

# Public Document Pack

**Late information for 12<sup>th</sup> January 2012 Scrutiny Board (Children and Families)**

Pages 1-14: Agenda item 9 – Main report on outcomes for looked after children in Leeds

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**Report of the Director of Children’s Services**

**Report to Children’s Services Scrutiny Board**

**Date: 9<sup>th</sup> January 2012**

**Subject: Outcomes for Looked After Children in Leeds**

Are specific electoral Wards affected?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):		
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?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

**1.0 Purpose of this report**

- 1.1 The Children and Families Scrutiny Board has been undertaking a review of placements for children and young people who are taken into care in Leeds. At an early stage of this review, members suggested that it would be helpful to understand the wider context of issues, challenges and work taking place in relation to looked after children. It is timely to provide such information given the ongoing high prioritisation being given to looked after children across the city. This report therefore provides members will an update on outcomes for looked after children in Leeds and planned activity for the coming year.
- 1.2 The report provides brief background about the current prioritisation of looked after children’s issues and then discusses key performance information and considerations in relation to LAC numbers, placements and outcomes under the broad headings of being healthy, safe, learning, being active citizens and having fun. The final part of the report discusses some of the key initiatives underway to target improvements for LAC in the context of the ambitions to make Leeds a Child Friendly City.

**2.0 Background information**

- 2.1 Improving services provided to vulnerable children, including those taken into care has been a significant city-wide priority for a sustained period. This followed a series of developments that highlighted the importance of improvements in this area within Leeds.
- 2.2 In March 2010 Children’s Services in Leeds were made the subject of an Improvement Notice by the Under Secretary of State for Children and Families. This followed two inspections and an annual assessment by Ofsted, which highlighted the need for significant improvements across services for vulnerable children.

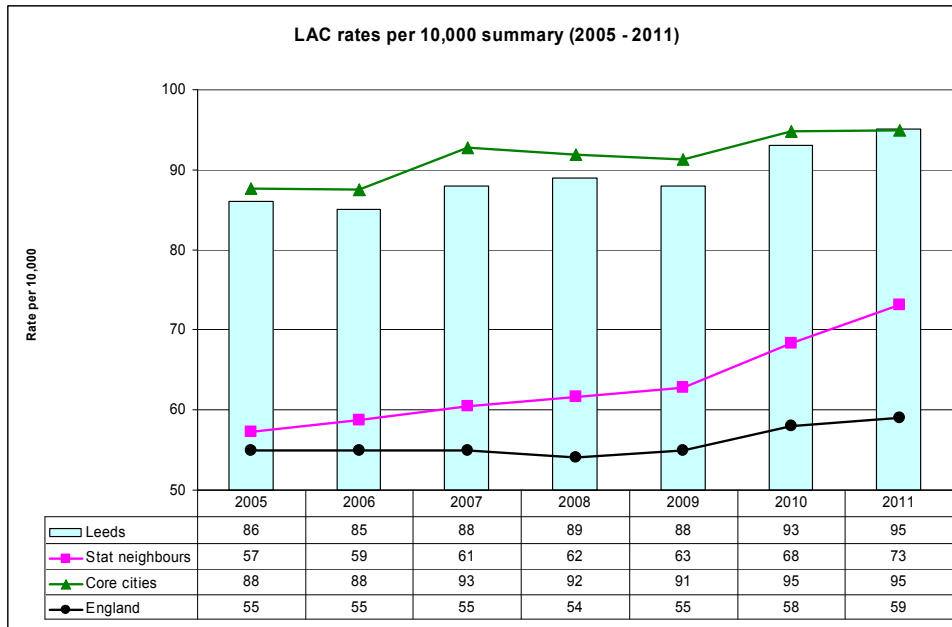
- 2.2 In relation to looked after children, Ofsted found a number of areas where particular improvement was required, specifically:
- Arrangements for prevention and early intervention, including the Common Assessment Framework were not sufficiently robust
  - Services were not targeted on children and young people at the point of crisis to prevent family breakdown.
  - Issues with the quality of care planning.
  - Issues with the timeliness of statutory reviews for looked after children.
- 2.3 It was in the context of these areas for improvement that Leeds experienced a notable increase in the numbers of looked after children in the city from 1370 in November 2009 to 1434 in November 2010.
- 2.4 Efforts to address these issues have been a key element of the Improvement Plan and the monitoring work of the Improvement Board that the Scrutiny Board is familiar with. Whilst there is still significant work to be done, the progress made to date is reflected in the recent lifting of the Improvement Notice (reported elsewhere on this Scrutiny Board agenda).
- 2.5 More generally, there is a significant body of research highlighting that looked after children have poorer outcomes than other children and young people in the community and that reducing the numbers of looked after children and improving their outcomes requires a coordinated effort from agencies working with children, young people and families.
- 2.6 Building on the vision of making Leeds the best city in Britain and using the framework of the Child Friendly City, the Council has mobilised the city and community behind children and young people. Members agreed to increase funding for Children's Services and improving the quality of service and outcomes for vulnerable children, young people and their families has been the focus of the Council and its partners working together through the Children's Trust and the Local Safeguarding Children's Board.
- 2.7 Reducing the number of children and young people becoming looked after was adopted as one of the three 'obsessions' identified within the latest Children and Young People's Plan.

### **3.0 Main issues**

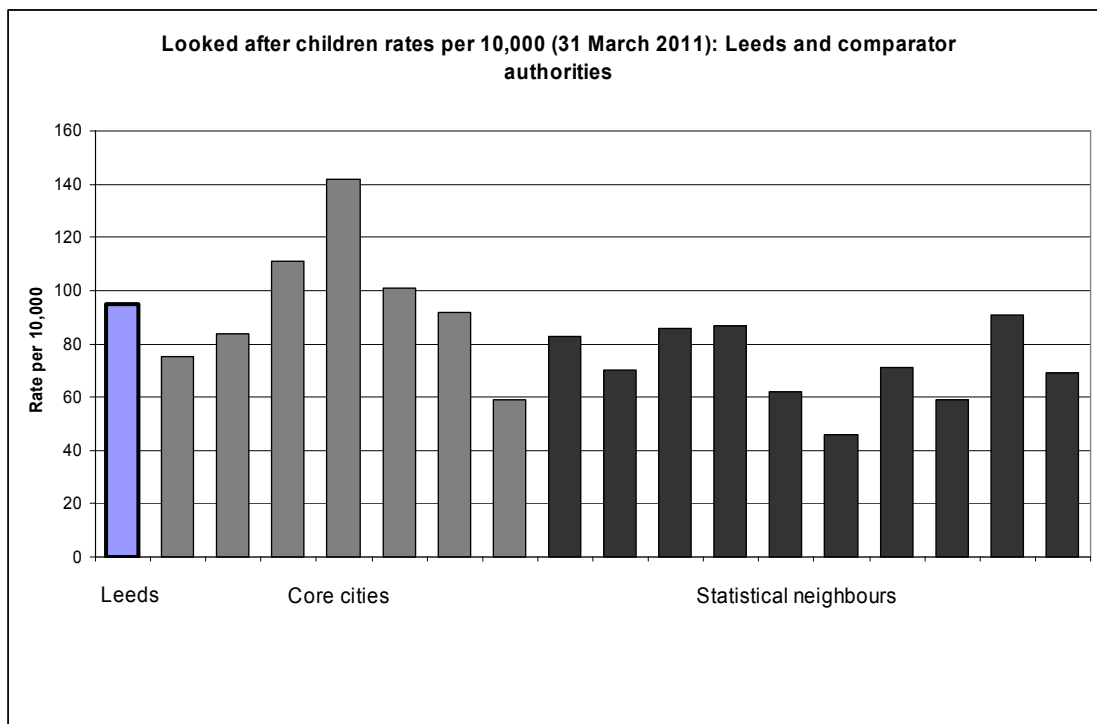
#### **3.1 Number of children in care**

- 3.1.1 The number of looked after children in Leeds has been steadily increasing since 2005, with the most significant rise coming between 2009 and 2010. Graphs 1 and 2 provide a comparative statistical analysis of the numbers of looked after children in Leeds (the rate of looked after children per 10,000 children in the general population) against both statistical neighbours and core cities, which have similar demographic characteristics.
- 3.1.2 Graph 1 illustrates that, as a result of the work undertaken to strengthen practice, the number of looked after children in Leeds has not seen a significant increase over the past year. In November 2010 there were 1434 looked after children and in November 2011 1445. There are currently 1437 looked after children. The graph also illustrates that the rate of increase in Leeds is lower than that in both Statistical Neighbours and Core Cities. This stabilisation in the numbers of looked after children is the precursor to 'Turning the Curve'.

**Graph 1: Looked after children rates per 10,000 summary (2005 - 2011)**



**Graph 2: Leeds & comparator authorities' rates of looked after children March 2011**



3.1.3 Tables 1 provides an analysis of the numbers of looked after children by age group at January 2011 and again in November. This indicates an increase in the number and proportion of looked after children under 4 years and a decrease in those aged between 11 and 15. This may indicate that initiatives to strengthen assessment and care planning to

support early intervention may be having an impact. However, Table 1 also highlights the importance of increasing the recruitment of more foster carers. Table 2 provides an analysis of looked after children by ethnicity. There is an over-representation of children and young people from a dual heritage and a Black British background when compared with the child population as a whole and an under-representation of children from an Asian background.

**Table 1: Numbers of looked after children by age group at Jan and Nov 2011**

Age Group	0-4	5-10	11-15	16 -17
Jan 2011	344 (24%)	359 (25%)	459 (32%)	272 (19%)
Nov 2011	429 (30%)	371 (26%)	396 (28%)	211 (18%)

**Table 2: Looked after children by ethnicity**

Ethnicity	White UK	Black / Black British	Asian / Asian British	Dual Heritage	Other
	79%	3%	3%	12%	3%

## 3.2 Children's placements

3.2.1 Providing good outcomes for looked after children is underpinned by matching the child or young person with a placement that is appropriate to their needs. Table 3 provides an analysis of looked after children. It shows that 27% of looked after children are being supported to live within their birth family or extended family (Placed with Parents or Family Network). Just over half of looked after children ( 54.4%) are placed with foster carers with a further eight percent being placed with prospective adoptive parents. This is consistent with the make up of the looked after children population (Table 1), which indicates that 56% of looked after children are under 10 years of age.

**Table 3: Looked after children by placement**

Foster Care	Family Network Placement	Placement with Parents	Residential Care	Children awaiting adoption
54.5%	15.5%	11.5%	10.5%	8%

3.2.2 The number of children in Leeds placed in Independent Fostering Agency placements has increased significantly in response to the rapid increase in the numbers of looked after children. Previously Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements were used where children and young people had needs that could not be met by an in-house foster placement; for example complex needs or a large sibling group. However, Independent Fostering Agency placements are now also being used due to the lack of availability of in-house foster placements. Improving the recruitment of foster carers is a significant target for Children's Services.

3.2.3 There is a similar pattern in the use of residential placements and a review of residential provision is currently underway. Although the use of Independent Fostering Agency and external residential placements has continued to grow during this financial year, there are indications that placement numbers in the third quarter have remained more stable (276 IFAs and 101 external residential placements at 18/12/11).

### 3.3 Placement stability

3.3.1 The stability of a placement is a useful indicator of whether children and young people are being matched with carers that can meet their needs. Table 4 shows the placement stability figures against core cities and statistical neighbours. It indicates that the number of children and young people experiencing three or more placements has increased. This may indicate difficulties in initial matching and is the focus of work to improve recruitment and care planning in the coming year. However, children and young people placed in long term placements have remained relatively stable.

**Table 4: Looked after children: Placement stability**

Placement Stability			2009-10	Core City	Stat Neighbour	2010-11
NI 62	Stability of placements of CLA	Percentage of children looked after with 3 or more placements during the year	11.0%	11.3	10.6	13.3%
NI 63	Stability of CLA	Percentage of children looked after for at least 2.5 years who had been in their placement for at least 2 years	68.4%	68.6	66.5	67.6%

### 3.4 Outcomes for looked after children

#### Safe from harm

3.4.1 A number of things are essential if children and young people who cannot be looked after by their families are to be safe from harm:

- They must be provided with good quality placements;
- Their case should be overseen by a qualified social worker who is well managed and supported;
- They must be visited, seen and spoken to regularly by their social worker;
- The plan for their care and its implementation should be reviewed regularly.

3.4.2 These factors are considered by Ofsted in their inspection of safeguarding arrangements. The January 2010 Ofsted inspection judged safeguarding of looked after children to be adequate. Both the most recent inspections of fostering and adoption rated keeping children safe from harm and neglect as good.

3.4.3 Children's homes are also inspected regularly by Ofsted. Currently, five of the local authority's children's homes in Leeds are rated as 'good', five as 'satisfactory' and one is rated as inadequate. Where they are needed, clear action plans are in place to ensure that necessary improvements are being made to achieve consistently high standards across all Leeds children's homes.

### ***Case file audits***

- 3.4.4 In November 2010, to ensure that looked after children were receiving a good quality social work service and in the context of the wider improvement work taking place, a large scale audit of 1095 looked after children and child protection case files was undertaken. The audit looked at the quality of practice against clear practice standards agreed with practitioners, and was used to determine development needs as well as areas of good practice across the service to help raise standards and provide more consistency.
- 3.4.5 A case file audit framework has been developed and implemented, with managers required to undertake a certain number of audits each month dependent upon their role. The management of the audit process is undertaken centrally by the performance team to ensure random selection, cross team auditing and to ensure that aggregated information is collected as well as individual corrective actions being set.

### ***Looked after children's reviews***

- 3.4.6 Care plans for looked after children are subject to independent scrutiny by an Independent Reviewing Officer. To improve the timeliness and quality of reviews, the Independent Reviewing Officer Service has been strengthened as part of the development of the Independent Safeguarding Unit. As a result, the percentage of looked after children's reviews carried out within required timescales has improved from 71% in 2009/10 to the current figure of 91%. This performance is similar to statistical neighbours though it is our ambition that performance in Leeds will continue to improve.

### ***Child sexual exploitation***

- 3.4.7 Some looked after children and young people are particularly vulnerable to exploitation. Children's Services and the Local Safeguarding Children Board have been working together to ensure that there are appropriate arrangements in place to safeguard these young people.
- 3.4.8 New arrangements to support agencies to work together more effectively where there are concerns that a young person may be at risk of exploitation have been developed and the new procedures will be formally launched at an arranged event in February 2012.
- 3.4.9 A specialist Child Sexual Exploitation practitioner was recruited in 2011. Based in the Integrated Safeguarding Unit this practitioner is responsible for coordinating operational and strategic matters in relation to Child Sexual Exploitation. This has led to more a coordinated response operationally and a large scale event to highlight this issue is planned for February 2012.
- 3.4.10 The Local Safeguarding Children Board provides training on this issue and are working closely with all partners to address the issue.

### ***Children lead healthy lives***

- 3.4.11 The timeliness of completion of initial Health Needs Assessments has been of concern, with a backlog of appointments and significant number of missed appointments. A review of the service by the designated doctor has resulted in improved systems, local clinics and patient/carer centred booking, which has resulted in improved timeliness. This will continue to be monitored and further improvements have been proposed, to ensure all children are accompanied by their parent and social worker as well as their carer wherever possible.



- 3.4.12 The proportion of our looked after children having up to date health needs assessments shows a year on year improvement. In 2006/7 72% of looked after children had a health needs assessment, in 2010/11, we achieved 92%. The statistical neighbour average was 82%.
- 3.4.13 The proportion of children with up to date dental checks also shows a similar year on year improvement from 78% in 2006/7 to 87% in 2010/11 against a statistical neighbour average of 75%.
- 3.4.14 The proportion of looked after children and care leavers with up to date immunisations is reported annually and has also increased from 57% in 2007-2008 to 76% in 2008-2009, 84% in 2009-2010 and 90% in 2010/11. The statistical neighbour average was 74% in the same year.

### **Children and young people do well in learning and have skills for life**

- 3.4.15 Contextual Value Added (CVA) provides a way to compare groups of children and young people with different previous educational experience. Though the government has decided not to support it in future, it still provides a helpful estimate of progress that allows one year group to be compared with another group, even though the groups might have differing 'academic' potential.
- 3.4.16 The estimated CVA between Key Stages 1 and 2 has consistently fallen between 99 and 101 over recent years. A score of 100 is usually accepted as evidence that a cohort of children is achieving in line with expectations and so, though the academic potential of Year 6 groups has varied over recent years they continue to achieve broadly in line with expectations. The estimated CVA between key stages 2 and 4 has, in contrast improved steadily from 960 in 2008 to 993 in 2011. Whilst still short of the 1000 that would suggest that the cohort was achieving as expected, this does show a positive trend of improvement.
- 3.4.17 By the end of key stage 2 the percentage of looked after children who had achieved level 4 or above in the core subjects has risen significantly since 2008 to 54% and 40% in English and Maths respectively. Though this remains lower than for all children the gap in attainment narrowed from 40% in 2010 to 26% in 2011, in English, and from 44% to 38% in Maths.
- 3.4.18 The percentage of looked after children who achieved 1+A\*-G at GCSE by the end of Key Stage 4 rose from 64% in 2008 to 84% in 2011 and those achieving 5A\*-G from 44% to 59% over the same period. Those achieving 5A\*-C increased from 9% in 2008 to 33% in 2011 and those achieving 5A\*-C, including English and Maths, rose from 6% to 9% over the same period. The %A\*-C including English & Maths fell back in 2011 from 14% in 2010, which may reflect a reduction in national funding used for one to one tuition, which has previously focused on English and Maths.
- 3.4.19 Attendance by looked after children in primary school (96.4%) has gone up slightly since 2008 (96.1) and remains 1.6% higher than that of all children (94.8%). Persistent Absence among looked after children in primary school has declined further in 2011 (to 0.8% at the 20% absence threshold) and is lower than among all children (1.4%). At the 15% threshold of absence, persistent absence among primary school looked after children is 2.0% compared to 4.3% among all primary school children.
- 3.4.20 Attendance by looked after children in secondary school (90.2%) remains lower than that of all children (92.4%) but has improved by 1.8% since 2008. While Persistent Absence (at

the 20% threshold) remains higher among looked after children than all children in Leeds (12.7% compared to 6.3%) it is significantly lower than it was in 2008 (18%).

3.4.21 Only 2 looked after children were permanently excluded from Leeds schools in 2010-2011. Data on fixed term exclusion must be treated with caution as academies are not required to submit fixed term exclusion data to the authority and some do not. However, based on available data, the total number of days that looked after children lost to exclusion continued to fall, from 828 in 2008-09 to 412 in 2010-11 while the number of children excluded and the number of exclusions they suffered also continued to fall. Exclusions among looked after children continue, however, to be significantly higher than among all children.

### **Children and young people are active citizens who feel they have voice and influence**

3.4.22 It can be difficult for looked after children, because of their needs and circumstances, to participate in decision making and to influence the provision and development of services. It is essential therefore that they are supported to have voice and influence. All looked after children and care leavers have good access to independent, proactive, advocacy services through the independent Children's Rights Service commissioned from Barnado's.

3.4.23 Looked after children and care leavers were involved with every senior appointment in Children and Young People's Social Care as well as the appointment of the Director of Children's Services. They have also contributed to the development of services through:

- The 'Leeds Promise' to looked after children was sent together with a questionnaire to all looked after Children aged 8 and over and their comments are being used to improve services;
- The Children's Rights service has worked in partnership with younger looked after children and staff in one of the children's homes to produce a range of stories to illustrate our promise to looked after children and assist them to understand the changes in their lives. It is intended that these powerful stories will be published.
- The Elected Member, Corporate Carer group's forward plan includes 6 monthly joint meetings with the Children in Care Council.

3.4.24 The 'Have a Voice group', (Children in Care Council) is working closely with the Looked After Children Partnership group and Elected Members to review the Looked After Children's Strategy and inform service development. The strategy will be used as a catalyst to further improve engagement and influence of looked after children.

### **Children and young people have fun growing up**

3.4.25 Many looked after children and young people will have had limited opportunity to participate in the type of fun activities that most children and young people take for granted.

3.4.26 Since mid-May 2010 the 'Creative Start Project' has delivered a range of arts provision to 6 children's homes across Leeds – all aimed at developing a long term and sustainable interest in the arts among the young people. Creative Start has also funded visits to a variety of locations including the Yorkshire Sculpture Park and The Deep in Hull, and has brought in artist Tim Curtis to support staff and work with two small groups of autistic young people at Acorn Lodge to create artwork inspired by their days out

3.4.27 The Leeds 'Find Your Talent' pilot linked looked after children with libraries, arts and heritage activities.

- 3.4.28 The youth service has worked closely with our children's homes. All homes have a designated link within the service who works in partnership with the homes activity coordinator to ensure that looked after young people have access to universal and targeted youth services. This has resulted in improved take up of youth service activities.
- 3.4.29 The Looked After Children's Strategy review has commenced with a thematic review of 'Have fun Growing up'. The partner group and our children's group agreed that we should prioritise ensuring that all children have positive self esteem, build on placement stability, good relationships with carers and key adults and good friendships but both also made positive recommendations about improving access to a range of activities. These will be developed into an action plan and form part of the Looked After Children's Strategy.

### **3.5 Key Focus for 2012-13**

#### **Prevention and Early Intervention work**

- 3.5.1 One of the most significant ways that we can support vulnerable children and young people in Leeds is to prevent the need for them to be taken into care. Recognising the importance of this, a number of key initiatives are being progressed that aim to strengthen preventative and early intervention work in Leeds. To provide members with a full understanding of the work we are doing to improve outcomes by preventing the need for children to come into care, a summary of these initiatives is provided below.

#### **Early Start**

- 3.5.2 Efforts to improve preventative work in Leeds are focused around the Early Start Teams in the children's centres. The findings of the universal review in relation to Early Start Teams have now been implemented in one cluster, Seacroft/Manston, where the Early Start Team is in place. Early Start Teams will be up and running across the city by September 2012.
- 3.5.3 Early Start Teams will identify and work with families and place children for the free 2 year old child care places in children's centres, specifically targeting those likely to become looked after.

#### **Common Assessment Framework (CAF)**

- 3.5.4 CAFs should be routinely undertaken with families where a single agency does not feel they can meet need and where consultation with other agencies is needed. It is expected that the number of CAFs (children needing universal or targeted services) should exceed those needing a specialist assessment from social care. However, in the 2010/11 financial year, 1131 CAFs were initiated. 570 CAFs were initiated between 01 April 2011 and 30 November 2011. Based on eight months' data, approximately 855 CAFs will be initiated in 2011-12, a drop of approximately 24%. There is therefore a need to significantly increase quantity and quality of common assessments undertaken in order to identify and meet needs at an early stage.
- 3.5.5 In order to support this intervention the CAF process is being simplified to concentrate on identifying and meeting the additional needs of children and families. Support and advice is being provided by Professor Harriet Ward from the Centre for Child and Family Research and Mark Peel from Leicester University who have worked with a number of authorities on the successful implementation of CAF.

## **Multi-agency working through locality and cluster working**

- 3.5.6 All clusters in the city now have in place a structure that includes a multi-agency group working together to provide more support to vulnerable children, young people and families.
- 3.5.7 These groups meet regularly to receive 'Requests For Support' from those universal settings (schools and children's centres) where it is considered a vulnerable child or young person needs additional support. The multi-agency group shares information where appropriate and discusses the individual child or young person, identifies whether any other agencies are involved and agrees an appropriate package of support. A lead person is nominated to lead on the support. Where appropriate the group will refer back to the universal setting as best placed to progress a recommended action, for example undertaking a CAF. Where the Targeted Service Leader (TSL) is in post, they chair the meetings.
- 3.5.8 All of the cluster multi-agency groups are at different stages of development, some beginning to work effectively, and some still evolving. There are some excellent examples of how the sharing of information has led to positive outcomes for the children, young people and their families. Efficiencies in the use of resources are being made by reducing the number of agencies supporting a child, young person or family in what was previously, an uncoordinated way. The delivery of evidenced-based parenting programmes is becoming more needs driven.
- 3.5.9 Development of the cluster practice and infrastructure is on-going, this involves partnership support including the Leeds Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). The significance and challenge of this work is considerable and while progress is being made the scale and support needed should not be underestimated.
- All 3 of the three early adopter clusters have held OBA based workshops focussing on the obsession "reducing the need for children to be in care".
  - The targeted services leader role, which is being piloted in 3 clusters, J.E.S.S, Inner East and Bramley is beginning to show some success. All three pilot clusters now have in place a list of their most vulnerable families. Using the Top 100 methodology they have managed to identify those families that need a coordinated support package in place, and have identified the most appropriate lead agency.
  - Children Leeds leadership team have identified a further resource that will now provide for around 18 TSL posts across the city and build on the learning of the pilot clusters.
  - A skills audit has been undertaken of all cluster family support staff and the LCSB have produced a list of training courses with recommendations to the clusters on who should attend.
  - Principles of effective supervision are currently being developed, for ratification by the LSCB for implementation in schools and clusters.
  - Ongoing areas for development include cluster case-management and effective and appropriate information sharing.

## **3.6 Responding to requests for service and referrals**

### **Re-referral rates**

- 3.6.1 Initial contacts with Children's Services in Leeds are known as 'requests for service' (RfS). A decision about the information contained in a RfS is made by a social work manager in order to determine whether a referral to a social work team is needed. Once this matter has

been dealt if a further request meets the criteria for a referral this will count as a re-referral. The rate of re-referrals can provide an indication of how effectively the child or family's needs were met. Increasing rates can suggest that the response is less effective.

	<b>2008-09</b>	<b>2009-10</b>	<b>2010-11</b>	<b>Nov 2010 to Nov 2011</b>
<b>Re-referral rate</b>	21.0%	28.2%	32.1%	35.5%
<b>Number of referrals in financial year</b>	8,667	9,909	12,945	14,139
<b>Number of re-referrals within 12 months of initial referrals</b>	1,821	2,790	4,154	5,025

(Re-referrals are calculated by examining all referrals received in a financial year to see if a previous referral had been received within the preceding 12 months).

- 3.6.2 It can be seen that the number and proportion of total referrals has increased significantly since 2008. Changes to the threshold for referrals to social care were lowered following the concerns about safeguarding in 2009. This has clearly led to an increase in the number of referrals dealt with by social care. However there have been some concerns that this has led to an investigative culture in response to these referrals without the appropriate support services being provided to families. An analysis of referrals taken by social care has been undertaken and is outlined below.

### **3.7 Analysis of referral taking in Leeds**

- 3.7.1 Professor David Thorpe was commissioned as part of a regional study to look at what he terms the 'front door'. This study looked at 300 referrals accepted by Children's Social Care in 2008. The referrals were studied in terms of decision making and response at the point of referral but also followed through for one year where social care remained involved for this period of time.
- 3.7.2 The same exercise was undertaken by Professor Thorpe in relation to referrals from June 2010, which were tracked through to June 2011, as there had been the introduction of a children's screening team at the contact centre during this time.
- 3.7.3 Professor Thorpe has now completed his analysis and a report is to be shared imminently. Initial findings would indicate a significant number of referrals are categorised as child protection resulting in an investigation, but when examined closely are actually welfare concerns which could be dealt with by a number of other types of service. This has led to numbers of children being subject to an initial assessment from social care with no further action taken and no other service provided. This means children's needs are not effectively met at this early stage and their situations deteriorate to the point where further referrals are made.
- 3.7.4 Detailed work with Professor Thorpe is planned over the next three months to implement a much more effective system to assist and support families at this critical time. This should reduce the need to refer to social work teams allowing them to work more effectively with the most vulnerable children.

### **3.8 Family group conferencing**

- 3.8.1 Family group conferencing is internationally recognised as an evidence based method of working with families. It is central to the commitment in Leeds to restorative approaches and an approach which works with families to find solutions to their difficulties. The provision of the family group conference service is to be expanded from one to three teams across the city to ensure that families experiencing difficulties are supported to find solutions within their own family and community network, with support and monitoring from agencies to ensure that children remain safe at all times. This approach will identify strengths in families and solutions that are sustainable without the need for extensive agency involvement.
- 3.8.2 Leeds will be undertaking this expansion in partnership with the Family Rights Group, a nationally recognised expert agency in this field. The expansion will take place from March 2011 onwards.

### **3.9 Improving services to children at the point of crisis**

- 3.9.1 In those circumstances where the more effective and coordinated early intervention services have not been able to meet the needs of children and they reach crisis point specific edge of care services will be available to intervene appropriately.
- 3.9.2 Multi-Systemic Therapy has proved to be very effective in Leeds during its pilot period, however the service has consisted of one team across the city. The team works with 11 – 16 year old young people at risk of care or custody. It has also proved effective, in a small number of cases, in returning children from external placements back to Leeds own placements and to children's families.
- 3.9.3 This service is to be expanded to three teams working across the city targeting children on the edge of care or custody. They will also be involved with a number of young people who have already become looked after but where there is a prospect of a return home. A number of these young people may have been in care for sometime, however, as this work progresses the service will focus on returning children and young people who have just become looked after.
- 3.9.4 Research suggests that children who become looked after and remain in care for longer than six to eight weeks are much more likely to remain in care for over two years. This window of opportunity therefore is very important in returning young people home and improving their outcomes. As well as MST a crisis support team is to be developed to ensure that families receive support at this critical time to ensure children do not enter care unnecessarily.

### **3.10 Effective care planning**

- 3.10.1 There has been a very significant restructure of children's services in Leeds bringing together the former Education Leeds and Local Authority services as the basis of a much wider plan of integration of services to children and their families. The integration of Children's Services along with more effective early intervention and edge of care services outlined above is aimed at reducing the pressures on social work teams.
- 3.10.2 The social work teams are to be realigned geographically to relate to clusters in order that each team relates to a small number of local schools, health visiting teams and other local agencies. These relationships will form the basis of more effective safeguarding and preventative work where the local social work manager will provide support, guidance and reassurance to professionals to help them to meet the needs of children earlier and to avoid

the need to refer for more specialist support. This in turn allows for much more effective intervention by social work teams with children who are the most vulnerable.

- 3.10.3 In addition to this, specialist Looked After Children's Teams will work in a dedicated and focussed manner to drive care plans for looked after children. This will tackle drift in care planning, quality assured by independent reviewing officers, and will focus intensively on permanence for children who are looked after. All young people looked after will have a permanence plan which means that agencies are working together actively towards an exit from care for all looked after children. These exits include adoption, special guardianship or a return to their family. Children may need one or more placements to prepare for permanence and this is acceptable as long as all children have a route to achieving a permanent home.

### **3.11 Placement choice**

- 3.11.1 Work is underway to improve the choice of placements. This will be achieved by increasing the range and number of in-house foster carers as well as increasing the use of adoption, special guardianship orders and by ensuring that in-house residential provision is appropriate to the needs of children in Leeds.
- 3.11.2 The fostering and adoption team has been strengthened and a review of residential services is underway to ensure that the Council's own provision is fit for purpose and allows for better matching of children's needs.
- 3.11.3 The overall Obsession to reduce the need for children to be looked after will also contribute to more effective matching of needs as the demand for placements overall begins to reduce. The expansion of in-house provision coupled with a reduction in demand for placements is a very high priority in the Council and will see more effective and efficient use of resources to meet children's needs.

## **4.0 Corporate considerations**

### **4.1 Consultation and engagement**

- 4.1.1 None specifically for this item.

### **4.2 Equality and diversity / cohesion and integration**

- 4.2.1 The ethnicity of looked after children is highlighted in the main body of the report and shows a variance with the population of children in Leeds. This issue is subject to analysis as part of the service redesign of Children's Social Care. National research highlights this as a concern, but concludes that there is little evidence to support the view that social workers or other welfare professionals operate a different threshold for groups from ethnic minority families when offering services or removing children from their parent's care.
- 4.2.2 The disparities in Leeds are less significant than other places in the UK however, further work is to be undertaken to understand the issues in Leeds.

### **4.3 Council policies and City priorities**

- 4.3.1 The work with looked after children is a very significant priority and reducing the need for children to be looked after is central to the ambitions for Leeds to become a child friendly city.

4.3.2 It is also one of three obsessions in Children's Services and will require the support of the whole Council and its partners and the city as a whole.

#### **4.4 Resources and value for money**

4.4.1 The work outlined in this report and the Looked After Children Plan is based on reducing the need for children to become looked after. This will require more effective early intervention, a greater focus on children on the edge of care and more effective care planning to achieve permanence where children are looked after. All these features will mean that outcomes for children are much improved. Over a period of time the reduction in the number of looked after children will also lead to financial savings for the Council.

#### **4.5 Legal implications, access to information and call in**

4.5.1 None specifically for this item.

#### **4.6 Risk management**

4.6.1 None specifically for this item.

#### **4.7 Conclusions**

4.7.1 At the request of the Children and Families Scrutiny Board, this report provides an update on outcomes for looked after children across Leeds.

#### **Background documents**

Looked After Children Obsession Action Plan (available to members on request)