

Scrutiny Board (Children's Services)



Councillor Judith Chapman
Chair of Scrutiny Board
(Children's Services)

Membership of the Board:

Councillor Judith Chapman (Chair)
Councillor Mick Coulson
Councillor Geoff Driver
Councillor Bob Gettings
Councillor Bill Hyde
Councillor Alan Lamb
Councillor Brenda Lancaster
Councillor Pat Latty
Councillor James Lewis
Councillor Kamila Maqsood
Councillor Vonnie Morgan
Councillor Brian Selby

Co-opted Members:

Mr Tony Britten
Ms Natalie Cox
Ms Celia Foote
Prof Peter Gosden
Mr James Granger
Mrs Sandra Hutchinson
Ms Claire Johnson
Ms Taira Kayani
Ms Jeannette Morris-Boam
Mr Ben Wanyonyi (part)
Ms Jacqueline Ward (part)

The Chair's summary

This year has seen major changes in Children's Services in Leeds. In the spring of 2010, the Children's Services Improvement Plan had just been approved; the new Children's Trust Board and Safeguarding Board had just been launched; the decision had been taken to end the contract with Education Leeds; and the council was seeking a new permanent Director of Children's Services.

A year later and the transformation programme to create an integrated children's service is well on the way under the leadership of the new Director of Children's Services and Ofsted have reported on the "remarkable and impressive improvement in the quality of services inspected and the safety of children in the city." The next chapter is beginning to open up with the agreement of the new City Priority Plans, the identification of three 'obsessions' as the key areas of activity for the Children's Services partnership and the development of results based accountability approaches to tackling these challenges.

All this has meant another busy year for the Scrutiny Board as we have sought to keep a grasp on the overall picture and hold decision makers to account, whilst playing our own part in contributing to the development of policy and service improvements. The next few pages outline how we have achieved this.

The new City Priority Plan is likely to form the basis of the Scrutiny Board's work programme next year. Members have already identified reducing teenage conception as a priority for an inquiry, and I have recommended that next year's Board looks in-depth at the budget challenge of external placements for looked after children.

As in past years, I must pay tribute to the energy and enthusiasm of Board members, including our co-opted members, for the level of commitment they have put into making our work programme a success. I thank them all for their dedication and support throughout the year.

Cllr Judith Chapman, Chair of Scrutiny Board (Children's Services)

Inquiry on Service Redesign

Summary

We decided to carry out an inquiry into the proposed redesign of children's services, taking the provision for children with disabilities, special educational needs and additional health needs (and their families) as our focus. Whilst the economic climate and changes in the council's structure were important issues, our main motivation for undertaking this piece of work was to examine how a better integrated service could improve outcomes for children and their families locally.

Anticipated service benefits

The key principles of the proposed new model of service delivery are:

- Child and family first
- Single point of contact
- Coordinated response
- Unified referral, assessment and planning process based on the common assessment framework (CAF)
- Named key worker
- Telling the story once
- Keeping the door open
- Planning ahead for the next stage (managing transition)

We visited

Ralph Thoresby School resourced unit
Rainbow House short break provision
St James's Child Development Centre
& Leeds Inclusion Support Service
(LISS)
Wortley Beck Child Development
Centre

We met with representatives from

Head Teachers' Forum
Higher Aspirations group of young
people

Our main recommendations

To be added after report is agreed

Inquiry on combating child poverty and raising aspirations

Summary

One of the key features of this inquiry was the innovative way in which we structured our fieldwork. Many of our major inquiries include a few members undertaking visits to front line practitioners between Board meetings and reporting back on those visits to feed into the evidence gathered by the Board.

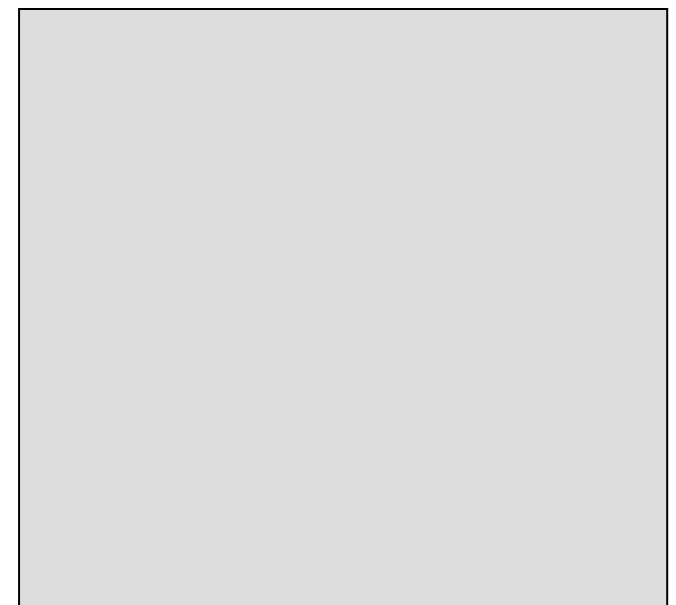
On this occasion we decided to take a slightly different approach. We identified 2 'case study' areas of the city and instead of our normal Board meeting, half of the members went to Killingbeck and Seacroft, while the other half went to Beeston Hill for the morning. In both areas, Members had the opportunity to talk to local practitioners and to undertake some additional visits in smaller groups, including meeting local people, before reconvening for a round table discussion with senior officers about their findings. Every member of the Board attended, and all agreed that it had been an effective way of working. It proved particularly helpful in clearly identifying the Board's recommendations. We would recommend this approach to other Scrutiny Boards.

Anticipated service benefits

We hope that the recommendations from our inquiry will contribute to effective joined-up services and solutions for children and families in poverty through the city's developing Child Poverty Strategy.

Our main recommendations

To be added after report is agreed



The Director of Children's Services and lead Executive Member welcomed the cross-cutting nature of this inquiry, involving partners from other council directorates as well as partners throughout the city.

Other work of the Board

Youth Services Commissioning Framework

We held two working group meetings early in the year in order to contribute to proposed changes in the way that youth services are commissioned. Unfortunately the planned timetable for this work was overtaken by events in the light of budget cuts, and our work was therefore also put on hold.

The emerging conclusions from the meetings we did have were that a future model needed to address the following issues:

- whether to adopt a cluster or locality basis for commissioning
- a 3 year budget forecast
- the balance between central prescription and local determination of the service
- performance measures
- a potential 'maturity' measure as a prerequisite to local commissioning

Outdoor Education Centres

We carried out a review of outdoor education facilities supported by the council. We had a very successful working group which included visits to Herd Farm, Lineham Farm and Bradford's Nell Bank Centre. We were very impressed by the facilities, which continue to provide a subsidised resource for local children and young people. As a result of our work we made a number of recommendations for improved joint working in order to try and secure the longer-term financial viability of the centres.

School Balances

Another small working group looked at school balances. We recognise and support the need for good financial planning by schools, and we also acknowledge the aim of schools to maintain a reasonable contingency fund. However we were concerned that some schools have held high balances over a period of years. Given that the authority is likely to have much less influence over school balances in the future we focused our recommendations around equipping governors to manage and challenge the effective use of school funds for the benefit of the current cohort of pupils.

Children's Social Care System review

The Scrutiny Board has shared the concerns of Ofsted about the inadequacy of the current case recording system for social care. Following the decision to commission new systems for adult and children's social care services separately, a small cross-party working group is closely monitoring the progress with procuring a new children's system. We have been particularly conscious of the need for the new system to be more user friendly for social work staff than the one it is replacing. This work is ongoing.

Reducing teenage conception

In December 2010, both the Children's Services and Health Scrutiny Boards agreed that reducing teenage conception should be a priority area of future work for scrutiny. This was triggered by members' concern that, despite all of the hard work and resource that has been directed at this area in recent years, the long-term performance trend shows little movement.

In light of the existing work programmes of both Scrutiny Boards it was acknowledged that this work would not take place until next year. A joint working group met with officers and young people in April 2011 to scope terms of reference for an inquiry, in order that work can start as early as possible in the new municipal year.

Call In

In September 2010 we considered a call-in of the community use of schools policy. Following discussion the Board voted to refer the decision back for reconsideration in view of:

- The fact that the Scrutiny Board was not happy with the decision-making process in this instance. Members' felt that this decision should have been taken by the Executive Board, and not as an officer delegated decision, and that this should take place as soon as possible.
- The fact that the Board strongly advised of the need for further consultation and discussion with schools and user groups about the impact of the changes in charging.

The original decision was subsequently confirmed by the Executive Board.

Outcome of recommendations made in 2009/10

The Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) published 6 inquiry reports in 2009/10, which resulted in 28 recommendations. We have tracked the response to those recommendations throughout the course of the year.

Entering the education system – our recommendations focused on ensuring that children would have access to a high quality of service and support regardless of the type of pre-school setting they attended, and improving the links between early years providers and schools. The Director of Children's Services agreed with all of our recommendations and a new transition document was published early this year, supported by a joint training programme. We are still monitoring two specific recommendations on the take-up of transition records and the introduction of a standard funding level for special educational needs support in early years.

Safeguarding – our interim report made an urgent recommendation for increased funding for additional social care staff, which was agreed as part of the 2010/11 budget. We have been tracking the staffing changes quarterly and will continue to do so until the proposed new structure is in place and fully staffed. We were pleased to note that the unannounced Ofsted inspection in January 2011 found that 'social work

staff have manageable caseloads, regular supervision and access to appropriate training.’ However we are aware that, especially as the number of referrals is still continuing to rise, this area continues to need careful management and monitoring.

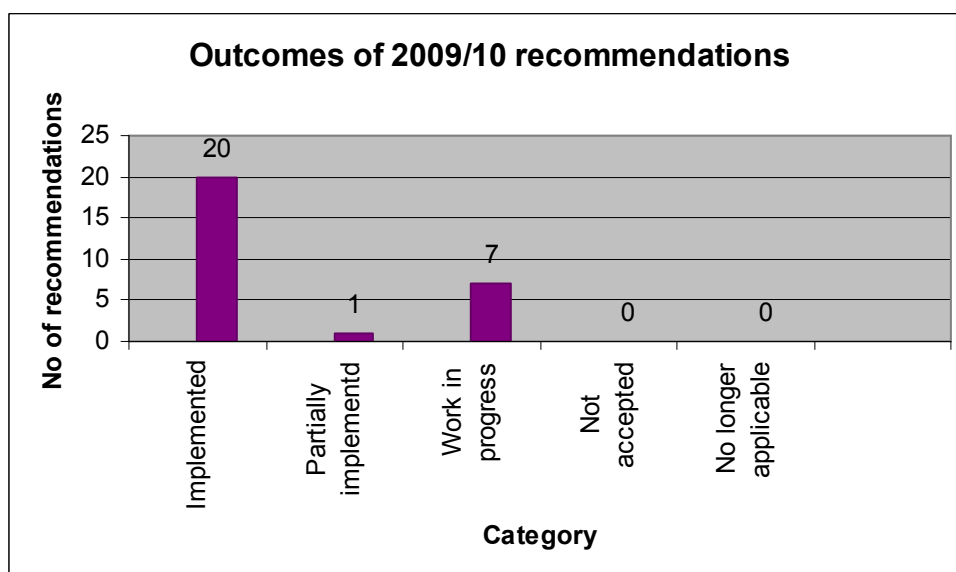
Attendance strategy – we recommended that attendance and behaviour targets were included in all area Inclusion Partnership plans and this has been achieved. A new policy on extended leave is also being finalised. Attendance is a key priority in the new Children and Young People’s Plan.

Meadowfield Primary School – our recommendations from this inquiry focused on learning lessons from a specific building project, with proposals for improved processes and procedures. We were also pleased that Education Leeds and the school were finally able to agree a list of outstanding actions which have now been completed.

School organisation consultations – we made a small number of recommendations designed to improve the consultation process, but also to improve the wider communications strategy associated with school change proposals. Education Leeds developed a strategy which was brought back to us for comment before being implemented and we were happy to endorse it.

Youth service surveys – We made 3 recommendations in this inquiry, as a result of which youth service programmes now feature on the Breeze website and Breeze cards are distributed proactively to young people. Data from youth surveys will be made available at a cluster level in future in a routine way. The department is still considering how best to identify barriers to young people’s participation in activities in response to our final recommendation.

The table below summarises the outcome of the recommendations we made last year.



The Board's full work programme 2010/11

Requests for scrutiny

- Connexions
- Children's Social Care system review

Review of existing policy

- Outdoor education centres
- School Balances
- Gypsy and Traveller education

Development of new policy

- Youth Services commissioning framework
- Vision for Leeds 2011-2030
- Children and Young People's Plan 2011
- New Strategic Plans 2011-15
- Service redesign – services for children with disabilities, special educational needs and additional health needs
- Combating child poverty and raising aspirations
- Reducing teenage conception

Monitoring scrutiny recommendations

- Services for 8-13 year olds
- Entering the education system
- Safeguarding interim report
- Meadowfield Primary School
- Attendance strategy
- School Organisation consultations
- Youth Service surveys

Performance management

- Quarterly Improvement Board report
- Quarterly performance management reports
- Quarterly overview of Children's Services and Children and Young People's Plan priorities
- Fostering Inspection
- Ofsted unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in Children's Services
- Annual standards report – primary schools
- Annual standards report – secondary schools

Call In

- Community use of schools policy