

SCRUTINY BOARD (CHILDREN'S SERVICES)

THURSDAY, 5TH FEBRUARY, 2009

PRESENT: Councillor R D Feldman in the Chair

Councillors B Cleasby, G Driver, B Lancaster,
J McKenna, V Morgan, K Renshaw, E Taylor and
C Townsley

CO-OPTED MEMBERS (VOTING):

Mr E A Britten	- Church Representative (Catholic)
Mr I Falkingham	- Parent Governor Representative (Special)
Mrs S Knights	- Parent Governor Representative (Primary)

CO-OPTED MEMBERS (NON-VOTING):

Ms C Foote	- Teacher Representative
Ms C Johnson	- Teacher Representative

80 Appointment of Chair

RESOLVED – That Councillor R D Feldman be appointed Chair of the Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) for the duration of this meeting, as Councillor W Hyde, the appointed Chair of the Board for 2008/09 municipal year had submitted his apologies for absence for the meeting.

(Councillor R D Feldman took the Chair)

81 Late Items

In accordance with his powers under Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Chair admitted to the agenda the Leeds Inclusive Learning Strategy – Parent and Carer Consultation Activity Plan. The Activity Plan had recently been updated and was unavailable at the time of agenda despatch. (Minute No. 89 refers).

82 Declaration of Interests

Councillor Morgan declared an interest in relation to agenda item 7, Draft Report – MAST Inquiry, due to being LEA Governor at Our Lady Of Good Counsel Primary School and Grange Farm Primary School. On the basis that the interest was personal and prejudicial, she withdrew from the meeting prior to consideration of this item (Minute No. 85 refers).

Ms Foote declared an interest in relation to agenda item 7, Draft Report – MAST Inquiry, due to her involvement with the MAST team as a Member of

NUT. On the basis that the interest was personal and prejudicial, she withdrew from the meeting prior to consideration of this item (Minute No. 85 refers).

Councillor Cleasby declared a personal interest in relation to agenda item 9, Recommendation Tracking – Adoption, and agenda item 10, Request for Scrutiny – Adoption Service, due to being a Member of South Leeds Fostering Board (Minute Nos. 87 and 88 refer).

Councillor E Taylor declared a personal interest in relation to agenda item 9, Recommendation Tracking – Adoption, and agenda item 10, Request for Scrutiny – Adoption Service, due to being a Member of the Adoption Panel (Minute Nos. 87 and 88 refer).

Councillor J McKenna declared a personal interest in relation to agenda item 11, Recommendation Tracking – Inclusion, due to being a LEA Governor at West Leeds SILC (Minute No. 89 refers).

Mr Falkingham declared a personal interest in relation to agenda item 11, Recommendation Tracking – Inclusion, due to being a Parent Governor at North West SILC (Minute No. 89 refers).

Mrs Knights declared a personal interest in relation to agenda item 11, Recommendation Tracking – Inclusion, due to being a Governor at North West SILC and Chair of Leeds Citywide Family Forum (Minute No. 89 refers).

Further declarations of interest were made at later points in the meeting (Minute Nos. 87 and 88 refer).

83 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted by Councillor W Hyde, Councillor Elliott, Professor Gosden, Mrs Hutchinson, Ms Kayani and Ms Morris-Boam.

The Chair reported that in relation to the Parent Governor Representative vacancy, the election process was ongoing and the closing date for nominations was 10th February 2009. One nomination had been received to date.

84 Minutes - 8th January 2009

Subject to an addition to Minute No. 61 to read ‘... Members commented that they would liked to have received the APA Inspection letter prior to the meeting taking place’, it was

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Board and Call-In meetings held on 8th January 2009 be confirmed as a correct record.

85 Draft Report - MAST Inquiry

Draft minutes to be approved at the meeting
to be held on Thursday, 5th March, 2009

Further to Minute No. 47 of the meeting held on 13th November 2008, the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report which referred to the work of the Board's Working Group, which had been set-up to consider issues in relation to the Multi-Agency Support Team (MAST).

Appended to the report was a copy of the draft MAST Scrutiny Inquiry Report for the Board's consideration.

The Chair welcomed to the meeting, Rosemary Archer, Director of Children's Services, to respond to Members' questions and comments

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

- The need to establish a strategic approach to other locally managed schemes.
- The importance of effective financial planning and the need to allocate resources against priorities.
- Concern that the decision had been taken without proper consultation.
- Involving Area Committees and area management in future discussions.
- The need for clear outcomes.
- The need for improvements to the piloting process and issues in relation to accountability and leadership.

The Chair thanked Members and officers for their involvement with the working group.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the Board's final report and recommendations be agreed; and
- (b) That officers be requested to formally respond to the Board's recommendations in May 2009.

86 Request for Scrutiny – Annual Performance Assessment

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report which invited the Board to consider a request for scrutiny, arising from the Executive Board meeting held on 14th January 2009.

Appended for Members' information was a report of the Director of Children's Services, which detailed the 2008 OfSTED Annual Performance Assessment (APA) in relation to Children's Services.

Rosemary Archer, Director of Children's Services, attended the meeting and briefly highlighted some of the main points reported to the Executive Board meeting, particularly that actions were being taken to improve performance in key areas.

RESOLVED – That the Executive Board be informed that monitoring will be incorporated into the Scrutiny Board's existing quarterly cycle of performance monitoring and progress tracking items.

87 Recommendation Tracking - Adoption

Further to Minute No. 70 of the meeting held on 8th January 2009, the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report which requested the Board to consider whether any further action was required on the final outstanding recommendation from its adoption inquiry, originally published in March 2007.

Appended to the report was an extract from the Board's recommendation tracking report and the Director of Children's Services report on Adoption in Leeds: Staff Recruitment.

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

- Rosemary Archer, Director of Children's Services; and
- Elizabeth Shingler, Interim Head of Operations, Children and Young People's Social Care.

The Chair invited officers to report on progress made to date. The Board was informed that the posts had now been advertised and the closing date for applications was today. It was agreed that the Principal Scrutiny Adviser would be informed of the number of applications received.

Members' questions and comments were then invited and the main highlighted points were:-

- The Board was advised that administrative and governance procedures had been revised to address concerns about delays in recruitment.
- That greater use had been made of the Regional Consortium arrangements to identify adopters during this period.
- Members emphasised the need to advertise the posts earlier in the year. In response, it was reported that the department had been advised not to advertise during December when the response rate was generally lower.
- The time taken before the officers would be in post. The Board was advised that the appointments were subject to CRB checks and clearance could take between 4-6 weeks. In addition, successful applicants would be required to provide a period of notice to their employer.

RESOLVED – That progress continue to be monitored in the quarterly recommendation tracking report.

(Councillor Lancaster declared a personal interest in this item, due to being Chair of the Foster Carers' Liaison Group)

(Mrs Knights declared a personal interest in this item, due to being a Foster Carer).

88 Request for Scrutiny - Adoption Service

Draft minutes to be approved at the meeting
to be held on Thursday, 5th March, 2009

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report which invited the Board to consider a request for scrutiny, arising from the Executive Board meeting held on 14th January 2009.

Appended for the Board's consideration was a report of the Interim Head of Operations, Children and Young People's Social Care on the criteria for the consideration of applications for adoption together with other supporting information.

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

- Rosemary Archer, Director of Children's Services; and
- Elizabeth Shingler, Interim Head of Operations, Children and Young Peoples Social Care.

The Chair also welcomed to the meeting Alison Share, Designated doctor for looked after children, Leeds PCT, to present information to the Board.

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

- The role of Elected Members as Corporate Carers.
- Professionals' opinion regarding the adequacy of the criteria.
- The need to focus on the needs of the child.
- The process for considering applications for adoption. It was advised that whilst medical issues were important, a range of factors were taken into account before a decision was made, particularly where there was an existing relationship between a child and prospective adopter.

RESOLVED – That the Executive Board be assured that the agency's policy and practice is in line with legal requirements and best practice guidance and therefore no further investigation is required by the Board.

(Councillor Lancaster declared a personal interest in this item, due to being Chair of the Foster Carers' Liaison Group).

(Mrs Knights declared a personal interest in this item, due to being a Foster Carer).

89 Recommendation Tracking - Inclusion Consultation

Further to Minute No. 59 of the meeting held on 11th December 2008, the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report which requested the Board to consider a report of the working group on inclusion consultation and agree whether any further action was required.

Appended for the Board's consideration was the report of the Inclusion Consultation Working Group held on 22 January 2009 and the Parent and Carer Consultation Activity Plan, circulated as additional information.

Rosemary Archer, Director of Children's Services and Carol Jordan, Education Leeds, Strategy Manager, Integrated Children's Services, were both in attendance to respond to Members' questions and comments.

RESOLVED – That progress continue to be monitored in the quarterly recommendation tracking report.

90 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 February 2009 to 31st May 2009, which related to the Board's remit, together with the minutes from the Executive Board meeting held on 14th January 2009.

In relation to some of the Board's Working Groups, the following changes in Membership were agreed as follows:-

Safeguarding – preventative duty: Councillor Driver and Ms T Kayani added to membership of this working group.

Meadowfield Primary School: Councillor Lancaster agreed to no longer serve on this working group, due to there being a sufficient number of Members involved.

Entering Education: Councillor E Taylor to no longer serve on this working group.

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

91 Date and Time of Next Meeting

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

(The meeting concluded at 11.19 am).