

SCRUTINY BOARD (CHILDREN AND FAMILIES)

THURSDAY, 23RD AUGUST, 2012

PRESENT: Councillor J Chapman in the Chair

Councillors C Gruen, A Hussain, A Khan,
A Lamb, P Latty, M Rafique, A Sobel, and
B Urry

CO-OPTED MEMBERS (VOTING):

Mr E A Britten – Church Representative (Catholic)

Ms J Ward – Parent Governor Representative (Secondary)

CO-OPTED MEMBERS (NON-VOTING):

Mrs S Hutchinson – Early Years Representative

39 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

There were no appeals against the refusal of inspection of documents.

40 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There were no resolutions to exclude the public.

41 Late Items

There was one late item admitted by the Chair which related to Agenda Item 9 'Draft Terms of Reference – Foundation Years – Providing the best start in life for children to succeed'.

42 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests or other interests declared.

43 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies for absence were submitted by Councillor Gettings and Co-opted Members, Ms A Craven, Ms N Cox, Ms C Foote and Ms J Morris-Boam.

44 Minutes - 26th July 2012

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 26th July 2012 be approved as a correct record.

45 Scrutiny Inquiry into Private Fostering

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report which asked the Board to consider the report of the Director of Children's Services

which provided the Board with information requested at its meeting held on 26th July 2012.

The following Executive Member and officers were in attendance to answer Member questions:

Councillor Blake, Executive Member (Children and Families);
Steve Walker, Deputy Director, Safeguarding, Specialist and Targeted Services; and
Val Hales, Fostering and Adoption.

The following external visitors were in attendance:

Savita de Souza – British Association for Adoption and Fostering
Judy Bedford – NSPCC.

The Chair thanked the external visitors for attending and subsequently requested that a video recording on private fostering be watched by the Board.

Steve Walker, Deputy Director, Safeguarding, Specialist and Targeted Services outlined the report of the Director of Children's Services which provided written evidence to the Scrutiny Board inquiry.

Members raised the following key points and discussed them with officers present and the external visitors:

- that it is unlikely many parents will realise they should notify the authority if they find themselves privately fostering someone else's child and also the difficulties this presents in close knit communities where children are often left with friends;
- the potential for difficulties where a child is moved to another authority area to be privately fostered due to the lack of control that Leeds City Council then has;
- the importance of monitoring private fostering to ensure that children's welfare is protected at all times; and
- where private fostering is legitimately taking place, the importance of ensuring the people doing this work receive adequate support and the correct child benefit and tax credit.

Members, officers present and the external visitors agreed the importance with working together with other partners such as doctors, the police, schools and social clubs to help identify where private fostering was taking place. Further, that if this relationship was to be successful continued efforts should be made to develop and train these professionals in the issues surrounding private fostering and ensure that awareness raising is consistently maintained.

RESOLVED –

- (a) that further information be provided to the Board on the number of children removed from private foster carers; and
- (b) that the Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) note the content of the report.

46 Scrutiny Inquiry into Private Care Homes (Children and Young People)

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report which asked the Board to consider written evidence in relation to this Inquiry into Private and Independent Care Homes for children.

The following Executive Member and officers were in attendance to answer Member questions:

Councillor Blake, Executive Member (Children and Families);
Steve Walker, Deputy Director, Safeguarding, Specialist and Targeted Services;
Nigel Richardson, Director of Children's Services; and
Martin Sellens, Head of Planning Services.

The following external visitors were in attendance:

Judy Bedford – NSPCC.

Officers present briefly outlined the legislation and current issues surrounding Private Care Homes the report of the Director of Children's Services which provided written evidence to the Scrutiny Board inquiry.

Judy Bedford from the NSPCC outlined the concerns her organisation have about small private care homes and expressed the willingness of the NSPCC to support local authorities in their work in this area.

Members raised the following key points and discussed them with officers present and the external visitors:

- clarification was sought on the planning laws surrounding the numbers of occupiers permitted in a Private Care Home which would not require planning permission. Members also sought confirmation that Planning Services and Children's Services worked together in terms of identifying private care homes;
- concerns were raised about the lack of knowledge on the different types of private care homes in Leeds;
- Members sought clarification on how far children could be placed away from their homes and expressed the view that children should be placed as close to their homes as possible to minimise disruption;
- the role of social workers was also discussed by Members and how they could help monitor children's progress where they have been

placed in private care homes and the duties placed on them to respond to any concerns they might have about the welfare of a child; and

- Members also questioned officers about the use of private care homes in Leeds by the Council.
- Members were extremely concerned that private care home operatives were under no legal obligation to notify the Local Authority Children's Services if they were intending to open a home in the area. It was felt that the regulating body Ofsted were too distant. Members concluded that a change in legislation was required to resolve this.

Members expressed a strong desire to ensure all children that live in Leeds should be safeguarded by the Council.

RESOLVED –

- a) that further details on the 10 Private Care homes in Leeds be circulated to Members;
- b) The Chair on behalf of the board writes to the Minister for Children and Families to express the concern of the Board; and
- c) that the Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) note the content of the report.

47 Terms of Reference - Scrutiny Inquiry into providing the best start in life for children to succeed

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report which invited Members to agree terms of reference for the Scrutiny Board's inquiry into providing the best start in life for children to succeed.

The Principal Scrutiny Advisor, Sandra Newbould, presented the report.

RESOLVED –

- (a) that the terms of reference for the Scrutiny Board's inquiry into providing the best start in life for children to succeed be approved; and
- (b) that the terms of reference be subject to amendment where necessary, including incorporation of additional information should the Scrutiny Board identify any further scope for inquiry or request further witnesses or evidence.

48 Work Schedule

A report was submitted by the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development which detailed the Scrutiny Board's work schedule for the remainder current municipal year.

RESOLVED – That the work schedule be approved.

49 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Thursday 27th September at 9.45am with a Pre-Meeting for Board Members at 9.15am.

(The meeting concluded at 12:40pm.)