



**Leeds
Safeguarding
Children Board**

Annual Report 2012/13

Executive Summary

Report of Jane Held, Independent Chair

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Forward

From Jane Held, Independent Chair of Leeds Safeguarding Children Board

I am pleased to present the Leeds safeguarding Children Board Annual Report for 2012/13. Looking back over the year when bringing this report together, it is clear that a huge amount has happened to improve the way children and young people are safeguarded in Leeds and that many people are working hard to keep on improving practice. If you want to know if children are safe in Leeds, I would say that they are considerably safer than they were a few years ago. Of course I could never say they are 100% safe, but this report should give the reader assurance about Leeds being a child friendly and safe city where everyone is striving to ensure that children achieve the best outcomes possible.

The Report shows that overall the Board is working effectively and that we are largely able to monitor the effectiveness of the system for safeguarding children and improving their welfare, but it also sets out clearly how much more there is to do. The commitment and passion to improve amongst statutory partners is undoubted, despite huge organisational change across the 'system' and some major challenges for some partners. This report shows just some of what we have achieved and what the challenges are in 2013/14 – challenges we will face as a Board and as agencies responsible for delivering safe, effective services to children, their families and their communities with the same determination and ambition as we have shown over the last year.

Executive Summary

The Annual Report of the Leeds Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) evaluates the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements for children and young people in Leeds in 2012/13 and sets out how the Board's work will be developed and strengthened in 2013/14. It is drawn from a wide range of sources from across the children's partnership and reflects the continuation of an 'improvement journey' that has involved a high degree of multi-agency co-operation and collaboration.

We are seeking to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and young people in Leeds by ensuring that they receive 'the right services at the right time' in order to address emerging issues and problems quickly and effectively. This has required a commitment by the children's partnership to develop preventative early help family support services that will, over time, reduce the number of children and young people whose problems have developed to the point where statutory intervention (through a child protection plan or becoming 'looked after' by the Local Authority) has become necessary.

1 Context

The report notes the considerable impact of policy developments from Central Government and sets the work of the partnership and individual agencies within the Leeds context.

2 The Effectiveness of Safeguarding Arrangements in Leeds

A comprehensive review of performance, quality assurance and audit findings clearly outlines the breadth and depth of work being undertaken to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of children and young people in Leeds. Engaging children and young people about safeguarding matters and their own care is being progressed and good use is being made of external expertise to shape the planning and development of services. Significant service restructuring has and is taking place to respond to the changing circumstances of the

public sector and to promote more effective ways of working with children, young people and their families. More quantitative and qualitative information is being collated to help analyse:

- Where progress is being made
- What outcomes are being achieved
- What difference this is making
- Where more improvement is required
- What requires further investigation and understanding.

There are positive indications that the improvement journey has sound foundations:

- There is a clear, coherent strategic direction which is focused on increasing the availability and effectiveness of Early Help preventative services and reducing the need for statutory intervention. This is formalised in the Children and Young People's Plan and supported by the challenges from the LSCB to 'rebalance the safeguarding system'.
- A shared partnership culture is developing, underpinned by a restorative approach to working with children, young people and their families that seeks to 'never do nothing' and to provide the right service at the right time with 'high support and high challenge'.

There is evidence of good progress being made in the aims and objectives set by the partnership as shown by:

- The reduction in the number of children and young people who need to be looked after
- The quality of services being provided for children and young people in the care of the Local Authority
- The establishment of revised Children's Services 'Front Door' arrangements which have supported:
 - An increase in conversations between partners about how best to respond to children and young people about whom concerns have been raised
 - A reduction in the number of referrals accepted by Children's Social Work Service
 - An improved understanding of the nature and scale of patterns of domestic violence across the city
- Continuing the investment in and co-ordination of Early Help services.

Emerging challenges are identified which have contributed to those set for the LSCB and Children's Trust Board in 2013/14:

- A greater understanding is required of:
 - The trends and profile of the number of children and young people who are subject to child protection plans
 - The full nature and extent of multi-agency Early Help and preventative activity being undertaken currently
 - How the development of a single assessment framework across the partnership and the continuum of 'risk' and 'need' can enhance the planning of Early Help interventions
- Areas identified for improvement include:
 - The timeliness of child protection processes
 - The effectiveness of child protection plans
 - The provision of services for children and young people at risk of or suffering sexual exploitation
- Areas identified for development include:
 - The agreement to a single assessment framework and process which is robust and straightforward to use
 - The updating of the Leeds 'Think Family Protocol' to improve multi-agency responses to children and young people living in the context of 'compromised parenting'.
 - The exploration of a partnership approach to establishing a Young People's Service (16 – 25 yrs) that would cater for vulnerable young people, including care leavers.

During a period of 'whole system re-orientation' it is particularly important that the Board is assured that risk in individual cases is being managed appropriately and safely. The report provides the following information to inform that judgment:

- The reduction in the number of looked after children and young people is gradual and is being actively managed. The reduction is due to a combination of fewer receptions into care (with alternative, more appropriate, options being rigorously explored) and improved permanency planning.
- Although the number and make-up of the cohort of children and young people who are subject to child protection plans requires further investigation and improvements are required in the effectiveness of plans, it is notable that the LSCB audits have confirmed the Ofsted findings of 2011 that children and young people are not being left in unsafe situations.
- The introduction of the new Children's Services Duty and Advice Team has impacted positively on the high rate of re-referrals to Children's Social Work Services, ensuring that children and young people are more consistently receiving timely and

effective responses. This trend is expected to continue in 2013/14 as the new arrangements bed in.

- Considerable audit and review activity is being undertaken to better understand the working of the safeguarding system as a whole and the performance of its component parts.

3 **The Effectiveness of the LSCB**

Through its annual review process the LSCB evaluates the work it has undertaken through the previous year, identifying progress made, emerging challenges and the impact it has had on the work to improve safeguarding services and outcomes for children and young people.

Good progress was made on all the tasks set in the Business plan for 2012/13 and outstanding actions have been included in the Business Plan for 2013/14.

Within the framework of the Strategic Plan progress has been made in the following areas:

- Lead, Listen and Advise
 - The production of an Annual Report evaluating the effectiveness of safeguarding in Leeds and identifying challenges for the coming year
 - Improved dissemination of safeguarding messages across the partnership
 - Establishing Lay Member and children and young people's input to the Board
- Know the Story; Challenge the Practice
 - The development and expansion of the LSCB Performance Management System
 - Learning lessons from Local and Single Agency Reviews
 - Undertaking safeguarding seminars with cluster leaders
- Learn and Improve
 - The establishment of a Framework for Learning and Improvement to promote a culture of continuous improvement
 - Improved dissemination of lessons from Reviews
 - Continued co-ordination and development of the LSCB Training programme

More progress needs to be made in:

- Increasing community engagement through the development of the LSCB website, the role of the Lay Members and input from the Voice and Influence sub group
- Receiving performance and audit information from across all agencies in the partnership
- Increasing our understanding of the quality of practice delivered at the front-line and contributing to its improvement.
- Understanding, monitoring and evaluating locality / cluster working
- Developing further a culture of constructive challenge and self-awareness.

Challenges for the LSCB to address in 2013/14 have been identified:

- To maintain and increase the momentum of the current work programme to support continuing improvement in services for children and young people
- To continue to monitor the management of risk within the safeguarding system
- To lead the partnership in addressing issues posed by children and young people living in the context of 'compromised parenting'
- To build on progress being made to collaborate more effectively with other strategic bodies
- To further implement the LSCB Communications strategy using the new website
- To encourage all partners to more fully engage in the work of the LSCB through its sub group structure.

The LSCB is having an impact on the work of the wider partnership through:

- The development and revision of policies and procedures which impact directly on how frontline work is undertaken. In 2012/13 this has supported work with children and young people who are missing / at risk of sexual exploitation / exhibiting self harm and suicidal behaviours.
- Raising awareness across the partnership of key safeguarding issues, lessons from Reviews and findings from audits
- Participants on training courses subsequently indicating that there had been an impact on their practice
- Findings from multi-agency audits being used to inform partners' in house audit programmes and the development of action plans to implement improvements in services
- Regular Performance reporting has identified issues that need further investigation (eg the child protection system) and have contributed to decisions made to undertake specific audits.
- Lessons from Serious Case Reviews and Local Learning Lessons Reviews informing the development of new initiatives (eg exploration of a Young People's Service) and the updating of existing arrangements (eg the Leeds Think Family Protocol).
- Improved understanding of the circumstances of child deaths has resulted in support for a number of public health campaigns (eg the dangers of co-sleeping)

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Conclusions

The report concludes that considerable progress is being made to make the necessary changes to improve multi-agency working, services and outcomes for children and young people. It identifies where more progress needs to be made and where we need to better understand problems and issues faced by children and young people in Leeds.

Challenges are set for the LSCB and the Children's Trust Board to address in 2013/14 which promote a direction of travel which places an increasing focus on:

- The quality of services rather than just on the timeliness of processes
- The LSCB operating more like an 'Improvement Board' which provides high support and high challenge
- The frontline and community engagement
- The voice of children and young people
- The use of research and evidence based practice.

As this report was being compiled and we moved into 2013/14, it has become apparent that an additional challenge for partners is to, through the Children's Trust, better understand, commission and co-ordinate early help services together so as to improve the welfare of and outcomes for children and young people in Leeds.