

Report of: Director of Children's Services

Report to: Executive Board

Date: 22nd April 2015

Subject: Outcome of the 2015 Ofsted inspection services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers; and the effectiveness of partnership working, including the Leeds Safeguarding Children Board



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. Over a number of years, Leeds has made children's services one of the city's very highest priorities. Significant investment, transformational change in children's social work and the child friendly Leeds initiative have placed children and young people at the heart of the city's growth strategy. An update report to Executive Board in February 2015 confirmed that Leeds was the subject of unannounced Ofsted inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers; and the effectiveness of partnership working, including the Leeds Safeguarding Children Board. This commenced on 20th January 2015 and concluded on 11th February 2015. Following the publication of the inspection report on 27th March 2015, this report provides the outcome of that inspection and outlines next steps.
2. This was a key test for the service, the council and the city, given the centrality of families to our best city ambitions, our investment to improve the service and the wider regional and national context around children and young people's safeguarding issues at the moment.
3. Ofsted has rated children's services in Leeds 'good' overall. There are five key areas that contribute to this overall judgement and on four of these: children who need help and protection; children looked after and achieving permanence; adoption

performance; and experience and progress of care leavers, Leeds is rated as 'good'. In the fifth area, 'leadership, management and governance' Leeds is rated as 'outstanding'. Alongside this, the Leeds safeguarding children board (LSCB) was also found to be 'good'.

4. Ofsted did not identify any priority or immediate actions. A number of areas for improvement have been identified by Ofsted and these are in line with Leeds own awareness and our aspirations to take the service forward.
5. This inspection outcome is a considerable achievement for the council, our partners and the city, particularly given the improvement journey that the service has been on and the quality standards required by Ofsted in the current inspection framework. The Leeds report reflects extremely positively on the city when seen alongside the outcome of other authorities inspected under the framework so far.
6. As is the case for each local authority after an inspection, Leeds is required to respond to the identified areas of improvement within 70 working days of the report publication date with copies of the Children's Services post inspection action plan provided to the Secretary of State and Her Majesty's Chief Inspector. (The Education and Inspections Act 2006 (Inspection of Local Authorities) Regulations 2007). The deadline for the response is 3rd July 2015.
7. A post inspection action plan is being developed and will be provided, alongside the new Children and Young People's Plan, to Executive Board at its June meeting prior to submission to the Secretary of State and Her Majesty's Chief Inspector in advance of the July deadline.
8. Leeds' achievement has been recognised by both Edward Timpson MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families and by The Rt. Hon Lord Laming CBE DL, who have proactively written to send their congratulations and to recognise the progress made. The letters are available as appendices to this report.
9. Leeds will not become in any way complacent following this positive judgement, but will use it as a basis to continue the progress being made, embed our restorative approach (using the innovation fund investment in the city), share learning and best practice across and beyond the city and pursue our ambition to be the best city for children and young people to grow up in.

Recommendations

10. Executive Board is recommended to:
11. Note the Ofsted report (appendix A) and the two letters of congratulation (appendix B and C);
12. Note that the post inspection action plan in response to the areas for improvement identified by Ofsted will be provided alongside the new Children and Young People's Plan, to Executive Board at the June meeting prior to submission to the Secretary of State and Her Majesty's Chief Inspector in advance of the 3rd July 2015 deadline.
13. Note that the Officer responsible for implementation is Deputy Director Safeguarding Specialist and Targeted, Children's Services.

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 Recognising the critical significance of the children's services to placing children, young people and families at the heart of the city's growth strategy, this report provides an update on the outcome of the recent unannounced Ofsted inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers; and the effectiveness of partnership working, including the Leeds Safeguarding Children Board. It outlines next steps in view of this inspection outcome.

2 Background information

- 2.1 Children's services in Leeds have been on a significant and wide-ranging journey of improvement over a number of years. In July 2009 Ofsted carried out an unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements and judged that Leeds services did not adequately safeguard children. In March 2010 the Government placed an Improvement Notice on Leeds. An improvement Plan was developed and an Independently Chaired Improvement Panel was established.
- 2.2 Since the 2009 inspection a new Executive Member for Children's Services (May 2010), Chief Executive of the Council (August 2010) and Director of Children's Services (September 2010) were appointed and have collectively and consistently articulated a clear strategic vision for children's services in the city – Child Friendly Leeds.
- 2.3 In January 2011 Ofsted carried out an unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements and found 'remarkable and impressive improvement' in quality and safety.
- 2.4 Over the past five years Children's Services in Leeds have undertaken a programme of transformational change to both services and in its approach to working with vulnerable children and families. The approach has been underpinned by the ambition to make Leeds a child friendly city.
- 2.5 The changes, which have been actively supported by partners in the Children and Families Trust Board and the Leeds Safeguarding Children Board, include a re-organisation of the service; a focus on 'doing the simple things better'; implementing restorative practices; having timely, quality conversations; and investment in workforce training and development. Children's Social work has been a particular focus of this work with a conscious effort made to raise the profile of the service, strengthen practice, improve staff retention and reduce case loads. The approach taken has been one of incremental change built on a strong, objective, evidence based foundation to ensure that improvements can be sustained and to create a more confident, secure and forward-thinking service.
- 2.6 The comprehensive change programme implemented to make these changes has come at a time of significant funding reductions for local government. Leeds has consistently taken the decision to invest disproportionately in children's services, recognising this as a cornerstone of the longer-term economic and social growth strategy for the city.

- 2.7 The unannounced Ofsted inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers; and the effectiveness of partnership working, including the Leeds Safeguarding Children Board, was therefore a key test of the progress that this work and investment has made. The inspection took place over four weeks and commenced on 20th January 2015 and concluded on 11th February 2015. It was carried out in line with the Ofsted inspection framework, which is available on the website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. The final report was published by Ofsted on 27th March and is attached at appendix A.
- 2.8 The outcome of the inspection is that Ofsted has rated services in Leeds as 'Good' overall. There are five key areas that contribute to this overall judgement and on four of these: children who need help and protection; children looked after and achieving permanence; adoption performance; and experience and progress of care leavers, Leeds is rated as 'good'. In the fifth area, 'leadership, management and governance' we are rated as 'outstanding'. Alongside this, the Leeds Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) was also found to be 'good'.
- 2.9 In the inspection report Ofsted comment very positively on the Leeds journey of improvement, 'The local authority has taken a thoughtful and methodical approach to improvement and has followed the child's journey. Firm foundations underpin the effectiveness of services. Leeds has placed a considerable emphasis on creating an environment where good quality social work can flourish.' Over the course of the four weeks, the inspectors recognised the clear strategic direction being taken across the city, the partnership approach that underpins this and the centrality of children's services to Leeds' wider ambitions.
- 2.10 To put the Ofsted judgement of Children's Services in Leeds in a national context, of over 40 local authorities inspected so far under the current inspection framework, only eleven including Leeds have been rated as 'good' overall (none are outstanding overall). Leeds is one of only four authorities to be given an 'outstanding' judgement in one of the key ratings. Of the eight core cities (the biggest cities in England outside London), seven have been inspected so far and Leeds is the first to be judged to be 'good'. Leeds is also the first core city to have improved its rating since the previous comparable inspection.
- 2.11 Leeds has received a range of positive feedback about the report from internal and external partners and collaborators. The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families wrote to the leader of the council to congratulate all those who contributed to this outcome and to recognise the achievement, the letter is attached at appendix B, it states: 'I recognise that local authorities face significant challenges in delivering really effective children's social care services but the fact that these services are so important to the most vulnerable children means it is essential that they are delivered to a very high standard. It is clear from Ofsted's report that you have made significant progress across a range of areas, showing clearly what can be achieved through strong leadership and effective partnership work'.
- 2.12 In addition, The Rt Hon Lord Laming, lead author of the Victoria Climbié inquiry report, also proactively wrote to congratulate those who have driven this inspection outcome, describing it as an 'excellent achievement'.

Particular reference was made by Lord Laming on the quality of leadership within the council, 'the inspirational leadership has set the values and ensured they are translated into day to day practice. The job satisfaction for the staff has understandably resulted in less turnover and fewer days away because of sickness. These factors demonstrate so well that the City of Leeds is a good employer, providing high quality services at standards seldom achieved elsewhere'. A copy of the letter is attached as Appendix C to this report.

- 2.13 The Leeds inspection process was rigorous with up to twelve inspectors on site. Inspectors examined over 220 cases and spoke with children, families and a range of professionals, including foster carers in 285 interactions.
- 2.14 The inspection– as Ofsted intended when the framework was introduced – focused on following the journey and experience of the child. It is therefore particularly encouraging that inspectors found that: 'professionals across the city put children and young people at the heart of their work'; 'staff take the right action quickly when there is a risk of a child being unsafe', that 'partners work effectively together to safeguard children and young people'. Inspectors commented that professionals in Leeds working with children and young people work 'tenaciously' with 'pride', 'know them [children] well' and 'do not give up on them'.
- 2.15 Strength of partnership has been a vital part of the progress that Leeds has made. The Ofsted report has been proactively shared with a wide range of partners including schools, health, the police child friendly Leeds partners and the academics and independent experts who have contributed research and insight to support the improvement journey.
- 2.16 Ofsted has not identified any priority or immediate actions for Leeds to respond to; however, as is the case for all authorities inspected, Ofsted requires Leeds to respond within 70 days of the publication of the report to state how the identified areas for improvement will be addressed.
- 2.17 A post-inspection action plan is in the process of being developed and will be provided to the Secretary of State and Her Majesty's Chief Inspector in advance of the deadline, which for Leeds is 3rd July 2015. Prior to this the action plan will be shared with Executive Board.

3 Main issues

- 3.1 Within the report, Ofsted judged that Children's services in Leeds are good in a wide range of areas and outstanding for leadership, management and governance. The following information summaries some significant feedback provided by the inspectors in relation to key themes:

Leadership, management and governance:

- 'Children's services in Leeds benefit from outstanding, inspirational and confident operational and political leadership. The 'Child Friendly' Leeds ambition has cross-party political support, reflected in ongoing investment in Children's Services despite the challenging financial context'.

- ‘The local authority has taken a thoughtful and methodical approach to improvement and has followed the child’s journey. Firm foundations underpin the effectiveness of services. Leeds has placed a considerable emphasis on creating an environment where good quality social work can flourish. Further work is now needed to ensure consistency and quality in practice across the city’.

3.2 *Quality of practice*

- ‘There have been significant improvements in every part of the local authority’s arrangements for safeguarding children and young people. Risk and harm are responded to in a timely, assured and well-coordinated way. There are extensive early and targeted help services available to families at the first emergence of a problem, delivered by knowledgeable, confident and well-trained practitioners’.
- ‘Assessments are informed by direct work with children, young people and their families, with good analysis of their circumstances. The authority and professionals across the city put children and young people at the heart of their work, and children are seen and spoken to as appropriate’.
- ‘There is a robust and well-coordinated response to children who are missing and/or at risk of experiencing child sexual exploitation’.
- ‘Decisions made to look after children and young people are appropriate. Robust assessments and innovative support methods with strong management oversight ensure that delay is avoided if children’s circumstances do not improve. Children and young people live in safe, stable and appropriate homes and have sustained relationships with social workers and carers who know them well’.
- ‘Adoption as a permanency option is considered early for children where care proceedings are being initiated. The local authority has substantially reduced the number of children waiting to be adopted, with 112 children adopted in the last year’.
- ‘Services for care leavers are good. Strong multi-agency partnerships have improved outcomes in education, employment and training. Care leavers have access to a wide range of suitable and supported accommodation and are well supported by tenacious staff’.

3.3 *Child Sexual Exploitation*

Ofsted also commented positively on our approach to Child Sexual Exploitation in the city:

- ‘Considerable progress has been made over the past two years in tackling child sexual exploitation (CSE).....This is providing clear support pathways for children and young people identified as being at risk of, or experiencing sexual exploitation.’

This reflects the level of attention given to this important area by Executive Board and the Council.

3.4 *Restorative Practices and Family Group Conferences*

Within the report, Ofsted also recognise the 'transformational impact on culture and professional practice across both the social work service and the Children's Partnership' as a result of the investment and commitment made by the Council in restorative practices including Family Group Conferences. Ofsted also recognised that the authority secured government innovations funding to expand restorative approaches.

3.5 *Scrutiny*

The effectiveness of Scrutiny was also highlighted in the report: 'Scrutiny activity and oversight of children's services is impressive, with strong prioritisation and a comprehensive understanding of the needs of children, young people and their families. Robust challenge is achieved through a range of pertinent inquiries and a strong corporate parenting ethos that extends beyond looked after children.'

3.6 *Children and Young People summary*

Within the report, Ofsted provide a summary for children and young people. It is our intention to share the summary with children and young people.

3.7 *Areas for improvement*

Ofsted did not identify any priority or immediate actions for the local authority. However, as anticipated, some areas for improvement have been identified by Ofsted.

These areas for improvement are listed in the inspection report on pages four and five. The inspection report is available as Appendix A to this report.

3.8 Next Steps:

3.8.1 This inspection outcome is a very positive endorsement of the approach that Leeds has taken to improving children's services. It comes at a particularly timely point as the service re-organises to further strengthen our localised approach to supporting families through clusters and as we work to transform children's social work through restorative practice, assisted by investment of £4.85 million from the innovation fund. There is growing interest in the model adopted in Leeds – system leadership, restorative practice, outcomes based accountability and the voice and influence of children and young people are all attracting growing national and international attention. A pro-active plan is being developed to use this interest to share best practice and build a growing network of like-minded partners.

3.8.2 Leeds was already developing the new Children and Young People's Plan and the inspection outcomes will feed into that. In June both the inspection action plan and the new Children and Young People's Plan will be presented to Executive Board to ensure a co-ordinated and coherent plan for the city is in place.

- 3.8.3 This inspection outcome gives Leeds a strong platform to move forward, but we are complacent and recognise that there are still significant challenges to address to realise our full ambitions for children and young people in the city. It will be vital to continue to harness the commonwealth of services that support children and young people in Leeds, including schools to continue our improvement journey. The new Children and Young People's Plan will reflect this and will continue to emphasise the centrality of family to the growth strategy for the city.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

- 4.1.1 As reported previously to Executive Board, a city-wide consultation on the new Children and Young People's Plan for Leeds has recently been completed. This has endorsed the continuation of the overarching strategy for children's services in Leeds. The post inspection action plan will be developed in light of the Children and Young People's Plan.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 4.2.1 There are no implications under this heading. Screening form attached.

4.3 Council policies and City Priorities

- 4.3.1 Leeds has made a city-wide commitment to becoming a child friendly city. Our aspiration within this is to provide the best quality services to vulnerable children and young people. In recent years clear progress has been seen in the approach to children's social work services, creating more restorative, family focused and evidence-based practice and culture and this has been recognised through the Ofsted inspection process.

4.4 Resources and value for money

- 4.4.1 There are no implications under this heading.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

- 4.5.1 There are no implications under this heading.

4.6 Risk Management

- 4.6.1 Ofsted requires Leeds to respond within 70 days of the publication of the report to state how the identified areas for improvement will be addressed. Thus Children's Services must respond by 3rd July 2015 and provide a post inspection action plan.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 This report has provided Executive Board with an update on the outcome of the unannounced Ofsted inspection which took place between 20th January 2015 and 11th February 2015.

- 5.2 This report also updates Executive Board on the requirement for the local authority to provide a post inspection action plan by 3rd July 2015.
- 5.3 This report also advises Executive Board that a report setting out the local authority's post inspection action plan will be presented to the June meeting of the Executive Board prior to the action plan being submitted to Secretary of State and Her Majesty's Chief Inspector.

Recommendations

- 6.1 Executive Board is recommended to:
- a. Note the Ofsted report (attached at appendix A) and the two letters of congratulation (attached at appendix B and C respectively);
 - b. Note that the post inspection action plan in response to the areas for improvement identified by Ofsted will be provided alongside the new Children and Young People's Plan, to Executive Board at the June meeting prior to submission to the Secretary of State and Her Majesty's Chief Inspector in advance of the 3rd July 2015 deadline;
 - c. Note that the Officer responsible for implementation is Deputy Director Safeguarding Specialist and Targeted, Children's Services by 3rd July 2015.

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.