

Children and Families Transformation Agenda

Date: 29th November 2023

Report of: Chief Officer Transformation and Partnerships, Children and Families Directorate

Report to: Scrutiny Board (Children and Families)

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

Brief summary

This report seeks to provide the Children and Families Scrutiny Board with an overview of the work being undertaken within the Children and Families Directorate on the transformation agenda. It seeks to outline the resources available for delivery, the workstreams of current and potential activity and at a headline level the opportunities and challenges presented by the work.

Recommendations

Children and Families Scrutiny Board is recommended to note the work being undertaken and comment accordingly.

What is this report about?

- 1.0 This report seeks to provide the Children and Families Scrutiny Board with an overview of the work being undertaken within the Children and Families Directorate on the transformation agenda. It seeks to outline the resources available for delivery, the workstreams of current and potential activity and, at a headline level, the opportunities and challenges presented by the work.

Report Detail

- 2.0 As part of the Council's consideration of its budget proposals for 22/23, Executive Board agreed a proposal to form a Transformation Team within the Children and Families Directorate to aid the transformation of services with a view to assisting in the delivery of significant financial savings to the Council, whilst also seeking to deliver, where possible, beneficial outcomes for children and young people across the city. Executive Board agreed an invest to save proposal in the amount of £1.4m to deliver against this work.
- 2.1 Following approval of the proposal by Executive Board, work has been undertaken to secure the agreed staffing structure, including the creation of job descriptions and person specifications, undertaking job evaluation for the roles and streaming against existing roles within the Council more generally for the team, undertaking governance approvals for the roles to be recruited to and finally undertaking the recruitment and selection process. This has included the flexible deployment of an existing LCC Chief Officer to undertake the role of Chief Officer with responsibility for the Programme. The majority of posts within the team have now been recruited to and a team of fifteen staff are hosted in the core team (excluding the Chief Officer) In addition, the team funding provides for an additional five posts which are organisationally hosted elsewhere within the Council but whose work directly supports the Directorate's change programme.
- 2.2 A further piece of work has been undertaken which has sought to put in place appropriate governance and programme management arrangements to support delivery. This has seen the establishment of an officer 'Delivery Board' chaired by the Director of Children and Families which is the overarching Programme Board for the work being undertaken and comprises officers from across the Council including officers from Finance, Internal Audit, Asset Management etc and includes external partners including the Integrated Care Board and West Yorkshire Police. The Delivery Board receives an overview of the overall delivery of the programme of activity, receives a regular dashboard of activity and exception-based reports of risks, actions, issues and dependencies along with focused reports on particular activity when decision points are reached or a steer on direction is required. The Delivery Board seeks to inform formal decision making which, in accordance with the Council's established arrangements, remains with individual officers and Executive Board (subject to the decision and the existing scheme(s) of delegation for decision making). The two portfolio holders for Children and Families are regularly provided with an update on the work of the Programme.
- 2.3 The Delivery Board is supplemented by a more focussed 'Task and Finish Group' which seeks to take a more detailed view of issues with a view to unblocking barriers and challenges. The Task and Finish Group is chaired by the Chief Officer – Financial Services. The task and finish group is a much more operationally focused group and has a more flexible reporting structure which allows it to flex and focus on issues presenting particular challenges at any particular point in time. There is a strong correlation between the work of the Delivery Board and the Task and Finish Group and the Transformation Team seek to act as both a conduit and 'the glue' between the two groups.

2.4 The programme of activity underway across the Directorate is broad and touches almost every aspect of the Directorate's work. Given the financial challenges being experienced both nationally and within Leeds, unsurprisingly there is a strong correlation between the areas of financial challenge and the change programme. But equally the programme of work seeks to ensure that better outcomes for children and families is at the heart of activity within the Directorate. The Transformation Team has a very clear approach of 'working with' staff within the Directorate and seeking to support professional activity delivered by committed practitioners.

2.5 In outline there are nine currently established areas of activity (each with various sub elements). In addition to this activity there is a 'pipeline approach' capturing activity which is not yet captured in the agreed programme of activity but which needs to be undertaken. This is though linked to capacity to deliver, noting of course that whilst the Transformation Team can provide support to activity, there is also a need for a 'business lead' which also has to be resourced by staff within the Directorate. The nine areas of activity (including the main sub areas) are:

- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP)
This review is the work supported by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), which has been reported previously to Scrutiny Board. This activity seeks to deliver improvements in the end-to-end process of how the Council responds to requests for SEND assessments and seeks to follow through from assessment to provision. This work is at the discovery and diagnostic stage (the initial stage considering the 'as is') and is currently moving into a more detailed define and design stage (the stage that considers the 'to be') which will consider how future arrangements will be delivered. This next stage is centred on a key outcome of being co-designed with stakeholders, most notably, children, young people and parents and carers. The review will aim to deliver improvements in our arrangements and in particular will seek to ensure that the arrangements place the child at the centre of activity undertaken. There is a key requirement within this review to ensure that the Council's arrangements are fully compliant with legislation and relevant codes of practice, including meeting statutory timescales whilst also providing better outcomes for young people with additional needs.
- Learning Inclusion
This review has not yet been scoped given the potential interdependences with the SEND and EHCP review. Whilst not formally scoped it is likely that this review will consider a range of delivery issues associated with support for children with additional needs but not formally included within the scope of SEND and EHCP. Whilst not scoped it is likely that this review will consider arrangements for the delivery of services relating to provision including Education Other Than in School, the Virtual School and support more generally to vulnerable learners, whilst also seeking to consider some of the wider partnership issues associated with learning inclusion.
- Transport
This review is very clearly linked to the SEND and EHCP review and in essence seeks to determine the most appropriate arrangements for the Council to discharge its responsibilities in relation to transporting children across the city for children both attending mainstream schools and specialist settings. This is a challenging area in relation to cost and a range of matters are being considered including nature of provision, eligibility for support and seeking opportunities for maximum efficiency and value for money.

- Children Looked After

This particular activity is currently the subject of a considerable amount of focus which reflects the very challenging financial situation, especially in relation to demand pressures in terms of number of children within and entering the care system, the increasing complexity of needs of individual children and overriding market related issues of capacity, sufficiency and cost. A number of areas of activity are underway including:

- Residential Accommodation – In order to address the market issues currently being experienced work is being undertaken to create more capacity within Leeds by means of additional provision directly delivered by the City Council with staffing being provided by Leeds City Council staff. The area of focus is on identifying and purchasing properties, in suitable locations, across the city which can be purchased (on the open market) and converted (sometimes requiring building changes) so that they are appropriate for use. Currently the focus is on Small Group Living (SGL) where 2 children can be accommodated but other opportunities for larger scale homes are also being considered. The aim of the SGL work is to bring on-stream 8 additional children's homes each having capacity for one to two children. Currently one SGL home has been purchased and is being converted, two further SGL homes have been identified and offers of purchase have been made and in addition one larger home has been selected and an offer has been accepted. The Council is pushing for as early completion as possible on the properties subject to offer.
- Fostering – work is underway around enhancing the Council's offer to foster carers and includes work looking at how children with more complex needs can be placed with suitably supported foster carers. A specific action relates to making changes to fostering support which would allow for children with more complex needs to be placed with foster carers who have the requisite skills and experience to be able to support the additional level of complexity of need.
- Re-unification – Activity is underway to look at the group of children in care who could safely and appropriately be re-united with families and taken out of the formal care system. In order to progress this work a dedicated staffing resource has been created (by deploying staff from existing roles) which allows for a discreet and dedicated focus on identifying these children and working on their reunification.
- Repatriation – Activity is being undertaken whereby children who may be in placements outside of Leeds are considered for being moved to placements within or closer to Leeds. This approach usually provides better outcomes to the children, given the availability of systems of care and also provides efficiency opportunities in terms of staff costs associated with travel and (sometimes) accommodation to visit and review children placed outside Leeds. This activity links to the work on commissioning as set out below.

- Commissioning

Children and Families Commissioning has been invested into with the aim of providing greater capacity which allows for greater financial return on investment. The aim of this activity is that where we have services which are delivered by others outside of LCC, that those services are initially procured, appropriately managed and subject to regular review. This seeks to ensure that Value for Money is secured and that external providers deliver on the outcomes (financial and child/family) that the Council requires. Activity to date includes reviewing contracting arrangements for providers, seeking to ensure greater compliance with contractual arrangements, more regular review of placements (avoiding high cost placements for any long duration), looking at ways to stimulate the Leeds placement market and to avoid placements

within Leeds being used by other local authorities, closer alignment of placement costs with decision making on type of placement, supporting Value for Money reviews of commissioned activity and considering gaps in commissioned activity. In addition, the Commissioning Team is working on a potential joint West Yorkshire bid to the Department for Education relating to Government proposals to deliver Regional Care Co-operatives. Opportunities for closer working with commissioning colleagues in Adults and Health are also being looked at along with our approach to joint commissioning with Health colleagues most notably within the Integrated Care Board (ICB).

- Early Help

A key plank of the Directorate's approach to ensuring beneficial outcomes to children and young people is by making sure that early support and help is provided to children and families, which prevents less beneficial and more costly interventions later. A number of work packages are being progressed under this activity including:

- Little Owls Review – The Council provides 28 nursery settings across the city and they are in the process of being reviewed against the Council's legal duty to ensure sufficient provision alongside issues associated with use by children with SEND (who may otherwise not be provided for by other providers) and deprivation. This could, ultimately, lead to the council directly providing less nursery provision.
- Childrens' Centres – a review, in part complementary to the review of Little Owls but also linked to a wider review of locality-based assets is at the scoping stage.
- Early Help staffing – a review of the most advantageous and appropriate staffing structure for Early Help Services is nearing completion. This work directly links to the national agenda for moving towards a more preventative based system of Childrens' Social Care (which, of course, has been the position in Leeds for a number of years).

- Turning the Curve is activity which seeks to address the upcoming potential demand and to seek to deliver interventions which support children to remain outside the care system. This activity is currently subject to a revised scoping exercise.

- Digital

Activity focussed on ensuring that the Directorate's two principal childcare information systems (one for social care and one for learning inclusion) are fit for purpose and are supporting practitioners in appropriate models of operation, including making sure that practitioners have a single live version of the data associated with individual children and families. This activity picks up two significant elements of work; group working which provides for effective linking of data which reduces the need for double data entry but also provides for a more holistic view of issues and needs and also a separate element of placement payments which seeks to link placement financial information to individual child records thereby, removing manual intervention and reducing the risk of incorrect placements.

- Work Environment

This activity seeks to support ad-hoc pieces of work that enables practitioners within the Directorate to focus on their key and core work tasks and seeks to 'problem solve' routine day to day issues which may divert attention from providing the best possible service to children and young people. The work in this activity does change over time but to date as been focused on issues that distract practitioners from focussing on their core role, examples include the provision of effective business support, accommodation and office related issues, travel and co-ordination of activity issues etc.

- 2.6 Whilst not a formal workstream activity is also undertaken to streamline decision making across the Directorate to enable more agile implementation of decisions to support service delivery with a focus on ensuring that officer delegated decision making is taken in line with existing schemes of delegation. This will continue to be in accordance with the Council's Decision Making Framework.
- 2.7 All the work being undertaken is supported by a range of enabling functions or foundations including Human Resources, Finance, Asset Management, IDS, Performance and Intelligence etc.
- 2.8 Whilst the activity being undertaken is reported here separately there are clear links and interdependencies between areas of work and there is a significant focus on ensuring that opportunities for change are progressed on a holistic basis where possible. Programmes will include working closely with other directorate transformation teams across the organisation to drive cross cutting and corporate improvement. Collaboration will further support oversight of social, economic and legislative influences that may negatively impact on children and families, which may require assessment and inclusion in cross departmental work programmes.

What impact will this proposal have?

- 3.0 Delivery of the transformation agenda within the Directorate is a key task and links directly to the provision of beneficial outcomes for children and young people whilst also seeking to assist the Directorate (and the Council more generally) to operate in a more financially sustainable way.

How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?

Health and Wellbeing Inclusive Growth Zero Carbon

- 4.0 The work being undertaken will have a direct impact on the ability to deliver improvements to the health and well-being of children and young people across the city and therefore has a direct link to the Health and Wellbeing pillar of the Best City Ambition.

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

Wards affected: All

Have ward members been consulted? Yes No

- 5.0 Consultation and engagement is and will continue to be a key element of the activity undertaken. This consultation and engagement will however be undertaken as an integral element of the workstreams. Dependent upon the individual activity this may involve Elected Members.
- 5.1 It is important to recognise that the Directorate's transformation focus extends beyond the organisation. The importance of engagement with citizens, partner organisations and the third sector to provide expertise and to shape the redesign of services is understood, and fundamental to the successful delivery of positive change.
- 5.2 There is an acknowledgement that there is a need to improve the overall communications of the work of the programme and this will be addressed when a postholder is in place.

What are the resource implications?

- 6.0 The resources for the team itself is provided on an invest to save basis. The cost of the overall team is £1.4m but this must be recouped by savings at least equal to the cost of provision.
- 6.1 There are significant savings that the Directorate must deliver upon, to help secure the long-term sustainability of the Directorate and indeed the Council. Currently £13m (in addition to the cost of the team itself as referenced in 6.0 above) of savings are directly attributed to be delivered by activity supported by the Transformation Team.

What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

- 7.0 The key risk is non-delivery of change, this is mitigated by robust governance arrangements for the programme as a whole however there remains a risk should programmes of activity not deliver the expected outcomes or delivers them to a different timescale.

What are the legal implications?

- 8.0 This report of itself does not raise any legal implications, however there is a need to ensure that legal compliance is in-built into every area of activity supported or delivered by the programme.

Options, timescales and measuring success

What other options were considered?

- 9.0 Given the scale of the financial challenges the 'do nothing' option was discounted. An internal resource, supplemented by external resource where necessary and appropriate was considered the least costly option and provide the most benefits in terms of being sustainable and allowing for effective knowledge transfer.

How will success be measured?

- 10.0 Each individual activity will have individual success measures and these will be set out in individual project proposals/business cases as appropriate.

What is the timetable and who will be responsible for implementation?

- 11.0 The Director of Children and Families is ultimately responsible for the delivery of the work, with the lead officer being the Chief Officer Transformation and Partnerships. Implementation is underway and ingoing.

Appendices

- None

Background papers

- None