

## INITIAL BUDGET PROPOSALS 2015/16 DIRECTORATE CHILDREN'S SERVICES

### Service Context

The Council has a statutory duty and responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of the 180,000 children and young people across Leeds. Leeds has set out a bold ambition to be the best city and the best council in the UK. We can only achieve this if we are the best city for children and young people to grow up in. This ambition is captured within our vision for Leeds as a 'Child Friendly City'. We are working to achieve this through our shared partnership strategy - the Leeds Children and Young People's Plan 2011-15 and the new plan for 2015-19 which is currently being developed and consulted on. Within this we have identified five outcomes: that children and young people can be safe, healthy, do well in learning, have fun growing up and have a voice and influence over the decisions affecting them, and crucially three obsessions: to safely and appropriately reduce the number of children looked after; to reduce the number of children and young people not in education, employment or training; and, to increase engagement in all phases of education.

A relentless focus on these obsessions galvanises the city around the difference that partners can make to contribute to Leeds becoming a child friendly city. Restorative Practice underpins our approach. We aim to work *with* children and families as opposed to doing things *for* them or *to* them, providing high support and high challenge, and empowering children and families to take responsibility for making positive and productive decisions about their lives and renegotiating a new 'social contract' between the various representatives of 'the state' and the citizens of Leeds based on 'high support and high challenge' practices.

Children's Services continues to face significant demand pressures including an increase of approximately 5,000 in the number of children and young people across the city since 2009 as well as a changing demographic mix. These changes have increased demand across all the services that we provide and commission and present significant challenges in respect of the supply of school places, the number of referrals and potentially increase the cost of high level services such as children in need, special educational needs and children in the care of the authority. However, despite this increase in demand and in contrast to much of the national picture, Leeds has successfully, and safely, stabilised and reduced the number of looked after children.

Our budget strategy for 2015/16 is guided by our statutory duties to help ensure that children and young people are kept safe, receive good quality education, and that any additional support needs are identified and addressed. We are also guided by our priority to create better life chances for children and young people across the City whilst at the same time recognising the changing role of the local authority particularly with regards to education support and the changing relationship with schools.

The budget challenges facing the Council in 2015/16 and 2016/17 will necessitate a fundamental re-design of services for children, young people and families to continue to support the strategy which we have in place. Over recent financial years, the prioritisation of resources to support vulnerable children and families has seen huge improvement in our 3 strategic obsessions. The medium-term budget strategy is based on sustaining these improvements and continuing to support the over-arching strategy around protecting the service around child protection and safeguarding whilst at the same time continuing to invest in preventative and early intervention services. Our vision is to build a fully-integrated Children's Services Directorate that will offer a seamless multi-agency service to vulnerable

children, young people and their families working at a locality level in partnership with schools, clusters and other partners.

The 2015/16 budget proposals are set in the context of the vision outlined above. In 2015/16 Children's Services face pressures of some £11.4m, including £1.7m of inflationary pressures and £6m of grant funding reductions, including a £2.4m reduction in the Education Support grant primarily as a result of a Government decision to cut the national grant by £200m. In addition, there are demand pressures of approximately £1.2m primarily in respect of home to school transport and a further £1.5m of other recurrent budget pressures. The budget strategy also includes a proposal to invest a further £1m by March 2017 to support and enhance those services that work with children and young people who are at risk of child sexual exploitation and those who go missing. Recognising these significant financial challenges, the 2015/16 budget proposals include a range of savings and efficiency proposals of some £16.4m across the Directorate.

In respect of Looked After Children, 2015/16 budget continues to reflect the success of our strategic obsession and 'Council Plan Priority' around safely and appropriately reducing the need for children to be in care with further proposed budget savings of £1.7m from further reducing the number of externally provided fostering and residential placements in addition to changing the mix of placement provision. Aligned to this programme the budget strategy recognises the need for additional investment to support Special Guardianship Orders, additional support for placements with extended families (kinship care) as well as further investment into in-house foster care.

The 2015/16 proposals also include over £4.8m of savings from a range of efficiencies and funding measures including reducing the leadership and management capacity across the Directorate [£1.1m of savings by March 2017], releasing staff who have expressed an interest to leave via voluntary severance/retirement [£0.25m] and capitalising spend in school revenue budgets [£1.5m] as well as implementing a transformational change programme across the Directorate [£2.5m of savings by March 2017]. In terms of staffing, the range of budget proposals for 2015/16 would result in a net reduction of around 177 [full-time equivalent] posts across the Directorate.

In respect of Education Support Services, the budget strategy recognises the impact of the £2.4m further reduction in the Education Support Grant. In response, the ambition is to retain a 'Leeds Learning Improvement function' through the development and implementation of a business model that would generate an additional £1.7m of income through trading with schools and academies in Leeds and also with other local authorities.

The 2015/16 financial year will see a fundamental re-design of the services that support children, young people and their families. Taking a partnership approach the proposal is to build on the current locality and cluster model by devolving and delegating targeted support services to work in localities. A key principle underpinning this will be the development and implementation of multi-agency and multi-disciplinary teams based in localities, working in close partnership and co-located with schools and clusters of schools. We will build on the highly successful Families First (Troubled Families) Programme and the 25 locality based, multi-agency clusters of services that already bring together a wide range of children's services, the proposals would bring together schools, social work teams, governors, police, youth and youth offending services, children's services, housing services, the third sector, and health services. These teams would support our strategy at a local level, securing the best solutions for those children, young people and families requiring additional help.

The budget strategy includes a number of proposals in respect of those services that support young people. These will include further savings on the Youth Offer as well as proposed reductions in respect of funding for Targeted Information Advice and Guidance which is

currently commissioned under the banner 'Connexions Leeds' and which works with priority groups of young people around the NEET (not in employment, education or training) agenda. This level of budget reductions across the Young People and Skills services would necessitate a fundamental change across the Council and partners in the city as to how we respond to young people at risk of becoming NEET.

### **Key Risks**

The number of children and young people in the city is increasing which places greater demand for services for children and families. In particular, the wider financial and economic climate can have a significant impact and increase requests for service/contacts specifically in the referrals for statutory social care services. The combination of continuing rising demand and reducing resources will place significant pressures across the system.

In addition to the risks around demand and resources it should be highlighted that the statutory duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people mean that Children's Services are the only element of the Council that is the subject of an unannounced inspection regime. There are continuing national concerns around child protection and safeguarding, including recent cases around child sexual exploitation.

The implementation of the range of proposals within the Children and Families Act will also continue to present challenges in 2015/16 and beyond, specifically around Special Educational Needs (SEN) where the Act extended the SEN system from birth to 25 alongside the requirement that all new statutory assessments will result in an integrated Education, Health and Care Plan with extended rights and protections for young people in further education and training, in addition to offering families personal budgets.

The budget proposals for 2015/16 include £16.4m of further savings/efficiencies to be found by March 2016, on top of those already achieved in 2014/15 and previous years. The need to deliver this significant programme of savings at the same time as developing the re-design proposals and trading ambitions will require leadership and programme management capacity, at a directorate, corporate and partnership level.