- The Board asked about prioritisation for those that will be transitioning to the new approach. In response the Board were informed that Children Looked After (CLA) are the top priority, along with those already facing learning transition. A key element of the approach is to target those with the most significant vulnerabilities first.
- Board members asked about how CLA, and children and young people generally, will be engaged and consulted about the planned assessments and changes to funding arrangements. The Board were informed that the 2014 legislation covers the engagement and consultation elements in the code of practice, so it is part of the EHC assessment to include the voice

of the child and capture their views. This process will be carried out by schools and SENCO staff that work in schools supported by the directorate through FAQ approaches and support with correspondence. It was noted that additional support will be developed to meet specific needs of families when they arise.

- The Board asked about educational psychologists and where the authority would like to be in terms of head count and wider recruitment plans. The Board heard that in an ideal world there would be more educational psychologists available and for them to be focussed on early help and early intervention to reduce the requirement and demand for EHCPs in the longer term. The Board were informed that recruitment processes are underway currently to expand the educational psychologist teams.
- The Board were also informed about ongoing work with the Leeds Parent Carer Forum (LPCF), more engagement has taken place with the LPCF, and more is planned to meet both the forum and parents and carers themselves.
- The Board asked about EHCP funding allocations and whether this is used to meet the needs of the child it is intended for and any monitoring arrangements to ensure the funding is used as intended. It was explained that with the number of EHCPs that are now in use it is very difficult to monitor how the funding is used outside of the annual review process. It was noted that in Leeds there is a high degree of professional trust and that creates confidence that at least the requirements of the EHCP are being met, where there are concerns that needs are not being met fully then this should be reported to the SENSAP Team.
- A Board member highlighted the challenges being faced by schools in providing SEND support and that often the funding allocated to support children and young people is not sufficient to fully meet needs which adds pressure to wider school budgets.
- The Chair highlighted the reassurances provide through the report and discussion at the Board particularly on timescale flexibility and the plans for Environmental Funding.

Resolved

The Board unanimously agreed the following, to:

- a) Note the specific and detailed responses to questions raised at Executive Board on the 19th June.
- b) Note the clarity and assurance provided in relation to the interface and for some children the necessary transition from FFI to Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) provision.

(Moved by Cllr Cohen and Seconded by Cllr Edwards)

32 The Annual Standards Report

The Board considered a report from the Director of Children and Families that presented Scrutiny with externally validated performance data for pupils

in Leeds in 2023 following the statutory assessments and examinations which took place in 2023.

In attendance for this item were:

- Councillor Helen Hayden, Executive Board Member for Children and Families
- Dan Barton , Deputy Director – Learning
- Becky Lawrence, 0-19 School Improvement Consultant

The Executive Board Member for Children and Families introduced the report setting out that this report is focussed on results from 2023, which have been validated and verified.

In addition, the Deputy Director – Learning highlighted secondary school outcomes and positive performance on Progress 8 which highlights progress on SATs to GCSE, in Leeds the progress 8 score is 0.12 which is a significant achievement but is not cause for complacency as it is an aggregate figure and does not mean that there aren't pockets of concern around performance in some areas of the city. SEND performance was also highlighted as an area for further work and it was noted that the development of a learning partnership would be a positive initiative to deliver further improvement in performance city wide.

Responding to comments and question the following issues were raised:

- Whilst welcoming the Progress 8 performance the Chair noted that primary performance is a contributor to this in that primary school performance is not as high and that progress is good at secondary but can often mean that academic progression is not always achieved due to starting from a relatively low base at SATs. It was acknowledged that attainment at all levels is also a priority, but that Attainment 8 is above national average and that in the majority of cases young people are accessing positive post 16 destinations at the end of their time in secondary schools.
- The Executive Board Member for Children and Families noted the positive performance at secondary schools and the hard work done at primary stage. Post 16 provision was noted as an area for reform with a need to adjust some attitudes to attainment at age 16, learning being a process that goes on throughout life and value added progress should be acknowledged and destinations at post 16 supported and praised even if placements are not always at level 4.
- The Board asked about performance amongst the cohort of children accessing free school meals. In response the Board heard that around a quarter to a third of pupils within most year groups in Leeds schools meet the Government's "disadvantaged" criteria, that is they have had a period of free school meal eligibility during the last six years, or are looked after or adopted. The performance of this cohort in Leeds tends to be lower than for pupils nationally who share the same characteristic. Pupils in Leeds who are not disadvantaged typically have outcomes in line with non-

disadvantaged pupils nationally. Where support has been provided to a school by the learning improvement service this tends to be impactful, but the capacity of the service means that there is a limit to the number of schools that can be supported.

- The Board noted plans for a system led approach to early years provision and that it is an item already identified for the work programme later in the year. It was also noted that there is a focus on from conception support to tackle inequalities and have children school ready when entering nursery and reception.
- The Board debated Early Years performance and the need to improve further despite some increases achieved in 2023. The Board acknowledged the impact of Covid on children but it was also accepted that the pandemic did impact the country as a whole so there is a need to work as a city towards achieving national standards at foundation level.

Resolved

The Board unanimously agreed the following, to:

- a) Note the performance against headline measures for pupils in Leeds in 2023 in comparison to national data.
- b) Note the actions taken by local authority services to support maintained schools and academies in their work to improve outcomes in Leeds.

(Moved by Cllr Cohen and Seconded by Cllr Edwards)

33 SACRE Report Scrutiny - July 2024 FINAL

The Board considered a report from the Director of Children and Families that sets out the priorities for SACRE over the last year and the progress made on them.

In attendance for this item were:

- Councillor Helen Hayden, Executive Board Member for Children and Families
- Dan Barton , Deputy Director – Learning
- Katie North, School Improvement Adviser
- Russell Trudgen, Chair of Leeds SACRE

The Executive Board Member for Children and Families introduced the report and noted the value that Religious Education (RE) adds to school curriculums and the challenges that can be faced teaching RE in schools. The commitment to and standard of RE provision in Leeds was also acknowledged.

Responding to member questions and comments the following topics were discussed:

- The Chair of Leeds SACRE highlighted the importance of RE and the value it adds to the school curriculum. In addition, an ambition to support teachers who are not specialist RE teachers was set out. The work SACRE does with the wider community and faith groups was also noted.
- Board members asked about teaching RE in non-exam classes a suggestion being that examination could become more common. By way of response, it was noted that fitting all subjects into the school curriculum can be problematic based on available time. However, it was recognised the value RE brings in terms of other subjects and disciplines that are covered by it such as philosophy, sociology, history and geography.
- Members asked about the gender gap in terms of attainment with boys appearing to not engage as effectively as girls. In response the Board were informed that confidence in the classroom can be an issue as well as SACRE being able to offer more support linked to the asks that were included in the submitted report.
- The board discussed the role that RE and SACRE can play in terms of ethics and ensuring that children and young people are taught this through the curriculum. This approach could be of particular value given the way society has become more polarised in recent years.
- Members suggested that young people could be members of the SACRE Board. Currently there aren't any, but SACRE does visit schools proactively to engage with young people. It was noted that more engagement could be done such as taking the SACRE meeting to schools and to have discussion with young people before the board meetings start. The Board felt that young people could be strong advocates for SACRE if this was developed further and through the Council's voice and influence team it was thought that further support for this could be given.
- The Chair of the Board sought and received permission (by unanimous vote) to adjust the recommendations in the report on page 89 of the agenda pack, to add in the following: 'and to thank all who contributed to the report and updated the curriculum.'

Resolved – By unanimous vote Members noted the content and recommendations set out within the appended report and thanked all who contributed to the report and updated the curriculum.

(Moved by Cllr Cohen and Seconded by Cllr Edwards)

34 Work Programme

Members considered the Scrutiny Board's work programme for the 2024/25 municipal year.

The following issues were raised under this item:

- Board members suggested that a work item could be developed to look at Youth Services. However, it was noted that some aspects of youth services do not sit in this board's remit and are under the Environment,

Housing and Communities (EHC) Board, albeit roles such as life coaches do sit within this board's remit.

- It was agreed that the Principal Scrutiny Adviser should take the suggestion away and scope a possible working group working jointly with the EHC Board. It was also agreed that the impact of the life coaching role could form the basis of a separate item in November.
- The Board also thought that an item could be brought forward on school support staff in terms of the role they play and what is expected of them in schools. It was noted that this could cover a strategic overview of recruitment and retention, expected role, salary levels and workloads of teachers and support staff generally particularly given that there is a new Government in place. This was agreed to but it was noted that funding levels are an issue along with the complex nature of the school system in Leeds in terms of the number of different employers.

Resolved - Members considered and commented on the Board's work programme for the 2024/25 municipal year.

35 Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Children and Families Scrutiny Board is scheduled for **Wednesday 4 September** at 10.00AM with a pre-meeting for all Board Members at 9.45am.