

Annex 1

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Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families Tim Loughton
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
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Dear Minister

I write to update you on the progress of the Leeds Children's Services Improvement Board. The Board has met a further three times since my last report in April. During that time a substantial amount of work has been done to further improve services for children and young people in Leeds.

I noted in your response to my last letter that you would like to see more detail about the rate of progress on integrating education back into the Local Authority and I will aim to address that within this report.

Overall Progress

You will have received the report from Graham Archer following the Department for Education review meeting with Leeds City Council on 20 May 2011. This highlighted a number of areas of real progress including:

strong leadership and commitment from the Children's Trust Board, chaired by Councillor Judith Blake as Executive Member for Children's Services, which will continue in Leeds as the key strategic driver for ensuring continued improvement and sustainability across the partnership in the long term;

a change in culture, in particular partners and practitioners across the city are starting to converse in a common language and there is recognition this is a 'city-wide' agenda and not just Council led;

achievement of some key targets from the Improvement Notice, despite increased workloads, and increasing evidence of quality improvements; and

increased evidence of Leeds being open to challenge and advice from a range of experts in key areas, and this being recognised as part of the key to sustainability.

It also acknowledged the commitment (including cross party) and realism with which the Local Authority is approaching the challenges it still has and the plans to address these, the main challenge being ensuring consistently strong practice everywhere. Work has

continued to progress the improvement work over the past few months as the Local Authority also gets ready for an Ofsted inspection in the Autumn, which I hope will reflect the hard work and commitment shown by the Local Authority and its partners in Leeds over the past 18 months.

Specific Areas of Work

Transformation Programme – Directorate Structure

In my last report I referred to the work being done by the Director of Children's Services, Nigel Richardson, to refine and strengthen his directorate structure.

In taking forward this work to create an integrated service for children and young people in Leeds, the majority of the senior leadership team for the directorate has now been appointed. These city-wide leadership roles will work closely with Nigel to ensure the delivery of the outcomes, priorities and ambitions set out in the city's new Children and Young People's Plan (which is one of five city-wide themed plans established to deliver the city's ambitions).

Four posts were advertised nationally, with a rigorous approach to selection through an assessment centre (including partner panels and young people's panels) and Member appointment through the Council's Employment Committee. Three of these have been filled from a pool of strong candidates including one successful internal candidate.

These are:

Deputy Director Safeguarding – Stephen Walker, Stephen is currently Head of Child and Family Services, City and County of Swansea.

Chief Officer Performance and Commissioning – Sarah Sinclair; Sarah is currently Deputy Director for Commissioning in Children's Services at Leeds.

Chief Officer Partnership Development and Business Support – Sue Rumbold, Sue is currently Head of Children's Trust at Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council.

The post of Deputy Director Learning, Skills and Universal Services has not yet been filled.

The next two main leadership tiers for the directorate have been agreed, following extensive staff and union involvement and are now being recruited to. This will enable the full integration of leadership roles and delivery teams, with a particular focus on local delivery. The current timeline will see appointments made to these posts late in September. At the same time, as the rest of the structure becomes clearer for current teams, we expect for all staff to understand their future role and the route and timescale for that to be determined.

Transformation Programme – Locality Integration

A key part of the implementation phase of the transformation programme has been the development of three early adopter clusters. These cluster areas have been identified as having disproportionately high levels of need on key indicators such as numbers of looked after children, NEET and free school meals. Additional capacity has been deployed in these clusters to help further develop the approach to locality working, local leadership and case management. An operational handbook is available to support staff to work together better. Additionally, there are two clusters who are early adopters for 0-5 early start teams, following an extensive joint review with health partners about the best way to improve 0-5 universal services.

The Local Safeguarding Children's Board has commissioned some work from Professor David Thorpe to help to understand referral patterns in more detail, which will add

significantly to the work already undertaken to improve the contact and referral system in Leeds.

Outcomes based accountability (OBA) is the framework being used to ensure that key data and information is available locally, so that the story behind that data can be understood and partners can generate actions on the basis of a shared understanding of performance in order to 'turn the curve'. This work enables the city-wide Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) to be delivered locally, especially the three obsessions – reducing the numbers of looked after children, reducing NEET and improving attendance. The city now has more than 30 trained OBA facilitators from across the partnership to support workshops and OBA implementation locally. During October Leeds are planning to hold two major, all-day workshops run by Mark Friedman, the recognised leader in this work.

Transformation programme - Education Review

A review on education provided by Leeds schools and the services they receive has been carried out by Professor Sir Tim Brighouse and David Woods. This was commissioned by the Director of Children's Services and Lead member of the Local Authority to enable them to take stock of the current position and performance and to inform the ongoing improvement journey for learning in the city. The review also took account of funding constraints (particularly as they affect local government), the encouragement of schools to consider academy status and a call, in the recent White Paper, for Local Authorities to be champion of the most vulnerable families, parents and pupils, rather than a direct provider of school improvement services.

The review identified some positive outcomes from Education Leeds that should be built upon but also some gaps that the Local Authority will need to address, for example, 'how the City Council, with its changed and wider brief, can find ways of ensuring that the city's schools have access to the best school improvement advice, challenge and support'.

It identified that whilst improving, Leeds needs to accelerate its improvement rates as other areas have improved faster. Leeds has seen improvements in outcomes at 19 with year on year a higher proportion of young people reaching level 2 and 3 qualifications by the age of 19. While the rate of improvement has not always been as strong as it has nationally there are good indications of improvement, with the achievement to date of the cohorts coming through in the next few years indicating that the gaps to national will narrow. The city recognises the importance of ensuring that these indications are realised in the results achieved.

At 16 Leeds has seen good improvement especially with the Level 2 (5+A*-C GCSE) measure where 2010 results of 76.5% were just above the national average having been over 6 percentage points below in 2007 at 55.9%. With the national standard of 5 or more good GCSE grades including English and Maths, Leeds has improved by 8.5 percentage points to 50.6% over the period 2007-10. This is faster improvement than England overall but with the national average for state funded schools at 55.2% there is recognition of the further progress needed. The narrowing of the gap in 2010 at Key Stage 4 for pupils entitled to free school meals needs to continue, as does improvement at 19, with the Leeds gaps remaining wider than national. Good improvement has been made in reducing the numbers of young people having no or limited qualifications at 16. Professor Brighouse's report highlights that, both at primary and secondary levels, there are too many schools falling below or close to the 'floor levels' in English and Maths performance indicators and there are too few secondary schools rated as 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted.

The report identifies a number of ways in which the Local Authority can influence school improvement. These include expanding the strong data sets, inherited from Education

Leeds, deployment of a highly skilled school improvement team and bringing key stakeholders together to take stock and 'set an over-arching ethos and set of expectations for the work of its schools and colleges'.

To provide a framework for the learning ambition in the city, and to ensure that there is coherence with the overarching CYPP, Leeds has developed the Leeds Education Challenge. This Children and Young People's School Improvement Plan for 2011-15 has been developed through more than 40 stakeholder meetings labelled the 'Big Conversation' – looking at the future relationship between schools and the Local Authority and specific areas that needed consideration. The initial stage of the conversation included a number of events, some of which included representatives from the city's universities, colleges and the Chamber of Commerce, as well as headteachers and governors.

Themes coming out of the 'Big Conversation' meetings included:

- a commitment to Leeds and localities;
- anxieties over how the change would be handled in terms of leadership and governance support;
- current partnerships and how to preserve and develop them.

The 'Big Conversation' culminated in a city-wide discussion with all headteachers on 12 July. Professor Brighouse, David Woods, Councillor Judith Blake, the Council's Chief Executive, and Nigel Richardson, the DCS, also presented at this meeting. Part of this meeting was to secure commitment to an inclusive set of delivery arrangements for the Leeds Education Challenge, which will be confirmed in September.

The Leeds Education Challenge, which has as a part of it the wider city vision to make Leeds recognised as the best city in the UK by 2030 and a 'Child Friendly City', has five pledges for 2015 specifically relating to learning:

- every child and young person of school age will be in school or in learning;
- every school will have an achievable plan to being recognised as an outstanding school;
- we will improve achievement for every young person year on year;
- every school will benefit from a fully qualified, skilled, committed and well-led staff team; and
- every child and young person will move confidently through their education.

Moving Forward

In my last report I mentioned that we were looking to review the work of the Improvement Board in July and that I would make some recommendations on the way forward.

Since the report we have been informed that Ofsted will undertake an announced inspection sometime in the Autumn. The Local Authority has submitted its self-assessment as part of the annual assessment process and is now waiting to be informed of the inspection date. Added to this, the July review by the Department for Education stated that exit from intervention would be considered if the inspection reflected the progress seen through the Improvement Board.

I felt that, therefore, it would be appropriate to wait until this inspection had been carried out and feedback received before making any recommendations on the future of the Improvement Board. By the time of my next report I hope to be in a position to do this. In the meantime, you can be assured that the monitoring processes established as part of the improvement arrangements continue. Improvement Board will be meeting early in September with a full agenda. The CTB received regular information, particularly on the 'obsessions' and CYPP performance more generally, and the Council's Executive Board and Scrutiny processes also ensure regular reporting of progress.

Yours sincerely

Bill McCarthy

Chief Executive – NHS Yorkshire and the Humber

Independent Chair for Leeds Children's Services Improvement Board