

Report of Director of Children's Services

Report to Scrutiny Board (Children and Families)

Date: 26th July 2012

Subject: Response to Scrutiny Inquiry Final report - Combating child poverty and raising aspirations

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 type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

1. This report sets out the Director of Children's Services response to the recommendations of the Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) inquiry into combating child poverty and raising aspiration, published on the 20th of June 2012.

Recommendations

2. Members are requested to approve the proposed responses as outlined in this report.

1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1** This report sets out the response of the Director of Children's Services to the recommendations of the Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) inquiry into the combating child poverty and raising aspiration, published on the 20th of June 2012.

2. Background information

- 2.1** Poverty lies at the root of most poor outcomes for children and blights the lives of too many children in Leeds. Eradicating child poverty in Leeds by 2020 is the ultimate challenging target, when considered against a backdrop of economic recession. The city's long term vision considers child poverty alongside all the key elements which impact upon child poverty. Namely, worklessness, levels of education and skills, housing and economic prosperity, aspiration and engaging hard to reach, isolated and disadvantaged families. We recognise that some of the factors with an impact on poverty are outside our control such as the global economic situation. We know that economic success, creates jobs and wealth which we can harness to address disadvantage and that in times of downturn we must still plan to minimise the impact of poverty and prepare families for the future.
- 2.2** Following early discussions, the Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) inquiry into the combating child poverty and raising aspiration identified some systemic issues (e.g. regulations, protocols, existing working practices) which present barriers to practical solutions, that were stopping support to families being as effective as it could be. Examples ranged from housing lettings policies to the size of school dining rooms.
- 2.3** In undertaking the inquiry the Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) provided members with the national and local context in relation to work on combating child poverty and raising aspirations, as well as sharing the current work on the child poverty needs assessment and draft Child Poverty Strategy for Leeds. The two groups visited one of the clusters identified for detailed study where they heard from local workers, visited facilities in smaller groups and met some service users. The report resulting from the inquiry is comprehensive and makes a total of seven recommendations. The report recognises the changing and difficult national context, the local context in terms of the rising birth rate and demographic changes and the work of the Child Poverty Strategy in bringing relevant partners together to address this issue.
- 2.4** The Director of Children's Services has accepted all the recommendations. The Child Poverty Strategy group continues to meet and address the systemic issues of working together. The group is chaired by Cllr. Blake, Lead Member for Children's Services.

3. Main issues

- 3.1** This section considers each of the seven recommendations made by Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) in their report and the response from the Director of Children's Services.

- 3.2 Recommendation 1 was to ensure that the Director of Children's Services provided an initial update on progress with the Child Poverty Strategy with the formal response to our recommendations in July 2012.**
- 3.2.1** This recommendation is accepted by the Director of Children's Services. The Child Poverty group will produce a formal response on progress for the Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) in July 2012.
- 3.3 Recommendation 2 – That the Director of Children's Services reports to us within three months on how the council and its partners are seeking to ensure the continued viability of money advice and credit union facilities within the city.**
- 3.3.1** This recommendation is accepted by the Director of Children's Services. A Community Development Finance Institution (CDFI) has been established in Leeds, in order to expand the availability of affordable financial services to low income households. Credit union increased membership in Quarter 4 and total number of members was 25,334 (of which 159 are new and 4,380 are junior). 1,206 loans were granted to financially excluded groups in Quarter 4 valued at £459,671. The set up costs for a telephone advice gateway with one common phone number for use across all advice agencies has been funded.
- 3.4 Recommendation 3 – That the Director of Children's Services reports back to us within three months on how he will ensure that workforce development plans are in place to increase front-line staff's ability to recognise needs such as debt advice and fuel poverty and signpost people appropriately.**
- 3.4.1** This recommendation is accepted by the Director of Children's Services. The Child Poverty Strategy group has advised the Welfare Reform Strategy Group to ensure that factors affecting child poverty and the workforce needs are taken account of in the Council's preparations for Universal Credit changes, including training the workforce. Training sessions available across the city for front line staff. Briefing sessions at Children's Trust Board Workforce Reform and Practice Development sub group, Children's Services leadership team and for cluster staff have taken place.
- 3.5 Recommendation 4 – That the Director of Children's Services reports back to us in three months on how the concerns raised about information sharing can be addressed.**
- 3.5.1** This recommendation is accepted by the Director of Children's Services. An information sharing agreement has been formally agreed between Leeds Community Health Trust and Children's Services around sharing data around all families under 5 years. As a direct result of this there has been a significant increase in registration of under 2 year olds in Children's Centers from around 30% to 60% and the identification of 2 year olds for vulnerable children's places is meeting the increased targets from 280 to place to 680 places by April next year.

3.6 Recommendation 5 – That the Director of Children’s Services reports back to us within three months on what is being done to increase the proportion of children and young people eligible for free school meals who are registered for this entitlement.

3.6.1 This recommendation is accepted by the Director of Children’s Services. An OBA workshop on Free School Meals was successfully undertaken on 22 February with partner actions identified. A Free School Meals Working Group has been established to implement the outcomes of the workshop. The first meeting took place on 12th June and was very well attended by school academies and other stakeholders. Draft terms of reference have been drawn up.

3.6.2 Free school meal uptake is reported on a financial year basis. Results for 2011/12 are currently being finalised. They are likely to be inline with 2010/11 for primary schools with an increase in uptake in secondary schools.

3.7 Recommendation 6 – That the Director of Children’s Services reports back to us within three months on the potential for the Child Poverty Strategy to engage with private sector housing providers on a similar model to social housing providers in combating the effects of poverty.

3.7.1 This recommendation is accepted by the Director of Children’s Services. Good attendance and engagement from housing has been secured for the Child Poverty Strategic group and the Head of Housing Support is attending the new Children’s Access to Service Panel (South). The Children and Young People’s Housing Plan has been made available for comment to children and young people’s ‘focus’ groups.

3.7.2 Although there are some good examples of Housing Services, Leeds ALMO and CSW working imaginatively to put in place housing options that keep families together and help children to thrive, such action is not universally embedded. The Children and Young People Housing Plan will roll out such good practice.

3.8 Recommendation 7 – That the Director of Children’s Services makes more information about services for children and families available at One Stop Centres.

3.8.1 This recommendation is accepted by the Director of Children’s Services. There is increased Jobshop presence in One Stop Centres in support of the Universal Credit pilot activity. There has been a reinstatement of the £35,000 of funding for Children’s Centre advice service following the original cut in funding. This should hopefully result in service being provided from a further 7 centres from October 2012 in addition to the 13 originally planned for 2012/13. The Children’s Centres Advice Service is to receive ongoing funding in 2012/13 and it is proposed that this will become a permanent funding stream managed via the Advice Agencies Grant. The mainstreaming of the funding provides an opportunity to make longer term plans for the service, ensuring that as many clients as possible benefit from it with the reduced level of resource available.

3.8.2 A mail out has been completed to approximately 9,500 households who are likely to be eligible for the Government Warm Front scheme to try and increase take-up of heating and insulation measures through that scheme whilst still available. We are currently promoting 'Wrap up Leeds' free loft and cavity wall insulation scheme, which is available to everyone, but also targeted at areas of low income with a large number of suitable properties. Leeds has generated 37 hotspots referrals during January, 64 in February and 53 in March.

4. Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

4.1.1 The Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) consulted widely as part of their review.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

4.2.1 Equality and diversity screening was not required as a response to the recommendation of the Scrutiny Board (Children and Families).

4.3 Council policies and City Priorities

4.3.1 There are no immediate implication for council policy and governance.

4.4 Resources and value for money

4.4.1 The recommendations are to be funded from within existing budgets and staffing.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

4.5.1 There are no legal implications, access to information or call in.

4.6 Risk Management

4.6.1 The risks associated with the recommendations are managed by the Child Poverty Strategic Group which is chaired by Cllr. Blake, Lead Member for Children's Services

5. Conclusions

5.1 The Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) inquiry into combating child poverty and raising aspirations has raised some important learning for departments across the Council. The recommendations it makes will help to address some systemic issues which have present barriers to practical solutions, and encourage departments to work more closely together. And enable the Scrutiny Board to monitor progress in this area. The actions proposed in response to these recommendations will ensure that this is the case, and that the work is taken forward into the future as effectively as possible, in relation to the national context.

6. Recommendations

6.1 Members are requested to approve the proposed responses as outlined in this report.

7. Background documents¹

7.1 Report of the Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) Final report-Combating child poverty and raising aspirations.

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available for inspection on request for a period of four years following the date of the relevant meeting. Accordingly this list does not include documents containing exempt or confidential information, or any published works. Requests to inspect any background documents should be submitted to the report author.