



Report of the: Interim Director of Children's Services

To: Children's Services Scrutiny Board

Date: 25th March 2010

Subject: The Children's Services Improvement Board, Improvement Plan and Improvement Notice

Electoral wards affected:

All

Specific implications for:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the gap

1.0 Background

- 1.1. In January 2010, the Children's Services Scrutiny Board received a report on Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission's Announced Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children's Services in Leeds. As part of this report, members were informed of some of the key activity taking place to support improvements across children's services in Leeds. In particular that report drew attention to the formation of a new independent Improvement Board to monitor progress, an Improvement Plan to inform work in Leeds and provide a monitoring tool for the Board and an Improvement Notice issued by the Secretary of State to inform and also help monitor the work taking place.
- 1.2. This report provides more details about each of these three inter-linking developments. The main focus is the Improvement Plan, a copy of which is included in the appendix, but it also provides further background information on the Improvement Board and the Improvement Notice.
- 1.3. This report links closely to the Children's Service's Update report, which is also on the Scrutiny Board's March agenda. In particular the review of leadership, management and partnership arrangements, the refresh of Leeds' children's trust arrangements and the revisions to the Leeds Safeguarding Children Board are all important strands within the Improvement Plan.
- 1.4. There will be further updates on progress against the Improvement Plan provided to scrutiny members in line with other performance reporting at future meetings.

2.0 The Improvement Board

- 2.1. A proposal to establish the Improvement Board was formally proposed to Dawn Primarolo MP, Minister of State for Children Young People and Families, in a letter

from the Leaders of Council dated 4 December 2009, and was formally announced as an agreed proposal shortly afterwards.

- 2.2. At the same time, it was announced that the Board would be led by an independent chair and it was confirmed that Bill McCarthy, Chief Executive of NHS Yorkshire and the Humber, had kindly agreed to fulfil this role. The final membership of the Board has now been agreed and can be confirmed as consisting of the following representatives:
- i) Cllr Golton, Lead Member for Children's Services.
 - ii) Paul Rogerson, Chief Executive of Leeds City Council.
 - iii) Chief Superintendent Gerry Broadbent, Leeds North East Divisional Commander, West Yorkshire Police.
 - iv) Peter Roberts, Chief Executive of Leeds City College.
 - v) John Lawlor, Chief Executive of NHS Leeds.
 - vi) Penny Thompson, external challenge and support.
- 2.3. The Improvement Board will also be attended by key officers of the Council, including the Assistant Chief Executive (Planning, Policy and Improvement), who will be the key corporate officer supporting the Chair, and the Director of Children's Services. Other senior colleagues from children's services and Education Leeds will also report into the Board as required.
- 2.4. An invite has also been extended for a Government Office for Yorkshire and the Humber representative, as well as a member of the DCSF Intervention team, to also attend the Improvement Board in an observer capacity.
- 2.5. The Board met for the first time on the 19 January 2010 and for a second time on 22 February 2010. At these meetings the Board discussed its proposed terms of reference and the final version is now included in the Improvement Plan.

3.0 Improvement Notice

- 3.1. In the January 2010 report to Executive Board, Members were informed that the Minister of State for Children, Young People and Families had indicated that she was minded to issue a formal Improvement Notice which would establish the targets and milestones the Minister expects to see delivered over the coming months.
- 3.2. Improvement Notices were introduced in April 2008 as a new method of addressing significant or enduring under-performance in a local authority or partnership. Issued by the appropriate Secretary of State (or Minister on his behalf), they aim to clearly specify the issue of concern, the level of improvement required, when and how this will be assessed and subsequent steps that may be taken if improvement is not achieved.
- 3.3. Improvement Notices are not legal instruments, but are formal notices designed to address under performance in a local authority or partner, usually as a step before formal statutory action.
- 3.4. A draft of Leeds' Improvement Notice was received shortly after the January 2010 Executive Board meeting and officers have been in discussion with the DCSF over recent weeks to secure agreement on the final terms of the Notice. The draft was

also reported to the Improvement Board at both its January and February meetings and the Board's comments have been taken into account in agreeing the final notice.

- 3.5. The Improvement Notice sets out a clear agenda for improvement in the areas of safeguarding children, improving attainment, delivering the National Challenge Programme and making overall improvements in LAA indicators relating to children's services and statutory attainment targets.
- 3.6. The duration of the Improvement Notice is until October 2011, although it can be lifted at an earlier date at the discretion of the Secretary of State if the necessary improvements have been made and are sustainable. A copy of the Improvement Notice is attached.

4.0 The Improvement Plan

- 4.1. The terms of reference for the Improvement Board, as well as the Improvement Notice, require the preparation of an Improvement Plan which identifies the key actions being progressed to ensure improvement is secured and that milestones set within the Improvement Notice are met.
- 4.2. The Improvement Plan has five high level themes as follows:
- i) Effective leadership and governance of integrated children's services in Leeds;
 - ii) Excellent safeguarding standards and practice;
 - iii) Improved outcomes for looked after children;
 - iv) All young people participating fully, socially and economically;
 - v) A highly skilled, well supported, motivated and continually developing workforce;
 - vi) Within each theme are a number of outcomes, for which lead accountability has been identified.
- 4.3. All of the actions within the Improvement Plan arise from key sources (e.g. the Improvement Notice, the Announced and Unannounced Inspection reports, the Annual CAA Children's Assessment) and, therefore, represent the key performance issues that need to be addressed over the course of the next 12-18 months. The Improvement Plan is attached.
- 4.4. A monitoring process and framework has also been developed and is outlined in the relevant section of the Improvement Plan.

5.0 Conclusions

- 5.1 Services for children and young people in Leeds are going through an important period of improvement. The establishment of an Independent Improvement Board, an Improvement Plan and the issue of an improvement notice all aim to drive and monitor this improvement. In the coming months the Children's services Scrutiny Board will have an important role to play in supporting and monitoring this work.

Background papers

- Report to Children's Services Scrutiny Board: Ofsted Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services in Leeds: Outcomes and Wider Improvement Activity – 28th January 2010
- Report to Executive Board: Children's Services Improvement Arrangements – 10th March 2010