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**Report of the**

**Executive Board**

**Date: 17<sup>th</sup> October 2007**

**Subject: Time for Change**

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**Electoral Wards Affected:**

All

Ward Members consulted  
(referred to in report)

**Specific Implications For:**

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Eligible for Call In

Not Eligible for Call In  
(Details contained in the report)

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1. Supporting the most vulnerable children and young people in Leeds and in doing so helping to narrow the gap is a key responsibility for all those working across children's services in the city. We have a particular responsibility to our looked after children through our role as corporate carers and as part of our duty to meet the broader every child matters agenda effectively.
2. Nationally, the Government has found that, despite high ambitions and a shared commitment for change, outcomes for children and young people in care have not sufficiently improved. This is supported by some stark statistics, such as the correlation between adult crime and having been a Looked After Child. There remains a significant gap between the quality of their lives and those of all children. Tackling this requires high prioritisation and sustained action across central and local government, from practitioners in all aspects of children and young people's lives and from their carers, friends and families.
3. The White Paper 'Time for Change' was published in June 2007 following the consultation on the Green Paper 'Care Matters'. In Leeds, our consultation response was co-ordinated through the Multi-agency Looked After Children Partnership (MALAP). 'Time for Change' proposes a comprehensive reform of the care system within the Every Child Matters agenda.

4. The White Paper focuses on these seven key areas:
  - Improving corporate parenting
  - Family and parenting support
  - Care placements
  - A first class education
  - Promoting health and wellbeing
  - Transition to adulthood
  - The role of the practitioner
5. This report provides a brief overview of the main issues raised within the White Paper. It includes the Executive Summary from the White Paper itself as an appendix to give more background information. The report also identifies the current activity, capacity and potential in Leeds to meet the challenges set out in the White Paper by providing a table at appendix B that considers each area in turn and the work being done in Leeds in relation to this.
6. In Leeds we are well prepared for reform of services for our Looked After Children. We already have:
  - A children in care Advisory Panel
  - Two development posts to support kinship care and private fostering
  - Improved training for foster carers
  - A head teacher of the “virtual school” for Looked After Children
  - A significant number of Looked After Children at university
  - A well established Independent Visitors Scheme
7. The aspirations we have for our Looked After Children are recognised in the Leeds Children and Young People’s Plan and it is important to reiterate that everyone is responsible as corporate carers for supporting better outcomes for the children and young people in our care.

### **Recommendations**

8. It is recommended that Members:
  - Note the contents of this report, paying particular attention to the table attached at appendix B and note that future relevant plans and reports will provide further details of our intentions and achievements.

## 1. Purpose Of This Report

1.1 This report advises on the significant reforms proposed for our Looked After Children in the White Paper and indicates the current position in Leeds in terms of the work both being done now and planned for the future that responds to this.

## 2. Background

2.1 'Time for Change' was produced after widespread consultation with children and young people, their carers, and services working with them. It marks the culmination of the government's action to create the best possible framework for improving both the care of and the outcomes for Looked After Children.

2.2 The White Paper focuses on seven areas:

- Improving corporate parenting  
Children in care deserve excellent parenting – nurturing, supportive and ambitious care, which provides stability, promotes resilience and respects their cultural heritage. Because of their unique relationship with the state, this task is complex and requires careful implementation at each level of the system.
- Family and parenting support  
Refocus services to ensure that where it is in children's best interests, they are enabled and supported to live at home.
- Care placements  
We need to ensure that children in care are provided with the one thing which they have told us makes the single biggest difference to their lives: being in the right placement a better choice of placement, and a more positive placement experience.
- A first class education  
A first class education is vital to improving outcomes for children in care. It acts as the foundation for improving outcomes throughout their lives.
- Promoting health and wellbeing  
Securing the health and wider wellbeing of children and young people in care is of fundamental importance. Good health makes an active and enjoyable life possible, as well as underpinning achievement in school and the work place.
- Transition to adulthood  
Many children receive excellent support from carers and leaving care services but too often young people in care move into adult life without being prepared or supported.
- The role of the practitioner  
In practice, for children in care the Corporate Parent is embodied by the professionals they see on a daily basis. Professionals need to be prepared and trained for this work.

2.3 Attached at appendix A is the Executive Summary of the White Paper. Attached at appendix B is a table setting out the main proposals, the current position in Leeds and what needs to be done to effect the changes. Where appendix B refers to specific pages

(e.g. p4) it points towards the page of the Executive Summary that gives more details of the requirement being outlined. A list of abbreviations from the table is attached at appendix C.

### **3. Main Issues**

- 3.1 The table attached at appendix B lists the main recommendations of the White Paper and describes for each the current position in Leeds. This is set out briefly as a full analysis would be very lengthy. The table then shows what action is needed within the next year and beyond, if we are to move towards achievement of each of the recommendations. This provides a starting point analysis on which we can now develop our approach. Each new area of action requires further detailed planning, by named lead officers within stated timescales.
- 3.2 Children's Services in Leeds start this work from a position of some strength. For example, in Children and Young People's Social Care the Service Improvement Plan for 2007/08 is based on five strategic themes which are absolutely supportive of the intentions of the White Paper:
- Keeping children living in the community wherever possible
  - Improving the quality of services provided (assessment, planning, decision-making and reviewing)
  - Working within effective partnerships
  - Achieving true participation of children and families
  - Providing safe, supportive and stable placements
- 3.3 The Service Improvement Plan is underpinned by action plans in respect of 14 priority areas. Eleven of those 14 are specific to our Looked After Children and are promoted in 'Time for Change'. These include action on participation, health checks, placement stability, educational attainment and teenage pregnancy. However, the fact that our service improvement planning appeared to have pre-empted many of the issues in the White Paper cannot be grounds for complacency or the belief that all is in hand, as these are significant (and not short term) challenges.
- 3.4 From even that short list it is immediately apparent that improvement will require concerted action by combinations of partners within Children's Services in the city. Joint working is key to the achievement of good outcomes for Looked After Children, especially (but certainly not only) in respect of health and education.
- 3.5 The nature of our corporate approach to these challenges is already evidenced, especially in:
- This year's review of the Leeds Children and Young People's Plan. The review process explicitly raised the question (for each of the Every Child Matters outcomes): "Are we narrowing the gap between vulnerable groups and communities and their peers?" leading to explicit consideration of the position of Looked After Children.

- The Multi Agency Looked After Partnership (MALAP) and its task groups, which are (and already were) driving through improvements in the very issues raised by the White Paper.

#### **4. Implications For Council Policy And Governance**

- 4.1 In order to make their work increasingly effective, advice is currently being sought about the governance arrangements for the MALAP and the Corporate Carers Group. This is likely to influence the way these matters are reported on in future.
- 4.2 Work to meet some of the challenges set down in the White Paper will inevitably lead to the revision of some policy and procedures.

#### **5. Legal And Resource Implications**

- 5.1 New legislation and new statutory guidance is required to bring about some of the changes. Additionally all the guidance in relation to Looked After Children will be collated and published together later in 2008.
- 5.2 There are some significant funding announcements from the Department for Children, Schools and Families which support several proposals as detailed in 'Care Matters: Time for Change Impact Assessment' which has already been presented to the Corporate Carers Group.
- 5.3 Leeds is already one of only four authorities in the country piloting the Budget Holding Lead Professional role in respect of Looked After Children. This is already enabling social workers to find innovative ways of preventing children and young people becoming Looked After, or speeding the return home (where appropriate) of Looked After Children. Together with other initiatives, this is an example of how the spirit of the White Paper is already having an impact on children in the city.

#### **6. Conclusions**

- 6.1 Leeds City Council already has structures and a strategic direction that supports the achievement of many of the ends set out in this White Paper. Building from the analysis contained in the attached table, we have or will develop plans to meet others. 'Time for Change' is a very positive change agenda for our Looked After Children is to be welcomed by all who have their interests at heart.

#### **7. Recommendation**

- 7.1 It is recommended that Members:
- Note the contents of this report, paying particular attention to the table attached at appendix B and note that future relevant plans and reports will provide further details of our intentions and achievements.