

Report of the Director of Children and Families

Report to Executive Board

Date: 20th September 2017

Subject: Leeds Children and Families' Services Sector Led Improvement Role



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? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

1. After the positive inspection of children's services in 2015, Leeds became a 'Partner in Practice', working closely with the government and other high performing council to lead sector wide learning and innovation. The other key role for Partners in Practice is to provide support for councils that fail OfSTED inspections or face other serious challenges. Over the past two years Leeds has taken an increasingly active role in sector led improvement, working successfully with a number of other areas. The Partner in Practice role has been valuable for Leeds in strengthening relationships with national government, increasing influence in national policy and improving access to additional funding.
2. Leeds' sector led improvement role is now growing through a major partnership with Kirklees Council and the Department for Education. Since Kirklees failed their OfSTED inspection in late 2016, senior leaders from Leeds have been in discussion with Kirklees Council, the government and their appointed 'Children's Commissioner' to agree a programme of support. A formal partnership is being agreed, where Kirklees Council will retain formal accountability for children's services and Leeds will work closely to support them, providing senior leadership and a range of support on leadership, staffing, practice and performance management. This will include an interim arrangement whereby during the next six months the Leeds Director of Children and Families will also act as the Kirklees DCS. It is planned that support will be intensive for six to nine months and will then be reduced to an advisory role.

3. As part of Leeds successful £9.6M bid for Innovation and Partner in Practice funding earlier this year, the Directorate is planning to create a centre of excellence to strengthen its sector led improvement role. The 'Leeds Relational Practice Centre' will build networks of leaders and academics to promote the model for children's services reform used in Leeds – restorative practice, strong political and partnership leadership, shared culture and strategies and a strong focus on building relationships as the key to successful change. The Centre will run events, training, masterclasses and develop and share learning resources for local professionals and colleagues across the country.
4. The key challenge ahead is to effectively manage the new risks and benefits of this national role for Leeds' Children and Families' Services. The additional funding and support for our strategy and reform agenda are both vital for the city's continuing success but there also significant risks of managing these significant new additional responsibilities, particularly in the context of continuing budget pressures for the Council. As such the Directorate is working closely with government and other partners to ensure plans and funding are in place to ensure there is adequate cover for senior staff working outside Leeds and the leadership team continue to have the knowledge and skills to lead ongoing improvement in the city.

Recommendations

5. Executive Board is recommended to note the contents of this report and to continue to support the improvement agenda in Children & Families in Leeds.

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is firstly to review the Children and Families Directorate's recent and ongoing work with other Local Authorities to support their improvement, and secondly to set out the Directorate's plans for developing this role in future years.

2 Background information

- 2.1 The government's strategy for children's social care ('Putting Children First: Our strategy for improving children's social care') places a strong emphasis on 'Sector Led Improvement' - finding better ways of using the sector's own leadership and good practice to support sector wide development and learning. An important part of the government's strategy is based on developing the group of 'Partners in Practice', high performing local authorities that work closely with the Department for Education to lead innovation in practice and help support for those local authorities that face challenges or fail inspections.
- 2.2 OfSTED's positive inspection of children's services in Leeds in 2015, led to the council being invited to become a Partner in Practice (PiP). Of particular importance was the 'Outstanding' judgement for children's services leadership, and the fact that Leeds was the first big city to be judged to be good by OfSTED.
- 2.3 Leeds' status as a Partner in Practice has been crucial for building strong relationships with central government and promoting the reputation and role of the city at a national level. The close relationships and confidence built through PiP have helped the city secure vital additional funding e.g. winning nearly £15 M of Innovation Funding, and have helped give Leeds a stronger voice in national reform, for example on social work reform.
- 2.4 Partner in Practice authorities work closely with the Department for Education (DfE) to respond to Councils that have struggled in OfSTED inspections and those that become subject to Improvement Notices. In most cases the DfE will appoint an independent Improvement Board and/or a 'Children's Commissioner' which will work with the local authority and government to agree a programme of support and challenge from a Partner in Practice. Leeds is developing a distinctive and growing role in this work which builds on the strengths of our own improvement journey, e.g. a whole system approach to reform and a focus on relationships and restorative practice.

3 Main issues

- 3.1 *Recent Sector Led Improvement Work:*
 - 3.1.1 Leeds Children and Families Directorate has worked with a growing number of Local Authorities experiencing challenges. The extent of this work has varied depending on the circumstances and needs of each council and the views of central government and inspectors. This work began in 2015 after the positive inspection of children's services in Leeds. The most significant pieces of work include the following:

- 3.1.2 Sunderland: in response to government request, Leeds seconded the Deputy Director to Sunderland Children's Services after the Authority failed their OfSTED inspection and became subject to formal government intervention. Leeds' Deputy Director acted as the Sunderland Director of Children's Services, working first to help stabilise the service and then to work with local partners to agree and implement an Improvement Programme. Leeds' Deputy Director's role then concluded with work with the Minister, DfE and Children's Commissioner to agree a model for longer term improvement in Sunderland.
- 3.1.3 Manchester: Leeds worked with our fellow Northern Core City on a wide range of activities: auditing practice and reviewing processes; improving the quality of Early Help practice; advising on developing performance management and quality assurance; corporate parenting and child protection arrangements. Leadership development was a key activity with Leeds providing mentoring for the DCS and a leadership development programme.
- 3.1.4 Darlington: the primary focus for Leeds in this work was support from managers and staff from the Performance Management and Information Management teams who worked with their colleagues in Darlington to support improvement in that Council's IT systems and performance management arrangements. Additional support was provided for leadership and workforce development.
- 3.1.5 In addition to these major pieces of work the Directorate has engaged in a growing number of smaller projects with a wide range of Authorities, including both those subject to government intervention and those looking to drive their own improvement and learn from our practice. Areas we have worked with include Wakefield, Worcestershire, Birmingham, Rotherham and many others.
- 3.1.6 Work with other areas has been both supported and promoted by a series of events that have showcased the learning and practice from Leeds' improvement journey. These have proved very popular with other Councils, and over a third of Authorities have attended at least one event. Interest has focused on the key strengths of Leeds reform agenda such as leadership, restorative practice and the Front Door.
- 3.1.7 This work has produced significant benefits – inspectors, government and Councils all report positively on the impact of Leeds' input and in addition the service has generated additional income through this work.
- 3.1.8 Alongside this work with Local Authorities Leeds has a growing role in national initiatives and policy reform such as support for the National Practice Leaders programme which is developing future senior leaders and implementation of the new Social Worker Accreditation scheme

3.2 *Kirklees Improvement Partnership*

- 3.2.1 Leeds' Partner in Practice role is continuing to grow and develop through a major new partnership with Kirklees Council. Kirklees Council was judged by OfSTED to be 'Inadequate' in late 2016. Since then Leeds has been in close dialogue with the Kirklees, DfE and the government's Children's Commissioner in Kirklees, Eleanor Brazil, about providing support to Leeds' West Yorkshire neighbour.

- 3.2.2 The emerging proposals are based on a distinctive model for improvement, one that is in line with Leeds commitment to restorative practice. As such, it is proposed that Leeds will work *with* Kirklees, building relationships, confidence and skills in Kirklees in order to promote and sustain change and improvement. This approach is not simply a rhetorical flourish but is based on an understanding that short term, external intervention is likely to struggle to foster the cultural change and enduring capacity for change that is needed.
- 3.2.3 Clear governance and a formal partnership agreement will be in place – Kirklees will continue to retain accountability for children’s services with Leeds providing an agreed and defined programme of support and improvement. The intention is for Leeds to provide intensive input over the next year, with support reducing to a mentoring and advisory role once progress has been secured and new local leadership team is in place.
- 3.2.4 The programme of support is still being finalised but will include the following
- Leadership: Leeds’ Director acting as Kirklees DCS for an interim period and working across both authorities. Leeds’ Deputy Director providing additional input to Kirklees, with a lead responsibility for Leadership Development. One Leeds Head of Service and two Service Delivery Managers seconded to Kirklees to lead the social work service and other key services. Leeds will also provide wider support for leadership including a development programme and review of structures.
 - Partnership: including work with Elected Members and key local services such as NHS and Police, multi-agency input in key areas such as the Front Door and development of the role of the Safeguarding Board.
 - Practice: support and training for front line staff and work to develop and implement an improved practice model
 - Workforce: improve recruitment and retention through development of a career development framework and associated professional development
 - Performance, Quality Assurance and IT: support implementation of a new case management system and alongside this put in place more robust arrangements for performance management and quality assurance, including strengthening the role of Independent Reviewing Officers and Child Protection Chairs.
 - Children Looked After: including review of residential provision and placements, developing new gateway panels etc.

3.3 *Leeds Relational Practice Centre*

- 3.3.1 As the Board will be aware, Leeds recently won nearly £10 M of Innovation Fund/Partner in Practice funding from the government. An important element of this is the development of a ‘centre of excellence’ to further strengthen Leeds’ sector led improvement work. The agreed name for this new development will be ‘The Leeds Relational Practice Centre’ (LRPC).

- 3.3.2 The LRPC's aim will be to bolster and develop the approach to children's services reform and improvement that we have used in Leeds, with a particular focus on the particular strengths of this model – whole system reform; shared priorities and culture; strong political, officer and partnership leadership; a confident and well supported workforce and an overarching focus on relationships as key at all levels – from front line practice to senior leadership.
- 3.3.3 The LRPC will work in a number of ways to promote this model for reform, to share our learning and strengthen Leeds' sector led improvement work, including:
- Developing a network of Local Authorities, academics and experts to share learning and best practice in relational practice and children's social care reform and to support and inform sector led improvement
 - Running a programme of events, conferences and masterclasses in key subjects such as the Front Door, leadership, relational practice
 - Develop and share learning resources
 - Providing additional capacity to support, assure and develop sector led improvement work

3.4 *Managing the Benefits and Risks of Sector Led Improvement*

- 3.4.1 Leeds' Sector Led Improvement role offers great opportunities for the city with additional funding, influence and reputation, but also offers risks in posing additional demands and risks in potentially distracting from continuing Leeds' improvement journey. The Directorate is clear and determined that whatever new responsibilities are offered, the first and foremost responsibility remains to the children of Leeds. Additional roles will only be considered where the additional demands are outweighed by the benefits in terms of funding and influence for the city.
- 3.4.2 The Directorate is very aware that additional responsibilities outside Leeds poses challenges and is making sure at every stage that local capacity, particularly leadership capacity, is not diminished. As such care is taken in planning all such work to ensure that the demands remain reasonable and income accrued is used to secure extra capacity within Leeds to provide local cover and expertise. For example, with the recent early work with Kirklees DfE have agreed to provide significant funding to secure additional experienced senior leadership capacity to strengthen the leadership team in Leeds during support for Kirklees. Negotiations are now underway with Kirklees and the government to finalise a shared improvement plan. The plan will clearly delineate how and when Leeds will be involved, and will ensure that all work is charged at a market rate. This will generate considerable income for Leeds which will be used initially to provide cover for staff working outside Leeds and any further funds will then be used to continue to invest and innovate in local services.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

4.1.1 This report raises no issues for consultation and engagement.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

4.2.2 This report raises no issues for equality, diversity and cohesion.

4.3 Council policies and Best Council Plan

4.3.1 These developments strongly support the Council's strategies and ambitions to be the Best Council and Best City in the UK, as set out in the Best Council Plan. Leeds' Partner in Practice role is vital to ensuring Leeds continues to develop its national leadership role and influence and access to additional funding. Furthermore these developments support the Council's ambitions for 'civic entrepreneurialism'.

4.4 Resources and value for money

4.4.1 Partner in Practice status is important financially both directly and indirectly. The direct benefit is through enhanced access to additional funding such as that seen with the recent award of £9.6 M for Leeds. In addition there are indirect benefits as the high reputation of Leeds helps with recruitment and retention of social workers and other key staff.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

4.5.1 No issues.

4.6 Risk Management

4.6.1 The Directorate is very aware that additional responsibilities outside Leeds poses challenges for ensuring that local capacity, particularly leadership capacity, is not diminished. As such care is taken in planning such work to ensure that the demands remain reasonable and income accrued is used to secure extra capacity within Leeds to provide local cover and expertise. For example, with the recent work with Kirklees income is being used to fund additional senior leadership capacity.

5 Conclusions

5.1 Leeds' status as a Partner in Practice is positive news for the city, offering greater national influence and additional funding for children's services and helping to promote the reputation of Leeds and the Council as a whole. Leeds' growing sector led improvement role has helped our fellow councils but also offers benefits for Leeds in providing opportunities for income generation and learning. The emerging partnership with Kirklees is a valuable opportunity to develop this role

and support a member of our City-Region, and the Leeds Relational Practice centre will further develop this role in future years.

6 Recommendations

- 6.1 Executive Board is recommended to note the contents of this report and to continue to support the improvement agenda in Children & Families in Leeds.

7 Background documents¹

- 7.1 None

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.