

Scrutiny Board (Children's Services)



*Cllr Bill Hyde
Chair of Scrutiny Board
(Children's Services)*

Membership of the Board

Councillor Bill Hyde (Chair)	Mr Tony Britten
Councillor Brian Cleasby	Mr Ian Falkingham
Councillor Geoff Driver	Ms Celia Foote
Councillor Judith Elliott	Prof Peter Gosden
Councillor Ronald Feldman	Mr Robert Greaves (part)
Councillor Brenda Lancaster	Mr Tim Hales (part)
Councillor Jim McKenna	Mrs Sandra Hutchinson
Councillor Veronica Morgan	Ms Claire Johnson (part)
Councillor Karen Renshaw	Ms Taira Kayani
Councillor Eileen Taylor	Mrs Sue Knights
Councillor Chris Townsley	Ms Jeannette Morris-Boam
	Mr Ben Wanyonyi (part)

The Chair's Summary

I am, as always, proud and pleased to be able to introduce the annual report of the Children's Services Scrutiny Board. As usual my colleagues on the Board have worked hard to ensure that our input makes a difference to the children and young people of our city, working alongside the ever-widening range of partners engaged in providing services in this arena.

This year has, once again, seen our work programme closely mirror the priority areas in the Children and Young People's Plan, and key performance indicators from the Local Area Agreement. We have carried out a major inquiry into education standards for young children entering the education system, focusing on transition between early years provision and the first years of formal schooling. We have also contributed to the ongoing development of 14-19 education provision in the city.

We have continued a strong focus on performance monitoring, and holding the Executive Members and senior officers to account for delivery of the key priorities. This year in particular we have become much more assertive in our tracking of action in response to scrutiny recommendations, to ensure that promised improvements in services are delivered.

As a Board, we continue to face (and from time to time to debate) the challenge for one Scrutiny Board in maintaining an overview across such a broad spectrum, as well as being effective in the detailed work that we choose to undertake. For us the answer continues to be a determined prioritisation of subjects for inquiry, and an ongoing reliance on the unfailing willingness of many Board members to take on additional work through working groups, which adds a vital dimension to our capacity.

Once again, we are delighted that young people in Leeds have been involved in scrutiny, through the Young People's Scrutiny Forum, which has produced an excellent report on 'Protecting our Environment'. We are proud to support their recommendations and look forward to working with the young people to track progress in the future.

We are also delighted that the young people's scrutiny work has received national recognition, being highly commended in the community engagement category of the inaugural *Good Scrutiny Awards* presented by the Centre for Public Scrutiny in June 2008.

As always, we have also tried to make room in our work programme for issues that arise during the year. The most significant of these is of course the safeguarding of our children and young people, echoing events on the national stage. We have added two inquiries about safeguarding into our work programme, and these will continue into the new year. The Board will continue to play its part in ensuring that the children of our city are safe.

The next few pages highlight some of the main features of our work over the past year, and I would like to thank all those who have contributed as witnesses to the success of our programme.

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Co-opted Members

This year the Board has said goodbye to two of its co-opted members: Robert Greaves, our secondary parent governor representative; and Tim Hales, one of our teacher representatives. We particularly pay tribute to Tim's contribution to scrutiny, as he has been with the Board since its very first year, and has been a strong player in many of our working groups and visits over the years. In their places, we are pleased to welcome Ben Wanyonyi and Claire Johnson, who are both already beginning to make their own contributions to the Board's work.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding of our children and young people has been at the forefront of everybody's mind since the national reports of the Baby P tragedy in late 2008. In January 2009, the Scrutiny Board considered a general report on safeguarding activity here in Leeds, and decided to undertake some more in depth work on the arrangements in place.

As a result the Board has set up two working groups, one focusing on core child protection resources, the other on the general preventative duty applying across the whole range of children's services. Following an initial scoping exercise by each group, the Board agreed a detailed remit for further work by both groups which will extend into the new municipal year. This will include investigations with local staff as well as learning from the significant pieces of work being carried out at a national level.

Education Standards

The Board has carried out two inquiries on this topic during the current year. Our inquiry on the 14-19 education review is ongoing, as indeed the review itself is ongoing. However our work so far has included a meeting with senior representatives of providers across all sectors, and a visit to Sheffield, which last year was awarded Beacon status for their innovative work with this age group.

The second of our inquiries is focused on the other end of the education system, on children entering formal education for the first time, often but not always from some form of childcare setting. In this case we have been particularly concerned to look at the transition from informal to formal education, and how information is shared between the various professionals working with children to enable them to start out on the best possible footing.

(to be completed in light of draft report)

Young People's Scrutiny Forum

'Protecting our Environment' is the third inquiry carried out by the Young People's Scrutiny Forum and, as always, we have been impressed at the quality of the recommendations and report that the young people have produced.

The Forum decided to concentrate on three aspects of the environment:

- Recycling
- Sustainability
- Education

They focused their work on ways that they could influence change and make a difference in Leeds.

The young people canvassed the views of their peers through a questionnaire, as well as collating written evidence from council departments, before holding a question and answer delegate event with a range of officers from across the council.

They have come up with a challenging set of recommendations which have now been formally endorsed by the Children's Services and Environment and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Boards. We have also agreed to work with the newly formed Scrutiny Panel of Leeds Youth Council to monitor implementation of the recommendations. This is part of a stronger working relationship that we are working to develop between the Youth Council Scrutiny Panel and the Scrutiny Boards on an ongoing basis.

Multi-Agency Support Team (MAST)

Our work on this topic arose from a request for scrutiny by a local ward councillor, concerned that a unilateral decision by one part of the council to reduce its funding contribution to a multi-agency project was going to lead to the project's closure, without proper consultation or consideration of the wider implications of that decision.

The project in question is the Multi-Agency Support Team, known as the MAST team, operating in East Leeds. Whilst everyone we heard from agreed that there was a need to review future operation, it was also very clear to us that the project was held in very high regard both locally and more broadly across the city.

Working with the local ward councillor who made the original referral, the Scrutiny Board has successfully negotiated a commitment to retain the project and its staff until September 2009 whilst the planned broader review of services is carried out, and also a commitment to ensure that the staff involved are kept regularly briefed on progress.

In addition the Board has obtained a commitment from the Director of Children's Services that appropriate arrangements will be put in place to ensure that such unilateral action does not jeopardise future joint projects, without the opportunity for the wider children's services partnership to consider the potential impact on the overall priorities for delivering children's services in Leeds.

Recommendation Tracking

Last year the Scrutiny Boards introduced a more formal system of tracking progress against previous recommendations, to ensure that they are put into effect. This is particularly important as some of our recommendations may take longer to achieve in full than others, and it would be all too easy to lose sight of them as the Board's work programme moves on to new inquiries.

We believe that our efforts are beginning to bear fruit. There have been at least three instances over the course of the year where we have found that progress in implementing our recommendations has been subject to unsatisfactory delays. As a consequence we have gone back to the service concerned to demand explanations and action. We trust that this has also sent a clear message to others to take Scrutiny Board recommendations seriously.

The Board's full work programme 2008/09

Requests for Scrutiny

Multi-Agency Support Team
Meadowfield Primary School

Review of existing policy

Children and Young People's Plan review
Leadership Challenge
Safeguarding - preventative Duty
Safeguarding - Resources
Education Standards - entering early education
Attendance

Development of new policy

Joint Strategic Needs Assessment
Children and Young People's Plan
14-19 Review of Education
Sustainable Communities Act
Involving Young People in Scrutiny

Monitoring Scrutiny Recommendations

Quarterly Recommendation Tracking
Inclusion response
Services for 8-13 year olds response
Breeze Youth Promise
Inclusion consultation
Adoption recruitment
Youth Service Surveys
Leeds Inclusive Learning Strategy
Multi-Agency Support Team response

Performance Management

Quarterly performance reports
Quarterly overview of Children's Services and Children and Young People's Plan priorities
Ofsted Annual Performance Assessment of Children's Services
Ofsted inspection and education standards biannual reports

Briefing

Commissioning

Young People's Scrutiny Forum

Protecting our Environment Inquiry