

Report of Director of Children and Families

Report to Executive Board

Date: 18th September 2019

Subject: The Leeds – Kirklees Children’s Services Improvement Partnership and next steps in sector led improvement.



Are specific electoral wards affected? If yes, name(s) of ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Has consultation been carried out?	<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
Will the decision be open 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

1. Main issues

- Leeds Children and Families Service has a significant role in sector led improvement and reform – as a ‘Partner in Practice’ of central government, through the Innovation Programme funded ‘Leeds Relational Practice Centre’ and through the intensive work of the Kirklees-Leeds Improvement Partnership
- OfSTED have recently inspected Kirklees and have praised the progress made since Leeds began its partnership. Inspectors report that children are now safe, that the improvement strategy has been effective and that good foundations in leadership, staffing and practice are now in place for the future.
- Leeds’ sector led improvement role will continue to develop in the next few years, principally through the £84M national ‘Strengthening Families, Protecting Children’ programme which will see Leeds support six local authorities to improve over the next five years.
- Leeds has gained significantly from its sector led improvement role – through improved relationships with central government and partner councils; enhanced access to additional funding; national influence on policy and reform and improved development and learning opportunities for Leeds’ leaders and staff.

2. Best Council Plan Implications (click [here](#) for the latest version of the Best Council Plan)

- The work set out in this report supports the Best Council priority to make Leeds a Child Friendly City. Sector led improvement work is important because it helps build good relationships with central government, maximises opportunities for additional funding and helps promote the Leeds approach to children's services across the country.
- No major climate emergency issues. All work with colleagues outside Leeds will be planned to use public, low emissions transport wherever possible.

3. Resource Implications

- There are no direct resource implications for this report although it is important to note that Leeds' status as a high performing Council for children's services has helped secure over £30m in extra funding for the city since 2015.

Recommendations

- a) Note the report

1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update to the Board on the Kirklees – Leeds Improvement Partnership, and to set out how Leeds' sector led improvement role will develop in the future.

2. Background information

- 2.1 In 2015 Leeds' children's services were judged to be 'Good' overall, and as a result the city was offered the opportunity to join a small group of high performing councils as a 'Partners in Practice'. Partners in Practice work closely with central government to provide improvement support to the sector and to develop new approaches to policy and practice.
- 2.2 Since 2015 Leeds has provided a wide range of successful support to other Councils – from training and events to short consultancy to intensive longer term support for councils facing the most significant challenges. This has proved to be successful – feedback from other councils, central government and senior leaders has been positive and has led to requests for further support and a growing role.
- 2.3 In recognition of this success, Leeds was awarded £2m Innovation Programme funding to create the 'Leeds Relational Practice Centre' (LRPC) to strengthen capacity for supporting sector improvement and learning.
- 2.4 In 2017 Leeds was approached by the Department for Education (DfE) to provide support for Kirklees, who had been judged as 'inadequate' by OfSTED in 2016. The government were concerned about progress in Kirklees and concerns about practice leadership and low morale in the workforce. In June 2017 Leeds entered a formal arrangement with Kirklees Council to create an 'Improvement Partnership' between the two authorities. The DfE provided funding for both councils – helping create new services in Kirklees and additional leadership and improvement capacity in Leeds. The Chief Executive and Political leaders in Kirklees recognised the need for a step change and welcomed the partnership and the close working relationship was created between the two councils.
- 2.5 The Director of Children's Services (DCS) in Leeds also took on the duties of Director in Kirklees, supported by the Deputy Director and seconded senior and middle leaders from Leeds. The arrangements were governed through a shared Board, with representation by lead members from both Authorities and the Department of Education appointed Commissioner.

3. Main issues

Kirklees-Leeds Improvement Partnership

- 3.1 The progress made by the Kirklees-Leeds Improvement Partnership was evaluated when OfSTED re-inspected Kirklees in June 2019. The inspection report is positive about the progress made and the impact of Leeds' support for Kirklees.

'Since the last Ofsted inspection in September 2016, when the local authority was judged inadequate overall, strong and resilient senior leadership has underpinned the improvement in practice from a considerably low base. ... In June 2017, a formal arrangement was implemented by the Department for Education (DfE), with Leeds City Council taking responsibility for overseeing improvement. Since March

2018, there has been steady progress in strengthening the foundations for sustainable service improvement. As a result, there are no widespread or serious failures that leave children at risk of harm.'

- 3.2 The overall judgement from OfSTED for Kirklees was 'Requires Improvement' because, whilst acknowledging strengths and progress, inspectors did not feel that practice was consistently good, and some areas of weakness remain. This could be seen as a frustrating result but should be seen in the context of the situation Kirklees was in when officers from Leeds first arrived – the inspectors note that the council was starting from 'a considerably low base', where improvement was hindered by 'instability in staffing and a lack of consistent and effective leadership' including four changes of DCS in a short time. An illustration of these problems was vividly seen on an early visit to Kirklees where social workers had gone on strike such were their concerns and poor morale.
- 3.3 OfSTED recognised the impact of the partnership work between the two councils and the benefits of building on Leeds' own improvement journey and the experience and leadership of senior officers from Leeds. In particular inspectors praised the impact of a whole system approach, the focus on practice and developing the workforce and the underpinning work to build better relationships across children's services – with children, families, staff and partner agencies.

'Leaders are creating the right conditions for social work practice to flourish. Managers have targeted areas of great impact for children through a whole service reform to support and sustain the improvements needed. Senior managers have re-established relationships with partners and have built stronger services, such as the improved multi-agency duty and advice team, while stabilising the workforce and repairing fractured relationships between social workers and senior managers.

Leaders have reviewed and restructured services for children in need of help and protection and children in care. As a result, most children now receive an appropriate response to protect them, and experiences of children in care are improving. Now that this has been achieved, and services have been secured, senior managers are in a positive position to look more broadly across the wider service.'

- 3.4 The inspection report is positive about the progress made to date but importantly is also hopeful and confident for the future in Kirklees. OfSTED have highlighted areas that need more consistency and reform but inspectors were assured that the strengthened local leadership is well placed to continue to improve and to continue to strengthen the 'conditions of success' for social work and to improve the lives of local children and families.

'[The Improvement Partnership] secured strong foundations for the recently appointed permanent DCS to build on when taking up her post in December 2018. There is a renewed energy and determination to continue improvements for children and families in Kirklees

Wider sector led improvement

- 3.5 Alongside the intensive partnership work with Kirklees, Leeds has been playing a prominent role in sector led improvement across the country – through learning and networking events; support and advice; review and consultancy.

- 3.6 The Leeds Relational Practice Centre (LRPC) has proved to be popular and successful. From 2017 to August 2019, 120 out of the 152 local authorities in England (79%) have accessed the LRPC support offer in some way, and there are only three local authorities north of Peterborough that have not received LRPC support. The team has also supported local authorities outside of England, for example Edinburgh and Jersey.
- 3.7 Feedback from colleagues in other councils has been very positive. For example this is feedback from an Assistant Director whose team visited Leeds for three days.
- 'Just to say a huge thank you to all of your team. Over the last three days 20 [...] officers have spent time in Leeds. I have heard feedback already that the visit was inspirational. That staff felt welcomed, that there were open discussions about challenges and strengths and a great deal of kindness and humanity. We all left full of ideas. We are collating the learning and considering the next steps. We will share our thoughts with you in the coming weeks.'*

Future developments in sector led improvement

- 3.8 Leeds' work supporting colleagues across the country is well regarded for its impact and effectiveness both by senior leaders in partner Councils and in central government. As such Leeds' sector led improvement work will continue to develop and grow over the next few years.
- 3.9 The main new element of this work will be the national 'Strengthening Families, Protecting Children' programme. This is a Department for Education initiative which provides £84M for three successful councils (Leeds, Hertfordshire and North Yorkshire) to work with up to 20 local authorities that are judged to be 'Requires Improvement' and have rising numbers of children looked after.
- 3.10 Leeds has received significant extra funding to create additional senior and practice leadership capacity to work on the programme. It will work with up to six partner councils over the next five years, with work already underway with a 'Trailblazer' partner, Darlington Council.
- 3.11 Alongside this programme, the service will continue its wider work through the LRPC and is currently in discussions with the Department for Education and Kirklees Council to explore how Leeds can provide support and challenge to the next stage of their improvement journey.
- 3.12 The additional practice leadership capacity will ensure that the work with other Authorities does not impact practice here in Leeds and in fact allows for continued improvement and innovation.

Kirklees Improvement Partnership – cost effectiveness and value for Leeds

- 3.13 The investment in Leeds to set up and run the Kirklees – Leeds partnership was £1.63m, which is around half the cost of some examples of setting up trust arrangements for other Councils. This central government funding for Leeds for working with Kirklees supported investment in leadership and social work capacity in Leeds, significantly reducing pressures on local budgets whilst freeing social work leaders and wider expertise to work with Kirklees. The collaboration with Kirklees provided additional opportunities for Leeds staff to develop and widen their skills and experience, bringing new learning back to work in the city.
- 3.14 Importantly the Improvement Partnership funding was used directly to support and lead change and improvement in Kirklees rather than paying for the consultancy and legal advice needed in setting up trust arrangements. Another important advantage was that the Improvement Partnership was developed much quicker than

Trust arrangements as it involved less legal complexity. Notwithstanding these significant factors perhaps the most important advantage of the Improvement Partnership approach was one of values and ownership – retaining local democratic leadership and a public sector ethos as well as promoting local city-region collaboration and support.

- 3.15 The Kirklees-Leeds Improvement Partnership has been important to help our local colleagues and to continue to build positive working relationships with central government. This is vital to securing significant additional funding for ongoing investment in improving and innovating in local services for the children and families of Leeds. Examples of this include: creating the multi-disciplinary Early Help Hubs and Restorative Early Support Teams; the Stronger Families programme that supports families and helps parents into work; the Family Drug and Alcohol Court that helps parents with substance misuse problems to safely reunite with their children; the Leeds Relational Practice Centre which promotes the work Leeds nationally and internationally and the Caring Dads initiative which works with perpetrators of Domestic Violence.

4. Corporate considerations

4.1 Consultation and engagement

- 4.1.1 No significant issues

4.2 Equality and diversity / cohesion and integration

- 4.2.1 No significant issues.

4.3 Council policies and the Best Council Plan

- 4.3.1 The work set out in this report supports the Best Council priority of make Leeds a Child Friendly City. Sector led improvement work is important because it helps build good relationships with central government, maximises opportunities for additional funding and helps promote the Leeds approach to children's services across the country.

4.3.2 Climate Emergency

One of the advantages of the design of this partnership is that it was designed to maximise local support and cooperation between two neighbouring local authorities. Instead of paying for consultants travelling from across the country, officers from Leeds close by, understood the local context and had short distances to travel. This approach minimises carbon emissions but more importantly helps promote sustainable, self-sufficient cooperation across local communities. The climate impact of this work was further moderated by efforts to ensure that wherever possible Leeds staff used public, low emissions transport and/or to use telephone and Skype communication to work with their opposite numbers in Kirklees. This approach will be carried over into future sector led improvement work.

4.4 Resources, procurement and value for money

- 4.4.1 The work that Leeds Children and Families services have undertaken with Kirklees was separately funded through the Department for Education, recognising the significant deployment of Leeds staff in Kirklees during the improvement programme.
- 4.4.2 The wider work undertaken thus far through the Leeds Relationship Practice Centre has been funded through innovation funding from central government as is the work being undertaken through the Strengthening Families Programme.
- 4.4.3 The value for money of the Improvement Partnership model and a summary of how sector led improvement work has secured resources for the city are set out in paras 3.12 to 3.14 above.

4.5 Legal implications, access to information, and call-in

- 4.5.1 No significant issues.

4.6 Risk management

- 4.6.1 All sector led improvement work is designed to ensure that risks to work in Leeds are well managed. In all projects the service is careful to ensure that additional demands are balanced by sufficient income to provide extra capacity and resources for the city.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 The Kirklees-Leeds Improvement Partnership has been successful in improving children's services in Kirklees and Leeds – ensuring children are safe, strengthening leadership improving practice and creating the conditions for success in the future.
- 5.2 Sector led improvement is the right direction for local government and it reflects well on the city that Leeds' is playing an important role in promoting locally led, public-sector solutions to the many challenges across children's services.
- 5.3 This high profile role in reform and improvement in the sector offers considerable benefits to Leeds – the opportunity to promote the Leeds approach across the sector; access to additional funding; stronger relationships with central government; national influence and learning and development opportunities for staff.
- 5.4 The success of Leeds' sector led improvement in Kirklees and across the sector in recent years has provided new opportunities for the city to continue to develop its role in the future helping partner councils to improve and helping Leeds secure important funding, learning and relationships for work here in the city.

6. Recommendations

- 6.1 Note the report.

7. Background documents¹

7.1 n/a

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.