



Report of the Interim Director of Children's Services

Executive Board

Date: 12th February 2010

Children's Services Scrutiny Board Inquiry Into Safeguarding - Interim Report: Director of Children's Service's Response

Electoral Wards Affected: all

Ward Members consulted
(referred to in report)

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Eligible for Call In

Not Eligible for Call In
(Details contained in the report)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.0 This report details the recommendation from the Children's Services Scrutiny Board's Inquiry into Safeguarding - Interim Report. The full interim report is attached at Appendix 1. This report includes comment by the Interim Director of Children's Services for Executive Board to consider in determining how they wish to respond.
- 2.0 The report relates to the issue of resources in Children and Young People's Social Care and therefore links closely with the Proposed Revenue Budget Report for 2010/11, which is also on the Executive Board's agenda. The Interim Director's comments link in with this report by proposing support for the principle of the Scrutiny recommendation, but with a pragmatic approach to taking this forward that recognises current challenges around social workers recruitment and the wider quality improvement, culture change and remodelling work currently taking place within the service in Leeds. The report also outlines how this work would be monitored.

RECOMMENDATION

Executive Board is recommended to:

- Note the recommendation of the Children's Services Scrutiny Board Inquiry into Safeguarding-Interim Report; and
- Endorse the response set out by the Interim Director of Children's Services in Paragraphs 3.2 to 3.7 of this report as an appropriate response to this recommendation.

1.0 PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

1.1 At its meeting on 28th January the Children's Services Scrutiny Board agreed an interim report as part of its inquiry into safeguarding children in Leeds. The interim report is attached at Appendix 1. This interim report includes a single recommendation, directed to the Executive Board, which has implications for Council spending and particularly for Children's Services. In accordance with the requirements of the constitution, the response to the Scrutiny Board's recommendation needs to be agreed by the Executive Board. The purpose of this report is therefore:

- To outline for Executive Board the recommendation made by the Children's Services Scrutiny Board; and
- To provide comment on the recommendation by the Interim Director of Children's Services for Executive Board to consider in determining how they wish to respond.

2.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2.1 In spring 2009, as part of its work programme and in response to issues raised through inspection findings (particularly the December 2008 Annual Performance Assessment) and matters discussed at its meetings, the Children's Services Scrutiny Board chose to carry out an inquiry into safeguarding children and young people in Leeds.

2.2 A cross-party working group was established and through scoping the issue it was agreed that the inquiry would have two distinct strands, resources and the preventative duty. Although the working groups for each strand had completed their original planned evidence collection by early December 2009, after meeting together, the members involved decided they wished to gather some important further evidence (during January and February 2010) and wanted to wait until after the publication of the Ofsted and Care Quality Commission Announced Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children's Service's, before drawing together their own overall conclusions.

2.3 However, those members also felt that they did not want to delay making an important recommendation with significant financial implications, particularly in light of the budget setting process during February 2010. So it was agreed that an interim report would be produced to highlight this recommendation and would be submitted in February to coincide with the paper on the proposed revenue budget for 2010-2011, to ensure that members have the opportunity to take timely action in response to its findings.

2.4 The recommendation from the report is detailed in the 'Main Issues' section along with a response from the Interim Director of Children's Services.

2.5 The Interim Director has brought the response proposed to the attention of the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services who has raised no additional issues.

3.0 MAIN ISSUES

- 3.1 The Children's Services Scrutiny Board Inquiry into Safeguarding-Interim Inquiry makes a single recommendation set out in two parts:

Recommendation One:

'We recommend that the Executive Board includes an increased resource for children's social care staffing in the budget proposals to be put forward to Council in February 2010.

We recommend that the costings provided to us by the Chief Officer for Children and Young People's Social Care for a caseload of 20 cases are used as a minimum starting point for working towards a children's social work service with sufficient staff to ensure a reasonable caseload, and promoting quality outcomes for the children and families of Leeds'.

Response from the Interim Director of Children's Services

- 3.2 Children's Services recognise and value the depth of the Scrutiny Inquiry into Safeguarding and appreciate the timeliness of this interim report and its recommendation. The Interim Director of Children's Services is happy to support the first part of the Board's recommendation. The need for additional resource has been highlighted throughout analysis carried out with Children and Young People's Social Care during 2009/10. Resource levels are also a key theme in the report on the announced inspection of safeguarding and looked after children's services, published on 7th January 2010. The Council is committed to responding effectively to the findings of that report. A separate report about the announced inspection is also on the February Executive Board agenda.
- 3.3 Before the announced inspection, as the Scrutiny Board's interim report recognises, work had already started to help reduce caseloads. In October 2009, for example, it was agreed that capacity should be increased through 25 new Advanced Practitioner posts. Eight of these have been recruited and will be starting work in these posts in February. The second wave of recruitment has now commenced.
- 3.4 In view of the Scrutiny Board's recommendation, Executive Board is asked to note the report also on its February agenda, which sets out the Council's proposed revenue budget for 2010/11. In broad terms, the scrutiny recommendation is already taken account of within the proposed budget, which incorporates a £6.2 million increase for Children and Young People's Social Care.
- 3.5 What this proposed increase does not do is direct the full amount suggested in the Scrutiny Board's interim report for the immediate recruitment of the additional social worker numbers suggested (and the administrative and managerial staff needed to support these extra numbers). This would be an unrealistic ambition given the limitations of the supply of qualified social workers currently available. Instead, the 2010/11 budget proposals include a two-year approach to increasing social work capacity. Year one builds-in additional funding for the 25 advanced practitioners, alongside a re-designation of other funding into additional frontline social work posts. Year two (2011/12) will allow for further new posts to be built into the social worker establishment. This two-year approach is pragmatic, with a strong focus in year one on remodelling the existing workforce to undertake more support functions and release social worker capacity. Importantly, this increased capacity is part of a wider approach to improving the quality of practice at the front line and the quality of the service as a whole.

3.6 It is suggested therefore that Executive Board endorses the recommendation of the Scrutiny Board but rather than proposing the immediate recruitment of the number of additional social workers and support staff suggested in scrutiny's report, agrees a more pragmatic approach, combining the remodelling of existing services along with phased recruitment of additional frontline staff. This is considered a better way to achieve the improved quality and reduced case loads being sought. Over the next two years this approach can significantly improve our support for vulnerable children and young people in Leeds.

3.7 If approved, Children's Services will welcome the opportunity to report progress on this approach to the Scrutiny Board. In addition, the progress and impact of this work will be closely monitored by the newly established Improvement Board, ensuring it is continually and effectively reviewed. Executive Board will be kept up-to-date through the monitoring reports on the Children's Services Improvement Plan.

4.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNCIL POLICY AND GOVERNANCE

4.1 There are no specific implications for council policy and governance.

5.0 LEGAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no specific legal implications. The resource implications of making additional investment in Children and Young People's Social Care are contained within the Executive Board report on the Proposed Revenue Budget for 2010-2011 on the February Executive Board agenda.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

6.1 The timing and nature of the Interim Scrutiny Inquiry Recommendation is helpful for the Council's priority of improving safeguarding. The Interim Director of Children's Services has accepted the recommendation that more resources are required within the Children and Young People's Social Care budget and has proposed a pragmatic approach to taking this forward that will improve social work capacity in the context of wider improvements within the service. Executive Board will be kept up-to-date through monitoring reports on the Children's Services Improvement Plan.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Executive Board is recommended to:

- Note the recommendation of the Children's Services Scrutiny Board Inquiry into Safeguarding-Interim Report; and
- Endorse the response set out by the Interim Director of Children's Services in Paragraphs 3.2 to 3.7 of this report as an appropriate response to this recommendation.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Report to the 12th February 2010 Executive Board on the Ofsted and Care Quality Commission announced Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children's Services in Leeds.

Report to the 12th February Executive Board on the Proposed Revenue Budget 2010/11.