



Report of the Director of Children's Service

Scrutiny Board (Children's Services)

Date: 19 April 2007

Subject: Implementing the Children Act: April 2007 Update

Electoral Wards Affected: All

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

1.0 Introduction

1.1 This report follows on from a number of previous update reports that have been presented to the Scrutiny Board in response to the inquiry carried out by the Children and Young People Scrutiny Board during 2005/06 into the implementation of the Children's Act 2004.

1.2 The report aims to provide Members with the following:

- An update on progress developing and embedding children's trust arrangements in Leeds.
- An update on progress in the staffing, activities and forthcoming plans of the Director of Children's Services Unit.
- An overview of key budgetary information in relation to Children's Services, as requested previously by Scrutiny Board Members.
- An insight into **a selection** of key activities that have been taking place within the children's services portfolio in recent months, particularly in relation to work that looks to engage directly with young people. This type of work is being given particular focus as it is an area emphasized in the original Scrutiny Board report into the implementation of the Children Act 2004 and because Members have shown an ongoing interest in the progress made in this area.

In addressing each of these issues in turn, the report also looks to outline the key challenges coming up in the months ahead.

1.3 This report complements other reports being presented to the Children's Scrutiny Board, particularly the report on the review of the Children and Young People's Plan for Leeds. That report will provide Members with an opportunity to learn more about

this important area of current work as well as an opportunity to talk about priorities and forthcoming challenges across the range of Children's Services. With that in mind, this report maintains a tighter focus than some previous update reports on the specific areas that Members have previously highlighted an interest in.

- 1.4. An update on the July 2006 Action Plan that followed the Scrutiny Board's inquiry is attached at appendix 1.

2.0 Developing and Embedding Children's Trust Arrangements in Leeds

- 2.1 As has been outlined in previous reports, there are a number of key elements in place in Leeds to bring partners together, share ideas and information, agree and act upon shared priorities and focus on the safety of children. The following provides a brief update on some of the key work that has recently taken place.

2.2 The Integrated Strategic Commissioning Board (ISCB)

The ISCB has met twice so far during 2007, in February and April. The Board is developing its work to bring together partners from across Children's Services who can identify where and how they can pool and/or allocate resources to supporting key priorities and strategies. It is also an opportunity for partners to identify the decision-making pathways and those who should be consulted with in taking key issues forward. Issues considered at the recent meetings have included City Centre Youth Provisions, the development of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and the Obesity Strategy. The feedback received about the Board's work so far has been positive, with those participating feeling that it is helping to give focus and direction to shared priorities.

2.3 The Children Leeds Partnership

The Children Leeds Partnership has also met twice so far during 2007 (with its next meeting due on 20th April). The Partnership provides an opportunity for stakeholders to come together and learn more about each others activities as well as sharing ideas and best practice, contributing to policy development and considering the strategic direction of Children's Services work. At the last two meetings areas covered have included family support developments, the work of the Youth Offending Team in light of the Prevention of Youth Crime Strategy and issues around the participation of children and young people. The willingness and enthusiasm of those taking part to share ideas and contribute has been an extremely positive aspect of this work and demonstrates the strong commitment in this area. The Partnership is still in its developments stages and as such a number of issues are currently being considered. Over the coming months work around the Partnership Board will look to find more imaginative ways to engage stakeholders with issues and will seek to get young people more involved in this work. The Partnership is also considering how to develop the groups that will sit beneath it to focus on more specific and specialised themes/areas of work and it is looking to plan the issues it looks at with a more long-term focus, so that issues are considered in the most timely way to allow partners to contribute to strategic developments.

2.4 The Safeguarding Board

The Safeguarding Board is also making positive progress. The new Safeguarding Manager, Bryan Gocke, is now in post and the appointment of an independent Chair of the Board should be completed shortly. More details will be provided for Members as they become available.

2.6 Director of Children's Services Unit Staffing Update

Significant progress has been made since the report presented in January in filling the key positions within the DCSU that will help to co-ordinate and progress the immediate changes and longer term work of Children's Services in Leeds. Within the Unit the Deputy Director for Innovation and Change, the Team and Resources Manager and the Public and Political Executive Support Manager have taken up their posts as have two of the Strategic Leaders (with the other two due to start shortly). Crucially, by time this report is presented all five of the Locality Enablers will be in post. They will play an essential role in linking the central strategic priorities for Children's Services to developments and specific situations in local areas. A copy of the structure chart for the DCSU is provided at appendix 2.

2.7 Integrating Children's Services – Supporting a Smooth Transition

The changes being made to integrate the various elements of children's services are being done in a way that is structured and clearly planned. Transition Plans are in place to guide this work, in particular in distinguishing between adult and children's social services under the new arrangements. Work is also underway towards the development of the Integrated Youth Support Service (IYSS), which should be in place by April 2008 and will bring together the Youth Service and those responsible for the provision of a Connexions Service in Leeds. Connexions work in the city will continue to be delivered by a partnership involving the City Council, Voluntary, Community & Faith based providers, and IGEN (Leeds Careers Guidance). Arrangements have also been made to support work integrating the Early Years Service and the Youth Service more effectively, recognising the need for more co-ordination between these areas. In addition, the completion of the Director of Children's Services Unit staffing will provide further opportunities to build on the good work already being done in co-ordinating Children's Services activities with partners from health and Education Leeds.

2.8 March 2007 Open Forum

The latest Open Forum, which brought together partners and stakeholders from across the city in an opportunity to network, share ideas and best practice and feed into the strategic development of Children's Services for Leeds, was held at the South Leeds Stadium on Monday March 26th. The half-day event was attended by approximately 300 people and included a speech by the Director of Children's Service that outlined the progress of the last year and the challenges ahead, a number of group activities to consider child safety issues and a variety of opportunities to share thoughts on Children's Services issues. At the time of writing this report the key outcomes from the event were still being brought together, more feedback will be provided when available and details are also being placed on the Children Leeds website.

2.9 Joint Area Review (JAR) Preparations

The Joint Area Review is the key inspection by which the quality of Children's Services in Leeds will be judged. The JAR in Leeds is due to take place in December 2007. A variety of work is underway to prepare for this, which is being co-ordinated from the DCS Unit. The review of the Children and Young People's Plan (discussed in another report) will contribute to this preparation process. The ISCB and Children Leeds Partnership have already discussed these preparations and officers have been pro-active in looking to raise awareness amongst head teachers, governors, health

partners and others involved in Children's Services work. More details on preparations for the Joint Area Review will be provided to Scrutiny Members as work progresses.

2.10 Forthcoming Challenges

At the Open Forum event in March the Director of Children's Services spoke to those present about the need to take the next step in taking the work of children's services further. With new staff and arrangements in place there is now an opportunity to move forward more efficiently in co-ordinating children's services work. Over the coming weeks work will take place to match the five Locality Enablers with one of the five wedges. This will be done through a thorough process that looks to link the individual skills, knowledge and experience of each Locality Enabler to the area where these qualities can best be put to use. As part of this process, Mariana Pexton is meeting with Area Committee Chairs to discuss related issues.

The JAR and Children and Young People's Plan Review offers an excellent opportunity for us to assess the progress we've made, review our priorities and consider future challenges. This is a significant area of current work, more details of which are in a separate report to the Board.

Work is also planned or underway to consider events and activities that will promote and inform the work of Children's Services over the coming year. This will include more Open Forums, work centred around the needs and issues of particular areas and work to engage with Elected Members through, for example a co-ordinated programme across children's services for seminars and work shops (agreed in liaison with Members). Furthermore, work on co-ordinating communications across Children's Services is being given high priority and will link in to the recommendations of the Scrutiny Boards review into this area.

3.0 Children's Services Budget Overview

- 3.1 The following information details an overall summary of the budget implications for 2007/08 within Children's Services. Whilst the cross-cutting and partnership based nature of children's services work incorporates the full range of Council activities, those for which budgetary accountability rests specifically under Children's Services are: schools and other education services (including Education Leeds); Children's Social Care; Youth Services; Early Years and the Director of Children's Services Unit.
- 3.2 The total net budget across these services for 2007/08 in £146.1m (excluding schools). Within this, £1.7m has been included to provide the infrastructure to assist the Director of Children's Services in improving outcomes for children in Leeds in accordance with Every Child Matters (see the staffing update above for more details).
- 3.3 In effect, 2007/08 will be the first full year of the children's trust arrangements in Leeds in operation. There has not yet, therefore, been the opportunity to identify significant areas of savings for realignment arising from more effective and coordinated service delivery. It is, however, anticipated that future budget reports for Children's Services will reflect a continuous realignment of resources with a concentration towards the targeted priorities contained within the Children and Young People's Plan.
- 3.4 Detailed work is currently being undertaken to review the financial reporting systems so as to ensure the budgets within Children's Services are monitored effectively in a coordinated way so that every opportunity for possible realignment towards the

priorities contained within the Children & Young People' Plan is identified and pursued.

3.5 Across the other Children's Services functions, the key budget highlights for 2007/08 include:

- Within **education**: A minimum per pupil increase of 3.7%; An increase in the Schools Standards Grant of 23% per pupil in Primary, 20% per pupil in Secondary and 11% per pupil in SILCs; Additional funding for personalisation and workforce reform.
- Within **early years and childcare services**: Funding for an additional 26 children's centres; A pilot scheme to provide 7.5 hours of free nursery education for up to 750 two year old children and extension of entitlement for free nursery education for three and four year olds from 12.5 to 15 hours per week; £275k to pilot a Budget Holding Lead Professional scheme which aims to respond more rapidly to the needs of vulnerable families.
- Within the **youth service**: funding for the continuation of the Out of School Activities Programme, in partnership with summer Breeze events, the addition of Neighbourhood Support Fund and Youth Opportunities Fund.

Further, more specific details can be provided on these and any other schemes of interest on Members request.

4.0 Engaging With Children, Young People and Their Families: Children's Services Key Activities and Progress

- 4.1 One of the key issues highlighted in the original Scrutiny report into Implementing the Children's Act and an area of particularly high priority under the new Children's Services arrangements is the importance of engaging effectively and consistently with children, young people and their families in making decisions and taking actions that will effect them. In highlighting activities from recent months the information below therefore focuses particularly on areas of work that have sought to carry out such engagement.
- 4.2 Even amongst very young children the importance of enabling them to inform decisions about their surroundings and activities is increasingly being recognised. The early years service promotes good practice in listening and responding to young children. This ensures young children's views, perspectives and feelings inform service planning and delivery, particularly in the Children's Centres and early years settings where young children spend their time being cared for and educated.
- 4.3 All Children's Centres have received training on listening and responding to young children using the visual and performing arts. This has increased awareness about offering children a range of opportunities and choices in the way they express their thoughts, feelings and perspectives, recognising the many languages of young children. There are individual examples of how children are making decisions about which resources are needed, where they go and how areas are planned in a setting. In addition the Parents Involved in Children's Learning (PILC) project supports the development of observation skills and planning for individual children's needs, recognizing the important role that trained observation skills play in listening and responding to children's needs. Furthermore, every Centre has a lead practitioner who ensures opportunities for young children to move and express themselves freely

and in one children's centre an artist is working with parents / carers and practitioners to explore ways to develop young children's creativity.

- 4.4 At school level The Leeds Healthy Schools Programme (LHSP), which has very recently been awarded Beacon Status (with work in the area of community and customer engagement and empowerment judged to be outstanding), incorporates the work of the Youth on Health Group. This provides a participative forum for young people aged from 8 – 17 who explore, find and promote solutions to health issues that are of concern to them. The Group meets every half term, Members establish the format/content for the year, including any evaluation, decide on a priority health area that concerns young people, and research views of others in school. They also regularly plan young delegates events - large meetings with a range of 'adult decision makers'. The events are run entirely by young people. Building on the work they did in 2006, the group has recently helped to launch the 2007 'Be Healthy!' initiative, which aims to encourage healthy activity across the city through the direct engagement of children and young people.
- 4.5 Within schools, the ongoing efforts towards obtaining the Stephen Lawrence Award puts pupils at the forefront of work around drawing up strong and effective policies and practices to promote race equality and community cohesion in their school. The award strives to ensure the culture and ethos of schools are such that, whatever the heritage and origins of members of the school community, everyone is equally valued and treated with respect. Young people use mediums such as poetry, raps, artwork, performance or taking assemblies to celebrate the cultural and racial diversity of the school and of the country as a whole. So far one third of all schools have achieved either level 1, 2 or 3 of the standard, one third are engaged and one third have yet to start. A recent development has seen the Morley family of schools working together collaboratively towards achieving the standard. This initiative, which has local business and community group support, was launched at an event at Morley Town Hall which involved children and young people sharing ideas and performances from across the schools.
- 4.6 More generally, young people have been actively involved in the recent development of the Leeds Youth Offer, which supports work to respond to Clause 6 of the Education and Inspections Act. Consultation with the Leeds Open Forums, the 4Children Consultancy in Leeds and the Youth Council has contributed to this process, with the Youth Council indicating that the Leeds Youth offer should be called the Breeze Youth Promise and backed up by an entitlement to a Breeze card and comprehensive information on the availability of services, opportunities and activities. To this end the Youth Service is supporting the further development of the Breeze website and the Family Hub website. A key aspect of the Promise will be a list of entitlements, for example, Youth Service entitlements might be access to youth work within a 30 minute safe journey from home, access to a Connexions Personal Advisor, access to the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme, etc. It is proposed that the Breeze Youth Promise will be finalised by 31.08.07 and officially launched by September 2007.
- 4.7 There are also a number of good examples of inter-agency work across the Council that puts the needs of young people at the centre of a wide range of work. For example, in working to improve the Council's performance as a corporate carer, staff in Children's Social Services have been working with Neighbourhoods and Housing and the ALMOS on a number of measures to make improvements on housing issues that affect our looked after children and young people. This includes

- A protocol being drawn up between Environment and Neighbourhoods and Pathway Planning to maximise the availability of council tenancies for young people leaving care.
- Work being undertaken to enable named officers in Pathway Planning to have access to the ALMOs' housing record system so housing applications by young people leaving care can be tracked by social workers after a referral is made.
- ALMO and Children's Social Services staff exchanging contact details of nominated officers to maximize joined up working by the two agencies.

Housing Management Officers now meet regularly with Children's Service Delivery Managers to discuss how children and families in need can be given priority. The object of this is to clarify the lettings policy, help prevent children being taken into care because of housing reasons, help children return to families or carers more quickly following the resolution of housing issues and help foster carers who need larger homes to accommodate the children they care for (A report to facilitate this process is going to Environment and Neighbourhoods Executive Board on 14 May 2007). Hence this work puts young people's needs at the centre of a piece of work that cuts across Council services.

4.8 All of this work is complemented by the current efforts to engage with young people in revising the Children and Young People's Plan, which will be crucial to guiding the work done for children and young people over the coming years. More details on this consultation work are included in the separate report on the Children and Young People's Plan.

4.9 Young People's Participation: An Ongoing Challenge

The examples above demonstrate just a few of the many ways that work across the spectrum of Children's Services puts young people at the centre of decisions that affect them. Efforts to broaden this work are an ongoing high priority. At the latest Open Forum the Director for Children's Services highlighted the need to 'embed a significant strategic and cultural change so that children and families really feel the difference and know that their involvement is a 'given' rather than an exception'. This remains a challenge. The new arrangements now in place provide an opportunity to intensify work in this area in a number of ways including:

- Joining up existing good practice within services so that the consultation and engagement work we do is better co-ordinated and shared, avoiding duplication and 'consultation overload', but targeting the work we do so that young people *consistently* feel they are involved in decisions that affect them and particularly that the majority of young people feel like this rather than just an active minority.
- Embedding the culture of consultation with young people across the whole Council. The Director of Children's Services recognises that this was a key recommendation of the original review into 'Implementing the Children Act' and will continue to highlight the importance of this type of work at a Senior level and across all services.
- Working with our partners to ensure that they share the commitment to engaging with young people over issues that affect them and work in a way that reflects this. As the notion of a shared Children's Services for Leeds becomes embedded we hope that this priority will become fundamental to the way we work together. In the short term we are increasingly looking to

examples of where there are opportunities for this type of work and encouraging partners to do so.

At the start of May the Strategic Leader for Partnership and Participation will take up her post in the Director of Children's Services Unit. This will significantly support efforts to co-ordinate and promote the sort of approach outlined in these points.

5.0 Recommendations

It is recommended that Members note and comment on the ongoing progress of work to implement the Children's Act in Leeds and the work and changes that stem from this.

Members may also want to take the opportunity to contribute views on how the work of the Scrutiny Board can be co-ordinated with the work of Children's Services in view of the arrangements now in place and the future opportunities available.