

Report of Director of Children’s Services

Report to Executive Board

Date: 9th October 2013

Subject: Children’s Services Update Report (October 2013)



Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

1. A key part of the ‘Best City’ Vision for Leeds is for Leeds to be the best city in the UK for children, young people and families – a Child Friendly City. The Vision and the City Priority Plan both make clear that improving the lives of children and young people is a central priority for the Council and its partners. This report reviews progress in children’s services and considers how outcomes and services have improved over the past two years.
2. The council’s prioritisation and investment in children’s services is making a difference. Overall outcomes are improving, supported by system reform, restructured services and investment in new approaches. 80% of the priority targets in the Children and Young People’s Plan show improvement over the past two years. Better early help and better management of care is beginning to pay dividends in reducing costs by improving care planning and interventions; reducing the need for expensive long term care and external placements. Services are improving in quality and performance, with Leeds now better than the national average in key areas such as the quality of primary schools, residential homes and children’s centres.
3. However, whilst there has been a great deal of progress in children’s services over the past two years, there remains more to be done. Front line practice, whilst improved, remains variable. Investment has allowed an increase in the number of front line social workers providing day to day support and protection for vulnerable children. Front line children’s social work teams are now fully staffed and caseloads have been reduced to support higher quality work. However challenges remain. Forty percent of the social

workers in these teams have less than two years post-qualifying experience. Caseloads, whilst reduced are not at the levels we would like. Services are improving but some, such as those for Care Leavers, continue to need further significant support and reform if they are to meet our local ambition and national standards. . In schools attendance remains a key priority for continued improvement and the quality of too many secondary schools in the city continues to be variable with too few being judged good or better by OFSTED.

4. Further improvement in these areas will need to be delivered in the context of reduced funding and wider national policy change. Policies are changing in social care and schools, and the needs of children and families are changing too as the city grows and becomes more diverse and as the impact of national funding reductions is felt. We wish to increase the pace of change to meet the needs of families and the heightened expectations of central government and inspectors. Recent inspections by OfSTED of safeguarding arrangements in local authorities have rated a quarter of councils across the country as 'inadequate'. The new Inspection framework to be implemented in the Autumn will raise the challenge even further.

Recommendations

5. Executive Board is recommended to recognise the progress Leeds has made in improving outcomes for children and young people, balanced against the on-going challenges, particularly in the context of a new inspection framework, and to support the city-wide strategy for continued improvement across children's services.

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Executive Board with an update of progress in important areas in children's services. This is a key part of the 'Best City' Vision for Leeds. The report has a particular focus on safeguarding and social work due to the importance of safeguarding for the Council, and because these services are the only area of the Council still subject to high profile, unannounced inspection. The report sets out progress made over the past year, and the key challenges for the year ahead.

2 Background information

- 2.1 Recent years have seen significant and rapid change in children's services in Leeds. Weaknesses in arrangements for children led to OfSTED judging the authority to be inadequate in 2009, which led to central government intervention. Services were improved significantly by 2011, leading to an improved inspection rating and the ending of government intervention. Since 2011, children's services has been engaged in further change as the service has been restructured in order to improve support for vulnerable children, respond to national policy changes and rectify historic weaknesses in social care and safeguarding..
- 2.2 A key part of the 'Best City' Vision for Leeds is to be the best city in the UK for children, young people and families – a Child Friendly City. The Vision and the City Priority Plan both make clear that improving the lives of children and young people is a central priority for the Council and its partners. These strategies set out priorities and target for Leeds, based around the 'three obsessions': safely and appropriately reducing the need for children to be in care; improving school attendance; increasing the proportion of young people in learning or work. The Leeds Children and Young People Plan, developed by the Children's Trust Board, sets out wider targets and objectives for the city.
- 2.3 This overarching vision and approach has provided the context to enable the improvements to service delivery and performance outlined below. This has been achieved at a time of national funding reductions, significant changes to national policy and a high level of external scrutiny and challenge from the government and OFSTED. These circumstances will continue to affect the future direction of the service – a new OFSTED framework for the inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers, was published at the end of September and demonstrates significantly raised expectations, the implications of which are discussed further below.

3 Main issues

Improving Outcomes

- 3.1 Children's services are committed to using the simple approach of Outcomes Based Accountability to understand what it is like to be a child or young person growing up in Leeds and how we can make it better. Therefore, the first test of progress should be whether outcomes are improving. Clear improvements have

been made across 17 of the 21 indicators in the Children and Young People's Plan between 2011 and 2013.

3.2 The main areas of improving outcomes include:

- (i) The number of looked after children has safely and appropriately reduced. On the 30th of June there were 1358 looked after children in Leeds. This is 74 lower (5.2 per cent) than the same period 12 months ago, lower than any point since November 2009.
- (ii) The proportion of young people who are NEET (Not in Education Employment or Training) was reduced by nearly a quarter between 2012 and 2013 – better than the national average or in similar areas (the latest annual figures show a reduction from 8.1% to 6.2%).
- (iii) Early data suggest improving learning outcomes in early years, schools and colleges across Leeds. Highlights include:
 - Initial analysis shows improvements in mathematics and writing at Key Stage 2.
 - Early data suggest GCSE results in Leeds have improved markedly, and faster than the region as a whole. For all 38 of our secondary schools, provisionally 57.4% of pupils have achieved five or more A*-C GCSE grades (including equivalents) and including English and Maths which compares with 55% for the city in the 2012 DFE league tables.
- (iv) Other key outcomes that show improvement include: a marked increase in the number of adoptions; a reduction in the number of children and young people with child protection plans; reduced offending by young people; a reduction in teenage conceptions, and a reduction in alcohol based admissions of young people to hospital.

Improving Performance and Quality

3.3 Improving outcomes are supported by improving performance and quality in children's services. The main areas include:

- (i) Quicker investigations of child protection concerns. The proportion of investigations completed within 15 days doubled between 2011/12 and 2012/13 (from 33% to 66%)
- (ii) Better residential care. 100% of residential homes in Leeds are now judged to be 'good' or 'outstanding'. This is much better than in recent years and well above the national average.

- (iii) Better children's centres. The proportion of children's centres in Leeds that are judged to be good or outstanding is higher than the national average (81% compared to 70%)
- (iv) Better primary schools. The proportion of primary schools judged as good or better has been raised significantly, and Leeds now has more high quality primary schools than the national average. (83% of primaries were good or better in Leeds in July 2013 compared to 69% in 2012 and a national average of 78%). The quality of Special school provision is also greatly improved with the percentage of Special schools judged as good or better now standing at 87%.
- (v) Better Pupil Referral Units (PRUs). For the first time all PRUs are now judged to be good or better.

Reforming Services

- 3.4 Improvements in the performance and quality of children's services have been driven by significant investment, reform and restructuring. Better early help and care management is also enabling the service to cut costs and deliver significant savings.
- 3.5 The Council and children's services have been successful in prioritising investment for key services, despite the challenging financial context. Since 2010, there have been a succession of funding changes that have reduced budgets in children's services, and in addition further changes that have redirected funding from the Council to schools, and in particular to academies and free schools. Despite this, the Council has positively initiated an invest to save model, recognising that stronger early intervention that prevents the need for children and young people to be taken into care, represents longer term financial and social benefits to the city. As such an allocation of an additional £2.5m has enabled the expansion of family group conferencing and family support, increased the multi-systemic therapy provision and supported continued investment in targeted locality services. The success of the Council in prioritising the needs of children and families over recent years will come under even more pressure over the next three years as budget forecasts for 2015/16 and 2016/17 show further reductions.
- 3.6 Investment has been supported by significant restructuring of children's services. Social work teams were restructured during 2012, splitting the service into dedicated fieldwork and care teams, allowing staff and managers to develop a clearer focus and specialist skills. High quality senior leaders have been recruited for the service and there is now a full, permanent leadership team in post. Targeted Services and the Complex Needs Service have also completed restructuring, putting in place new, clear local leadership and services with better links to schools and children's centres. Learning, Skills and Universal Services have been reformed – with new leadership supported by eight seconded Headteachers.
- 3.7 In addition to the restructuring of existing services, new approaches and teams have been developed and expanded. Key developments include:

- (i) Duty and Advice Team: the Duty and Advice team has been further developed over the past year to better manage referrals to social care and joint working with partner agencies. These new arrangements have led to better quality referrals and decision making and made joint working quicker and more effective. The rate of re-referrals has fallen by 10% since the new arrangements were introduced (32% to 22%). This work has developed through partnership with Professor David Thorpe, an expert on these issues, who was jointly commissioned by the local authority and the local Safeguarding Children Board. The progress made means that the services in now increasingly being recognised as a model of good practice regionally, nationally and internationally.
- (ii) Family Group conferencing: Family Group Conferencing is designed to reduce the need for care by resolving problems within the wider family network rather than relying on statutory intervention. Children's services has worked closely with leading national practitioners, the Family Rights Group, to develop this approach in Leeds, investing in new teams across the city. Capacity has been expanded fourfold over the past two years in line with the aim to ensure that where appropriate all vulnerable families can be offered this form of support in future years. This approach has been received positively by all parties, including the courts and CAFCASS.
- (iii) Early Start: Support in the early years has been strengthened through the development of the Early Start Service, bringing together children's centres and NHS staff to provide a more integrated approach. The Family Nurse Partnership, a form of targeted health visiting, has been successfully piloted from children's centres.
- (iv) The new School Improvement Policy: children's services have worked with schools to develop a new collaborative approach for schools and the authority to work together to improve schools. This new policy has been supported by eight seconded headteachers and delivers a more challenging, focused and sector led approach.
- (v) Families First: The Council attracted £8 million of government funding to implement the government's 'Troubled Families' initiative, providing targeted support for families affected by worklessness, crime and poor attendance. The service, which is being led by children's services, but takes a partnership approach across the council and other key services, has been successful in working with these families, meeting and exceeding government targets for contact and support. Leeds has been viewed as one of the more successful local authorities in implementing the initiative.
- (vi) Youth Review: youth services in the city have been comprehensively reviewed, informed by close working with young people, communities and Elected Members. As a result, youth services have been remodelled with most funding and services devolved to local areas, supported by a central targeted team. This new model gives more accountability to Area Committees.

- (vii) External support and challenge: Changes to services have been supported and informed by leading national and international researchers and practitioners. Children's services has partnered with a number of 'outstanding' Council's, for example North Lincolnshire, and also worked with academics at the University of York, Loughborough University and the Institute of Education to provide robust external scrutiny of services and to ensure that services are developed in the light of best practice and research.
- (viii) Child Friendly Leeds: The Child Friendly Leeds initiative provides the overarching vision and framework for improving children's services and encompassing the work of partners and other organisations across the city into our ambitions. Since Child Friendly Leeds was launched during the Royal Visit last in July 2012, it has helped engage communities, business and the voluntary sector across Leeds in supporting key priorities for children. Examples include promoting fostering and recruiting mentors for Leeds schools. Awareness of the Child Friendly brand is growing which is supporting the establishment of strong partnerships with, for example the BBC (following the CBBC summer event), First Direct, O2, the major sports and entertainment names in the city and many other retailers.

3.8 Investment in preventative services and concerted action to better manage placements for those young people in care has meant that Leeds has been able to safely and appropriately reduce the number of children in care and in doing so make significant savings on the projected spend had numbers of looked after children continued to rise at previous rates.

Challenges and Next Steps

3.9 Despite all this progress, there is still more to do. Key areas for improvement include:

- (i) Continuing high demand for care and protection: Whilst there is improvement due to better early help and case management, the proportion of children and young people in care or with a child protection plan remains higher than the average in similar areas. These high numbers pose continuing pressures on caseloads which, whilst improved, remain relatively high with 50% of cases involving looked after children or children subject to a child protection plan.
- (ii) Variable front line practice: Audits within the service and by external auditors such as the Safeguarding Board suggest that the quality of social work and safeguarding practice is generally sound and improving. However, in a minority of cases practice continues to be weak, undermining consistency and weakening the trend of improvement.
- (iii) Care Leavers: Historically, services to care leavers have been limited and poorly coordinated. Care leaver services have been restructured and new leadership put in place and new partnership plans agreed but the impact of these changes will take some time to be felt.

- (iv) Attendance: Whilst school attendance has improved since it was identified as a priority and obsession in the Children and Young People's Plan, with Leeds seeing its best ever attendance levels in 2012, over the past year this improvement has stalled. As such continuing intense focus in this area is essential. It should be noted that here are some mitigating circumstances in the latest data, for example the outbreak of norovirus last year, a revised data set which now includes Reception children and a severe winter; the city remains below national and benchmark averages for attendance.
- (v) Closing the gap in learning. Whilst the headline indicators for schools and learning are generally positive, this masks continuing low achievement in some groups of children, e.g. boys, those on Free School Meals, some Black and Minority Ethnic communities.

3.10 Alongside addressing these areas where outcomes are poorer, children's services will need to work together better to manage significant change. These are outlined below:

- 3.10.1 *Changing and reducing funding:* Children's services will need to manage considerable budget pressures whilst delivering improved services over future years. As highlighted previously, central government funding has significantly reduced for services for vulnerable children. In addition central government funding to Councils will continue to be transferred to schools if more of the become Academies.
- 3.10.2 *New ways of working in social care:* over the next year the service will have to implement new approaches to assessment in line with national policy and continue to manage the full implementation of the replacement to the ESCR IT system.
- 3.10.3 *New partnerships and strategy for learning.* National policy now requires each council to work with schools and other stakeholders to agree a shared approach to school improvement. For Leeds this will mean developing a Leeds learning partnership "Leeds for Learning" as a new approach to engaging schools and colleges.
- 3.10.4 *Changing demographics.* As the Board will be aware, the latest Census has shown that the population of Leeds is both growing and changing rapidly. This is having a particularly sharp impact amongst young people, as these age groups are generally more diverse and more at risk of the impact of poverty than the city as a whole. This is already having a marked impact on services for early years and in schools, and can be seen in the high number of babies entering care at birth. The percentage of younger children that have Special Educational Needs (SEN), that are eligible for free school meals, whose first language is not English or who come from ethnic minority backgrounds is significantly higher than older children in the city and the population as a whole and this diversity is growing year on year in the city.

- 3.10.5 *Basic Need.* As reported to the Board in July, population growth and change will have a massive impact on school places in future years. This will lead to significant pressures on services and funding.
- 3.10.6 *New inspection framework.* As highlighted above, amidst these changes and challenges, the Council and its partners will also need to respond to new and higher expectations from central government and inspectors. Recent inspections of local authorities by OfSTED have seen a quarter of councils judged to be inadequate and this higher level of challenge will only grow as from this Autumn, OfSTED will begin implementing its new inspection framework that will look at the entire safeguarding and social work system from early help to leaving care. In addition, OFSTED has instigated a new framework for the inspection of Local Authority school improvement services.
- 3.11 As the sections above make clear, whilst there have been rapid and major improvements in children's services there is still a need for further reform and further action on areas where services for children and families are not yet good or outstanding. The pace of change will need to increase rather than slow and the Council will have to take a lead role with its partners in continuing to implement the shared strategy. To support this work, children's services have developed the 'Supporting Children and Families, Strengthening Social Work' Action Plan (the 9 Point Plan) and will work with schools and colleges over the autumn to agree a revised 'Learning Strategy' for the city. Progress on these plans will be shared with the Executive Board in the future.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

- 4.1.1 There are no consultation and engagement issues relating to this report.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 4.2.1 There are no specific implications under this heading.

4.3 Council policies and City Priorities

- 4.3.1 This report includes information on important elements of the Best City Vision for Leeds, the City Priority Plan and the Leeds Children and Young People Plan. The report also relates to the 'Child Friendly Leeds' initiative and the 'wishes' for the city agreed with children and young people.

4.4 Resources and value for money

- 4.4.1 See section 3.10.1 above.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

- 4.5.1 There are no specific implications under this heading.

4.6 Risk Management

- 4.6.1 This report relates to two key risks for the Council – firstly the key corporate risk relating to service failure contributing to significant harm for a child or young person. The second relates to the reputational and financial risk to the Council of a major inspection failure within children’s services. These risks have action plans within the Council’s corporate risk register, and mitigation of these risks is supported by actions set out in the strategies and plans detailed in this report.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 Good progress is being made towards Leeds’ ambition to be the ‘Best City for Children and Young People’. The Council’s prioritisation and investment in children’s services is making a difference. Outcomes are improving, supported by system reform, restructured services and investment in new approaches. Over the past two years measurable progress can be demonstrated on the majority of priorities in the Children and Young People’s Plan. Better early help and better management of care is beginning to pay dividends in reducing costs by reducing the need for expensive long term care and external placements. Services are improving in quality and performance, with Leeds now better than the national average in key areas such as the quality of primary schools, residential homes and children’s centres.
- 5.2 However, whilst there has been a great deal of progress in children’s services over the past two years, there remains more to be done. Front line practice, whilst improved, remains variable. Services are improving but some, such as those for Care Leavers, continue to require development. In schools, improving attendance continues to require intense focus and overall the quality of secondary schools in the city continues to be below the national average.
- 5.3 Further improvement in these areas will need to be delivered in the context of reduced funding and wider change. Policies are changing in social care and schools, and the needs of children and families are changing too as the city grows and becomes more diverse and as the impact of austerity is felt. Despite these challenges, the pace of change needs to increase to meet the needs of families and the heightened expectations of central government and inspectors. Recent inspections by OfSTED have rated a quarter of councils as ‘inadequate’ and the new inspection framework to be implemented in the autumn raises the challenge even further.

6 Recommendations

- 6.1 Executive Board is recommended to recognise the progress Leeds has made in improving outcomes for children and young people, balanced against the on-going challenges, particularly in the context of a new inspection framework, and to support the city-wide strategy for continued improvement across children’s services.

7 Background documents¹

7.1 The Children's Services Weekly Obsession Tracker (w/c 23rd September version)

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.