

Report of the Director of Children's Services

Report to Executive Board

Date: 12th October 2011

Subject: Findings of the Announced Ofsted Re-inspection of Safeguarding Services for Children and Young People in Leeds

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?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

1. This report presents the findings of the announced Ofsted re-inspection of safeguarding services for children and young people in Leeds. This follows an on-site inspection that took place between 12th and 16th September 2011. The Ofsted report on the inspection is scheduled for publication on 10th October and as such it will be submitted to Executive Board as a late, additional paper and appendix 1 to this covering report.
2. Ofsted undertook their last announced inspection of safeguarding and looked after children's services in Leeds in December 2009 (with the report published in January 2010). That inspection found the overall effectiveness of safeguarding services to be inadequate and capacity to improve to be adequate.
3. In light of that inspection and wider issues identified across the service, an Improvement Notice was placed on Leeds by the Government. An Improvement Plan was drawn up and an Improvement Board, with an Independent Chair, was established to monitor the implementation of this. These arrangements were detailed in a report to the Executive Board in March 2010.
4. Since then, a significant amount of work across the council and the partnership of children's services in Leeds has been taking place to deliver improved safeguarding services. Elected Members have played an important role in monitoring, challenging and supporting this work through regular update reports to the Executive Board and Scrutiny Board. This announced inspection provided an important assessment of progress on this work and the basis on which the service will look to move forward and continue improving.

Recommendations

5. Members are recommended to note and consider the content of the Ofsted announced inspection report, which will be sent as an additional paper following its publication on 10th October.

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report presents the findings of the announced Ofsted re-inspection of safeguarding services for children and young people in Leeds. This follows an on-site inspection that took place between 12th and 16th September 2011. The Ofsted report on the inspection is scheduled for publication on 10th October and as such it will be submitted to Executive Board as a late, additional paper and appendix 1 to this covering report.

2 Background information

- 2.1 Ofsted undertook their last announced inspection of safeguarding and looked after children's services in Leeds in December 2009 (with the report published in January 2010). That inspection found the overall effectiveness of safeguarding services to be inadequate and capacity to improve to be adequate. In light of that inspection and wider issues identified across the service, an Improvement Notice was placed on Leeds by the Government. An Improvement Plan was drawn up and an Improvement Board, with an Independent Chair was established to monitor the implementation of this. These arrangements were outlined in a report to Executive Board on 10th March 2010.
- 2.2 Since then, a significant amount of work across the council and the partnership of children's services in Leeds has been taking place to deliver improved safeguarding services. Elected members have played an important role in monitoring, challenging and supporting this work through regular update reports to the Executive Board and Scrutiny Board. This announced inspection provided an important assessment of progress on this work and the basis on which the service will look to move forward and continue improving.
- 2.3 Ofsted published a revised framework for announced inspections of safeguarding and looked after children's services in October 2010. Subsequently, in line with revised monitoring arrangements for Authorities with inadequate judgements against safeguarding or looked after children services, Ofsted entered into correspondence with Leeds Children's Services in May this year about undertaking a re-inspection of key services. This took place in light of the measurable progress achieved under the direction of the Improvement Board and the upward momentum gained through subsequent inspections of fostering and adoption services and in particular the unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment services in January 2011.
- 2.4 Ten days notification of the intention to undertake an inspection was received from Ofsted on August 26th. The inspection framework was slightly different from that anticipated. Its focus was solely on safeguarding (and not on looked after children's services as well, as had been the case in the 2009 announced inspection), the inspection was carried out by a team of three HMI inspectors over a timescale of five days. This is consistent with a change in practice by Ofsted whereby announced re-inspections are targeted more intensively at service areas previously found to have been inadequate. Throughout the process a particular focus was maintained on assessing compliance with recommendations made at previous announced and unannounced inspections.

2.5 During the week on site the inspectors held over 30 meetings, saw approximately 100 people and examined 25 case files in detail. Methodology for the inspection had a strong practice emphasis, based on a detailed analysis of this sample of case work files, where families were the subject of safeguarding interventions. The meetings that took place were with a number of key individuals and groups across the partnership together with off site visits to referral and assessment teams, the contact centre and one children's centres. The inspection team had access to a range of documentation and performance data including a comprehensive self assessment carried out in advance by the Authority against the Ofsted evaluation schedule.

3 Main issues

3.1 The Ofsted grading of inadequate for safeguarding received following the announced inspection in December 2009, is a limiting judgement in respect of the overall annual assessment of children's services. Whilst this judgement remains in place the Council's children's services are restricted to an outcome of "performs poorly" in the annual assessment process. As such, in addition to the significance of this latest announced inspection as a measure of progress and a basis from which children's services will maintain its improvement journey, it is also important in terms of its impact on the annual children's services rating for Leeds and the wider implications this has for the council and its partners in terms of focus, confidence and reputation going forward.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

4.1.1 In preparation for the inspection a significant amount of staff and wider stakeholder engagement and where appropriate, consultation was carried out. Communications notifying staff, Councillors and wider partners about the inspection were sent shortly after notification was received, staff 'workshop events were held for those staff most immediately affected by the inspection and a series of communication documents were distributed widely. Partners from health, the police and other relevant services helped prepare information relating to the key lines of enquiry that Ofsted identified. Representatives from partners organisations, as well as a small number of parents were also interviewed as part of the inspection process.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

4.2.1 There are no specific considerations under this heading.

4.3 Council Policies and City Priorities

4.3.1 Improvements in children's services and particularly in services for vulnerable children and young people are a key priority for the city as reflected in key plans. This inspection is therefore an important measure of progress in this area that will shape the future prioritisation and direction of travel for this work.

4.4 Resources and Value for Money

- 4.4.1 There are no specific resource implications to this report, other than to highlight that the Council's investment in safeguarding services was an important area of interest for the inspectors.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

- 4.5.1 The final report from this Ofsted inspection will not be published until 10th October, the findings are confidential until then. As such it has not been possible to include the report with this covering report at the time of publication, but it will be submitted as a late paper and appendix to this report once it has been published.

4.6 Risk Management

- 4.6.1 There are no specific considerations under this heading.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 The Council and its partners have invested significant focus and resource on improving safeguarding practice for children, young people and families in Leeds since 2009. The unannounced inspection in January 2011 and the monitoring work of the Improvement Board has indicated that significant progress has been made. This announced inspection is a further important measure of that progress.

6 Recommendations

- 6.1 Members are recommended to note and consider the content of the Ofsted announced inspection report, which will be sent as an additional paper following its publication on 10th October.

7 Background documents

- 7.1 Ofsted framework for announced inspections of safeguarding and looked after children's services (October 2010).
- 7.2 'Children's Services Improvement Arrangements' – report to Executive Board, 10th March 2010.
- 7.3 Children's Services Improvement Update Reports – a series of regular reports to Executive Board and Children's Services Scrutiny Board detailing progress against the Improvement Plan and wider related developments in Children's Services.