

**Report of the Director of Children's Services**

**Report to Scrutiny Board (Children and Families)**

**Date: 13 February 2014**

**Subject: Update on Children's Services Improvement Action Plan**

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 type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" 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. In late 2012, Children's Services developed an action plan to focus and drive improvement in social work and safeguarding. This 'Nine Point' plan was developed after consultation with children and young people, staff and other stakeholders.
2. Progress on the plan over the past year has been good overall, particularly in the key areas of the plan relating to improving front line practice and services for children.

**Recommendations**

3. The Board is recommended to:
  - consider the report
  - advise on the Board's views of priorities and objectives for developing a revised plan for the year ahead.

## **1 Purpose of this report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Board with a summary of progress against the 'Nine Point Plan', developed by Children's Services to help improve social work and safeguarding in Leeds

## **2 Background information**

- 2.1 In late 2012 Children's Services developed a new action plan to focus improvement work in safeguarding and social work. The plan was developed to bolster the progress made since 2011, prepare for future inspection and provide a shared framework for staff and partners on priorities for improvement.
- 2.2 The plan, 'Supporting Children and Families, Strengthening Social Work' had nine themes and so has become known as 'The Nine Point Plan'. The plan was developed with input from managers and staff across the service; feedback from children and young people and consultation with key partners such as members of the Children's Trust Board.

## **3 Main issues**

- 3.1 Progress in implementing the plan has been good overall, particularly in the key areas of improving front line practice and services for children. The sections below summarise progress in each of the nine key strands of the plan.

### *Strengthen the voice and influence of children and young people*

- 3.2 Progress on this strand of the plan was good overall. The main areas of success include:
- *Achieving the national LILAC standard.* Leeds Children's Services were assessed by LILAC (Leading Improvement for Looked After Children, an organisation led by care leavers) as meeting all seven of their national standard for involving children and young people in their care.
  - *Development of Children in Care Council and setting up of Care Leavers Council.* The past year has seen improved working with the Children in Care Council in developing joint working with them on shared priorities such as the Care Promise. In addition a Care Leavers Council has been set up for the first time.
  - *Care Promise:* children and young people have led work to revise and renew the 'Care Promise' – key standards for the way services work with children in care. The promise was successfully launched in late 2013 with very positive feedback from children and staff.
  - *STARS awards:* children and young people worked with services to develop these awards to recognise the achievements of children in care. The events were very popular with children, families and staff and will continue in future years.

3.3 Some areas of this strand of the plan require further work to complete. These include: recommissioning advocacy services; promoting best practice in involvement in front line working.

*Improve provision for looked after children and care leavers*

3.4 Progress on this strand of the plan has been good overall, with marked improvements in services and support for children and young people in care and for care leavers. The main areas of success include

- *Residential improvement and reform.* The quality of residential care has been sharply improved and now all homes are judged by OfSTED to be either 'good' or 'outstanding'. In addition, two older style homes have been closed as part of a plan to move to smaller, family home style residential care.
- *New leadership and management:* the service has recruited new and successful leaders and managers for these vital teams, providing fresh impetus to improvement work.
- *Better, more cost effective management of placements:* the services has successfully reduced the use of external placements, has met targets for expanding the number of Council foster carers and centralised placements for children in care and care leavers in the Placements Team.
- *Corporate Offer:* the whole Council has contributed to making a clear offer to both Care Leavers and Foster Carers, ranging from free leisure activities to shopping discounts.

3.5 Some areas of this strand of the plan are still ongoing. These include: recommissioning advocacy services; promoting best practice in involvement in front line working.

*Strengthen the role of families*

3.6 Progress on this area of the plan was good overall, with all main actions implemented. The main areas of success are:

- *Implementation and expansion of Family Group Conferencing (FGC):* the service has successfully established the use of FGCs in Leeds, and met targets for expanding the service to more families, helping to keep families together and reduce the need for intervention and care.
- *Development of Restorative Practice training.* The service has continued an intensive training programme to front line staff in restorative practice to promote a new approach to working *with* families to resolve problems.

3.7 Whilst all actions have been fully implemented the service is determined to work more on evaluating the impact of FGCs and better targeting the expansion of the service towards the most vulnerable children and families.

*Develop social work practice*

3.8 Progress in this theme of the plan has been good overall. Implementation of this central element of the 9 Point Plan has been real strength of recent work, driven by strong leadership from the social work service. The main areas of success are:

- *Implementation of the Stein and Beihal development programme:* the Children's Social Work Service has worked closely with two leading academics from the University of York to develop and implement a research, policy and training programme for front line social work. Staff and managers have been closely engaged with the process and it has led to important changes in practice and policy.
- *Leadership development:* the leadership of the Social Work Service has been strengthened with the recruitment of new, successful and experienced leaders. This new team has helped drive change and this will now be further strengthened by a leadership development programme for all social work managers.
- *Improved workforce development:* restructuring has created a new Workforce Development Team which is now established. The team have now reorganised an enhanced programme of workforce training and development for all levels of staff and improved support for newly qualified workers.
- *Cross service development work:* there have been several successful programmes of engaging staff from across the service, working with leading experts in social work and safeguarding such as the Chief Social Worker of New Zealand.
- *West Yorkshire Care Proceedings Pilot:* Leeds is working with the Courts to pilot new approaches to Supervision Orders and Final reports. Feedback from the courts has been very positive about this work.
- *Implementation of Child and Family Assessment:* a new approach to assessment has been successfully implemented with all staff trained and new procedures in place.
- *Implementation of Frameworki:* after several years work the new IT system for social work and safeguarding was launched in November, after an intensive programme of training and development.

3.9 Whilst there has been very positive progress in this area of work, there are a small number of areas where work is ongoing. These include: implementation of the Principal Social Worker role; finalising a new kinship care policy and implementing a new quality assurance framework.

*Improve communication and engagement across social work services*

3.10 Progress in this area of the plan has been more uneven and requires improvement. Areas of progress include:

- *Improved engagement between leadership and front line staff:* a regular programme of events, meetings and visits has been set up to improve links

between senior managers and front line staff. Feedback from staff for events such as the Social Work conference have been very positive.

- *One Minute Guides:* in recent months a new format for clear and concise summaries of key issues and subjects has been developed with staff and partner agencies. Feedback for these has been very positive and a wide range of staff in the NHS, Council and Schools have praised the usefulness of this new approach.
- *Increased use of Sharepoint:* the service has begun to make better use of the web and intranet to share research, policy and news and to help communication across the service.

3.11 Remedial actions to address delays in this work have been agreed and a communications plan has been agreed with three priorities: 'Doing the simple things better', 'Recognising success' and 'Learning together'.

*Improve ICT and the estate for social work and families*

3.12 This area of the plan has made some important and valuable progress but, conversely, some areas of delay remain so it requires improvement overall. The main areas of success are:

- *Implementation of Frameworki:* as set out in a separate report to the Board, the new IT system for social work and safeguarding is now live and in use by front line teams.
- *Improved ICT infrastructure:* IT services have completed a programme to improve IT systems for social work teams, reducing delay and helping day to day work through Windows 7, wifi access in area offices etc.
- *Agreed plans for relocation of Roundhay Road staff:* after significant delays in previous years, there is now agreement to move all teams from Roundhay Road to new office accommodation.

3.13 The main areas where further work is ongoing include: implementing effective reporting from Frameworki; improvements to the wider estate for social work staff and improving access to mobile working ICT for front line staff

*Develop peer support and challenge*

3.14 Progress in this area of the plan has been good overall. The service has made very effective use of expert and peer advice over the past year to support and inform change and improvement in Leeds. The main areas of success are:

- *North Lincolnshire and New Zealand visits:* a wide range of staff and managers were involved in cross service work to develop new approaches to social work with leading practitioners from New Zealand and North Lincolnshire, an authority rated as 'outstanding' by OfSTED.

- *Academic research:* the service has engaged leading academics in supporting reviews and improvement plans for key areas, such as: the Stein and Beihal work detailed above; a review of Care Leavers support by Emily Munro; and reviews of CAF and the Principal Social Worker role by Dr Mark Peel.

3.15 A minor amount of further work is needed to fully implement the recommendations proposed by existing work, and to develop a renewed programme to support new priorities such as improving support for 0-4 year olds.

3.16 At a local level the Leeds Safeguarding Children's Board is providing effective challenge to the service; including scrutiny of practice through independent case file audits.

*Strengthen quality assurance and performance management*

3.17 Progress in this area requires improvement overall. The pace of change has been delayed in the past six months due to the demands of managing the implementation of Frameworki. The main areas of success are:

- *Strengthened oversight by Independent Reviewing Officers and Child Protection Chairs:* the independent oversight of child protection and care cases has been strengthened by new management in the service and improved quality assurance.
- *Improved performance reporting:* a wide range of new reports and analysis were developed and shared with teams and managers. The most successful new report was better team level analysis which led to more focused work with individual teams and managers.

3.18 To address delays in this area further work has been agreed, particularly to: improve quality assurance and reporting in targeted and complex needs services; implement a revised performance and quality assurance framework and strengthening the voice of children and families in performance reporting.

*Strengthen early help and prevention*

3.19 Implementation of this area of the plan has been good, with all key actions implemented. The main areas of success are:

- *Turning the Curve:* investment in early help and prevention has helped Leeds safely reduce the need for children to be in care.
- *Investment and expansion of key services:* the past year has seen key, evidence based, early help services restructured and expanded. These include the new Early Start service, Multi-Systemic Therapy, Family Nurse Partnership and Family Group Conferencing.
- *Improved support for joint working:* the service has worked with schools and partners to improve cluster working including support for Targeted Services

Leaders, improved training and quality assurance and better performance information.

- 3.20 Whilst all areas show good progress, the service is now determined to move onto assuring the impact of early help services; improving targeting of support to those most in need and improving communication and engagement around the Early Help offer.

## **4 Corporate Considerations**

### **4.1 Consultation and Engagement**

- 4.1.1 Consultation informed development of the plan and work is now ongoing to consult a range of stakeholders to update the plan for the year ahead.

### **4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration**

- 4.2.1 Improving outcomes for children and families in need of help, protection and care is an important part of the Council's duty to promote equality.

### **4.3 Council policies and City Priorities**

- 4.3.1 Delivery of this plan directly relates to key priorities of the Council and its partners as set out in the Best Council Plan and Children and Young People's Plan.

### **4.4 Resources and value for money**

- 4.4.1 Delivery of this plan is a key element in the directorate's budget strategy, by helping 'turn the curve' and reducing the need for children to be in care.

### **4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In**

- 4.5.1 None applicable

### **4.6 Risk Management**

- 4.6.1 Ensuring this plan is successful is an important part of achieving key priorities for the service and Council such as reducing the need for children to be in care and the Children's Services budget strategy. Therefore the service has redirected staff to support the project management of the plan.

## **5 Conclusions**

- 5.1 As this report shows, the 'Nine Point Plan' has helped support and inform a wide programme of improvement and reform in social work and safeguarding. Progress has been good over the past year and has made a real difference to children, families and front line staff. Where delays have occurred, these are being managed and remedial plans are in place. Views are now being sought from a range of partners to update the plan and continue to improve over the next year.

## **6 Recommendations**

6.1 The Board is recommended to:

- consider the report
- advise on the Board's views of priorities and objectives for developing a revised plan for the year ahead.

## 7 **Background documents**<sup>1</sup>

7.1 None

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<sup>1</sup> 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.