



Report of the Director of Children and Families

Report to Executive Board

Date: 18th March 2020

Subject: Children Looked After



Are specific electoral wards affected? If yes, name(s) of ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Has consultation been carried out?	<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
Will the decision be open 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

1. Main issues

- The latest figures released by the Department for Education have revealed that the number of children in care in the UK is at a ten-year high, having risen by 28% over the last decade. More than 78,000 children and young people are currently being looked after by local authorities, while councils have also seen a 53% rise in the number of young people subject to child protection plans.
- In recent years Leeds has successfully reduced both the number and proportion of children looked after. In Leeds the number of looked after children peaked in 2012 at a figure of 1475 and a rate per ten thousand (RPTT) of children looked after of 95.3. By May 2017 the number of children in care had reduced to 1278 and the RPTT to 78.6. Since then there has been a slow rise in both the number and RPTT proportion of children looked after.
- These headline figures needs to be analysed carefully in order to take account of both national and local trends including: a rising child population, increasing deprivation, a rise in the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children and declining adoption rates which all have an impact on the proportion of children looked after.
- The reduction in the number of children looked after in Leeds has produced cumulative savings for the Council of over £12m and avoided extra costs of an estimated £7m by avoiding the rising numbers seen nationally. This has been vital

for the Council's financial strategy and the strategy for continuing to protect investment in early help for children and families.

- Once these factors are considered the picture for Leeds is much more positive and indeed show some real strengths – for example the significant reduction in the more deprived areas of the city thanks to new children's teams and better cooperation with wider council services, partner agencies and communities.
- This does not mean there is any complacency – the data show that the number of children leaving care has declined in Leeds in recent years and the factors driving increase demand are expected to grow in the years ahead. As such the report sets out the key areas of the next stage of the strategy including: strengthening the role of 'expert by experience' families in reform; developing a more integrated approach to adolescents; investing in successful evidence informed services such as the Family Drug and Alcohol Court; and continuing to define restorative approaches to practice in new areas such as domestic violence.

2. Best Council Plan Implications (click [here](#) for the latest version of the Best Council Plan)

- Safely and appropriately reducing the need for children to be looked after is one of the 'three obsessions' for change at the heart of the Best Council Plan priority for Leeds to be a Child Friendly City.

3. Resource Implications

- There are no direct resource implications from this report.

Recommendations

The Board is recommended to:

- Note the contents of the report.
- Endorse the proposed approach for the next stage of the strategy which will be progressed by the Director of Children and Families over the next 12 months. A further update will then be provided to Executive Board.

1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Board with an update on national and local pressures on children's services that are driving increasing demand for children to be looked after; and the Leeds' strategy for continuing to safely and appropriately reduce the need for children to be looked after through innovative approaches to prevention and early help and restorative ways of working *with* children, families, communities and local partners.

2. Background information

- 2.1 The latest national figures produced by the Department for Education show that the number of children in care is at a ten-year high, having risen by 28% over the last decade. In March 2019, more than 78,000 children and young people were currently being looked after by local authorities. Other data shows a similar rise – for example there has been a 53% rise in the number of young people subject to child protection plans. Part of the rise in children looked after in England has been due to a rise in the child population overall, but has also been due to a rise in the proportion of children that are looked after. In 2010 there were 57 children looked after in England for every 10,000 children and young people aged 0-17 (Rate Per Ten Thousand or RPTT). In 2019 this had risen to 65 per 10,000.

Number of Looked After Children										
Statistical Neighbours	-	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Leeds	-	1450	1475	1375	1357	1256	1239	1252	1268	1288
Statistical Neighbours	-	413	431	427	418	419	417	446	457	488
Yorkshire and The Humber	-	7290	7530	7420	7380	7260	7250	7720	8190	8580
England	-	65510	67070	68070	68810	69470	70410	72610	75370	78150

Children looked after rate, per 10,000 children aged under 18										
Statistical Neighbours	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Leeds	93.00	94.00	95.00	88.00	86.00	78.00	76.00	76.00	76.00	77.00
Statistical Neighbours	68.50	74.80	78.50	77.70	75.80	75.60	74.80	79.90	80.60	88.00
Yorkshire and The Humber	-	65.00	67.00	65.00	65.00	64.00	63.00	67.00	71.00	74.00
England	57.00	58.00	59.00	60.00	60.00	60.00	60.00	62.00	64.00	65.00

- 2.2 As the table above shows, this national rising trend was also seen across Yorkshire and Humber and in those areas classified as having being most similar to Leeds in terms of the local population – what the government calls 'Statistical Neighbour' authorities. Across Yorkshire and Humber the number of looked after children rose by nearly 18% between 2011 and 2019 to 8,190. The proportion of children looked after across the region rose from 65 RPTT to 74 RPTT. In Statistical Neighbours the number of looked after children rose by just over 18% in the same period, and the proportion looked after rose from 74 RPTT to 88 RPTT.
- 2.3 The latest national and local figures show a different longer trend in Leeds. Since 2011 the number of children has been safely reduced from 1,450 to 1,288 in March 2019 (with numbers peaking in March 2012 at 1,475). The proportion of children looked after has also been reduced over the same timescale, starting at 94 RPTT in 2011 and being reduced to 77 RPTT by March 2019 (again with a peak of 95 RPTT – or equivalent to just under 1% of children in March 2012).

- 2.4 The success of Leeds in bucking the national and regional trends has been a result of the whole city approach to improving support for children and families. Local analysis, OfSTED inspection and independent academic research have shown the impact of the Leeds strategy. Within the framework of a Child Friendly City approach a strategy was implemented with cross party and wide community support that focused on whole system change: promoting prevention and early help, e.g. protecting investment in a network of children's centres and the success of the 'Families First' and 'Stronger Families' programmes and developing restorative practice to support new ways of work with families with a focus on maintaining children and young people within their birth families wherever it was safe and appropriate to do so. Local services also led national practice and invested in a wide range of evidence based and innovative approaches including Multi Systemic Therapy, Family Group Conferencing and Restorative Early Support Teams.
- 2.5 The reduction in the number of children looked after in Leeds has produced cumulative savings for the Council of over £12m and avoided extra costs of an estimated £7m by avoiding the rising numbers seen nationally. This has been vital for the Council's financial strategy and the strategy for continuing to protect investment in early help for children and families.
- 2.6 Although the progress in Leeds over the past decade is clear, more recent data shows a changing trend. The number of children looked after in the city was at its lowest in the national data in March 2016 – 1,239, since then there has been a slow increase to 1,288 in March 2019. The trend in the proportion of children looked after in Leeds has also changed. It too continued to fall until 2016 when it reached 76 per ten thousand. It then was steady until 2018 and rose slightly in 2019 to 77 RPTT.

3. Main issues

Population growth

- 3.1 One of the major factors driving the rise in the number of children looked after is a simple one: the child population is rising. Between 2014 and 2018 the child population in England is estimated to have risen by 3.1% nationally, reaching 11.95 million in 2018.
- 3.2 In Leeds, the number of children is estimated to have risen even more quickly, growing by 4.8%, from 160,476 to 168,176 between 2014 and 2018. This is a third higher than the national rate and more than double the rate of increase in statistical neighbour authorities (2.1%).
- 3.3 Other things being equal, with a steady proportion of the child population being looked after and a rising child population one would expect the number of children looked after to rise in line with population growth. However, in England the number of children looked after has risen far faster than the population – in the same time as the population grew by 3.1, the care population rose by 12.1%. In Leeds, the story was different – the population grew by 4.8% but the care population only grew by 2.5%.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

- 3.4 An important factor in the changing population of children looked after in England is the sharp rise in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UAS

Children) in recent years due to rising migration. Children who enter the country without their parents have automatic legal status as children looked after until they become eighteen. Nationally the numbers are stark – between 2015 and 2019 the numbers nearly doubled, rising by 83% from 2,760 to 5,070. In Leeds the numbers were smaller but the rise sharper, more than doubling from 16 in 2015 to 60 in 2019.

- 3.5 The rights, legal support and care that UAS children receive is vital and worthy of all support but it is important to consider this factor when understanding the pressures on the care system. As a compassionate city, welcoming these young people to settle and build a future in Leeds is the right thing to do so it is important to value this work whilst recognising that their needs are driven by national policy and global events and therefore separating them from an analysis of how well the local child welfare system is supporting local children and families.
- 3.6 With additional analysis it is possible to separate out the UAS child population from the care population to give a better picture of outcomes for local children and families where local authorities and their partners can make all the difference. The table below shows the proportion of local children that are looked after in Leeds, Statistical Neighbours (SN) and in England and Yorkshire.

Table 1: Local children looked after comparison by RPTT

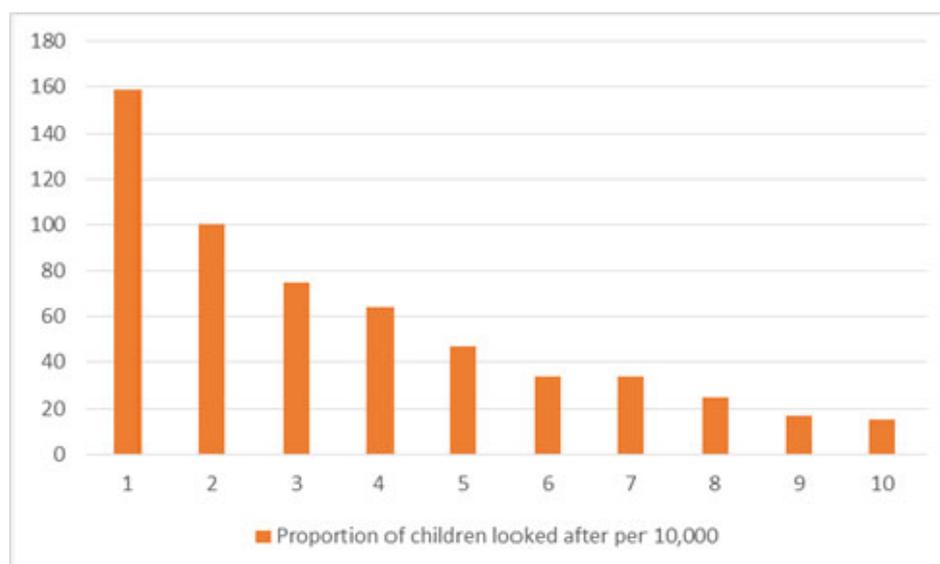
	CLA Local Children 2015	CLA Local Children 2016	CLA Local Children 2017	CLA Local Children 2018	CLA Local Children 2019
Leeds	77.3	73.9	73.2	73.0	73.0
SN	71.0	65.8	73.4	75.0	79.4
ENG_AVD	57.5	56.6	57.6	59.7	61.1
YORKSHIRE AND HUMBER	63.0	62.2	65.1	68.4	71.0

- 3.7 The table shows that once analysis controls for the rising number of lone children seeking asylum are removed there is still a rise in the proportion of children looked after across England, Yorkshire and Humber and similar areas to Leeds. However, for Leeds it shows a more positive picture, better even than the initial figures reported in the opening sections of this report. Once the rise in UAS children in Leeds is excluded, the proportion of children looked after in the city kept being safely reduced until 2018, and rates held stable in 2019.

Deprivation

- 3.8 In common with many other outcomes in health and wellbeing such as infant mortality or life expectancy, research has shown that the proportion of children that are looked after has a ‘social gradient’ where outcomes are closely linked to deprivation and income.
- 3.9 Recent research by Professor Paul Bywater and colleagues in a Nuffield Trust funded project has analysed national care and deprivation data. This has found very significant differences in the likelihood of children being looked after between affluent and deprived neighbourhoods.

Graph 1: Proportion of children looked after by deprivation decile



- 3.10 The table groups neighbourhoods in deciles according to their ranking in the Index of Multiple Deprivation, – so number 1 shows outcomes for the 10% most deprived, where 159 children are looked after out of every 10,000 children aged 0-17. In number 10, the 10% most affluent neighbourhoods, 15 out of every 10,000 are looked after. So, in short, children in the most deprived neighbourhoods are over ten times more likely to be in care than their peers in the most affluent areas.
- 3.11 This pattern is mirrored in Leeds. For example, in 2019 164 RPTT children in the ‘JESS’ cluster in inner South Leeds were looked after compared to 11 RPTT in the ‘EPOSS’ cluster in outer North East Leeds. The seven most deprived clusters in the city account for 65% of all children looked after in Leeds.
- 3.12 These findings are very relevant because data shows that child poverty is rising nationally. In 2017-18 4.1 million children were living in poverty and this is expected to rise to 5.2 million by 2021-22. In addition, data suggest that deprivation rates for families are rising in some areas of the city due to the impact of welfare reform. In this context it is likely that rising deprivation will lead to increases in the number of children looked after.
- 3.13 This is a particular challenge for Leeds because we know that the majority of growth in the child population has been concentrated in the more deprived areas of the city. Two thirds of the rise in the 0-17 population has been in neighbourhoods classified as amongst the 20% most deprived nationally. In these communities the child population has grown by 9%, but the rate is higher still in the most deprived parts of the city. In the neighbourhoods that rank amongst the 3% most deprived in the country the child population has risen by 12% - one third of the overall rise. Some initial local analysis has predicted that based on the Bywaters et al research and other things being equal, the expected impact should be an increase of around 100 extra children becoming looked after.

Children becoming looked after

- 3.14 Despite the predictions of this analysis and the pressures of population growth and deprivation, what we have seen, as a result of our strategy is a reduction in the number of children becoming looked after.

Table 2: Children becoming looked after in Leeds

Financial Year	Leeds Children	UAS Children	Grand Total
16/17	406	31	437
17/18	410	39	449
18/19	380	35	415
19/20 est*	364	49	413

- 3.15 Despite the predictions of the analysis based on a rising population and rising deprivation the data highlights that there has been a reduction in the numbers of children coming into care from the most deprived areas in Leeds. Early evidence from the evaluation of Restorative Early Support teams show that entrants into care has reduced from the highest demand and deprivation clusters chosen for the approach by 26% in 18/19, with 2gether and Inner East being nearer to a 30% reduction. Part year figures for 19/20 indicate this pattern continuing in 2gether and Inner East with further reductions in J.E.S.S. Whilst this data is at an early stage, this is seen as emerging evidence of an effective Early Help strategy, the introduction of new teams and approaches such as the Restorative Early Support Teams and, importantly, stronger joined up working between children's services and colleagues in other key areas such as Citizens and Communities, Jobs and Skills and partners in the NHS, Police and schools. This is supported by wider data such as the fact that, whilst there has been a significant increase in the number of children subject to a child protection plan nationally; in Leeds the number has halved since 2012.

Children ceasing to be looked after

- 3.16 The continued success at reducing the number of children becoming looked after in Leeds needs to be balanced by a recent reduction in the number of children ceasing to be looked after. In 2014/15 nearly 500 children left care but that by 2018/19 this had fallen to 389.
- 3.17 The main reasons for this fall include:
- A reduction of over 50% in the number of adoptions between 2014/15 and 2018/19
 - A 12% fall in Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) in the same timescale
 - An increasing proportion of adolescents entering care
- 3.18 The trend on adoption follows the national trend, where across England the number of adoptions has fallen by a third. Explanations for this trend are changing case law that restricted the use of adoptions and the improved effectiveness of IVF treatment as an alternative to adoption. Leeds' larger decline reflects the fact that the city was

particularly proactive and successful at securing adoption placements prior to the national changes.

- 3.19 We believe our current policy, which requires a child to be placed with carers for two years before they can make an SGO application has impacted on the number of Special Guardianship Orders and we are in the process of reviewing this approach and the support offered to carers.

Continuing the strategy to 'Turn the curve'

- 3.20 As the sections above make clear, once the wider context is considered and the data more closely analysed, the overall picture for Leeds is much more positive than the simple headline figures suggest. However, it is clear that the wider trends of population change, poverty, migration and a challenging policy context will continue to place the city's child welfare system under sustained pressure. As such, the Children and Family Service is working closely with its national and local partners to continue to reform, innovate and improve. The key areas of focus for the years ahead are as follows:

- *New approaches to domestic violence and abuse:* in line with national trends, local data suggest that domestic violence and abuse is a factor in 60% of all cases that proceed to assessment. The service is currently working to develop new restorative approaches to practice and working with children and families impacted by domestic violence and abuse.
- *Strengthening work to support permanence and reunification for children within their family and friends network.* As this report notes, whilst the number of children becoming looked after continues to show some important improvements, the trend on the number of children ceasing to be looked after is more challenging. Whilst there have been some positive initiatives in this area – for example the 'Outstanding' Multi Systemic Therapy – Family Intervention Team (MST-FIT) children's homes which provide therapeutic help to children and families to support reunification; or the creation of new social work posts who support children to 'move on' from residential homes, it is clear there is still scope to improve in this area and work is now being planned including reviewing the financial and policy framework around Special Guardianship Orders and completing work to restructure the Council's children's homes so that they provide more flexible support to children and families to enable quicker, safer and more successful returns home.
- *Parent and family voice, advocacy and peer support:* the service is at the early stages of a major initiative co-produced with parents and families that have experienced social work processes such as children becoming looked after, with the aim of using 'experts by experience' to help design the next stages of reform, developing parent advocates to support future families and extending peer support from the current successful projects such as 'Empowering Parents, Empowering Communities' (EPEC) and Mockingbird .
- *Early Help Hubs:* national funding has been used to expand and develop the successful integrated approach of Families First (the Leeds name for the national 'Troubled Families' programme). This has been centred around three new Early Help Hubs which bring together not just practitioners from Children and Families Services, Police and DWP but also with new adults' services experts in key areas for families: mental health, substance misuse and domestic violence. The Hubs are working to deepen cooperation across agencies and find new ways of joining up work with families – feedback from families and partners is positive already and will continue to be developed.

- *Child and Family Poverty, Jobs and Skills and Regeneration*: the Early Help Hubs and wider work such as the 'Stronger Families Initiative', the 'Priority Neighbourhoods' programme and the city's Child Poverty Strategy all show the potential and importance of finding new ways of joining up work around families and wider work to regenerate communities. As the research shown above in this report makes clear, material deprivation can be a significant factor in worsening and perpetuating families problems, and practical support with issues like debt, worklessness and benefits can be key to giving families the space and opportunity to changing their family life and improving their children's life chances.
- *Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC)*: Leeds led work to pioneer this evidence based restorative approach to family justice in Yorkshire, and has had considerable success in recent years working closely with the Family Court and Barca, the FDAC lead agency. The Children and Families service has just successfully led a bid to expand the service to more families and meet wider needs such as domestic violence. Further funding support has also been agreed by the CCG.
- *Futures*: national and local research has shown that babies and infants form a significant proportion of children becoming looked after. National research showed that around 29% of these infants were children of parents who had had previous children removed. Further analysis showed that Leeds had an even higher rate – around 35% of babies entering care were from parents who had other children who had become looked after. This research informed the creation of the Leeds Futures team, which has subsequently won a national award for their work with these vulnerable parents. This is an area where there are benefits not just to children's services but to other local partners such as NHS and Police so work is underway to explore ways to expand this successful project.

4. Corporate considerations

4.1 Consultation and engagement

- a. As a data led report there has been no direct consultation on the content of the report but it is important to note that the new initiative working with families to continue to strengthen the voice of children, parents and families within the child welfare system should be seen as central to the next stage of reform in Leeds.

4.2 Equality and diversity / cohesion and integration

- a. There are no direct equality, diversity and integration issues raised by this report, but it is important to note that further analysis and work with children and families is ongoing to understand how to best respond to the different rates of becoming looked after that are seen between different communities both nationally and locally.

4.3 Council policies and the Best Council Plan

- 4.3.1 Leeds' strategy for safely and appropriately reducing the need for children to be looked after contributes to the city's strategic planning to ensure that the most vulnerable children of Leeds are safe from harm. Children and young people are a

key priority for the city, with one of the Best Council Plan priorities being to make Leeds the best city for children and young people to grow up in. This report relates to the Children and Young People's plan, as one of the 'three obsessions' is to safely and appropriately reduce the need for children to be looked after. It is also aligned to the Child Friendly Initiative to support children and young people to have the best start in life, are safe, and feel safe in their communities.

Climate Emergency

- a. The Leeds approach to safeguarding ensures that wherever safe and appropriate, children are cared for by their own family and community network. This is achieved by providing help and support to families as early as possible through local cluster arrangements and where children do need to become looked after every effort is made to find placements that keep children close to their family and community.
- b. A localised approach reduces impact on the environment by reducing the need to travel larger distances across the city compared to when services were more centralised. This local approach combined with our commitment to effective early help has also helped reduce the need for children to become looked after. In turn this has reduced the number of placements made outside of Leeds by almost half since 2012. This reduction means significantly reduced impact on the environment through reduced social work visits, independent review meetings and arrangements for family time for looked after children's relatives.

4.4 Resources, procurement and value for money

- a. The overall reduction in the number of children looked after, from 1,475 down to 1,288 in March 2019, has delivered cumulative savings of £12m to date. Since 2010 there has been a reduction in the use of external residential (ER), 96 down to 68, and independent foster placements (IFA), 301 down to 199.
- b. Over this time period the national CLA trend of Rate Per 10,000 (RPTT) increased by 14% from 57 to 65 PTT. If Leeds had followed this trend CLA numbers would have increased from 1,475 to 1,652, equating to an annual saving of over £7m.
- c. Budgeted In-House Fostering placement numbers have remained steady at around 500, with the budget for 2020-21 supporting 510 placements. Kinship Care placement numbers have increased significantly over this period to 350 which is both a positive outcome for the child and from a financial perspective where the average weekly cost of a kinship care placement is £223 compared to the average cost of a paid CLA placement being £700. More significantly for ER the average weekly cost is £4,000 and IFA £805.
- d. The strategy to support children living within their own family and community network also means that their legal status and responsibility can be moved to their relatives and carers. This provides much needed stability and a sense of belonging for individual children but it also means that those children no longer require social worker visits or independent reviews putting much needed capacity towards children who are less settled.
- e. The Council's financial strategy since 2016-17 has invested significant funding into CLA demand led budgets reflecting increasing demand, price and complexity pressures that are seen nationally. Between 2016-17 and 2020-21 funding for CLA demand led budgets have been increased by £9m from £35m to £44m. This is set to continue with an additional £1.5m per year over the next 5 years.

- f. In summary the CLA Demand led budget for 2020-21 is £44m, an increase of £2m from 2019-20 reflecting rising demand, price and complexity led pressures. This supports an average of 1,346 placements. The budget reflects increase demand in Kinship Care Placements (+70) and Semi-Independent Living <16 (+14). ER Placements budget supports an average of 58 (nil change) and IFA an average of 183 (+3).

4.5 Legal implications, access to information, and call-in

- a. This report has no direct legal implications and is eligible for call in.

4.6 Risk management

- a. Ensuring that the Child Friendly Leeds strategy for child welfare continues to safely and appropriately reduce the need for children to be looked after is both an obsession for the city and an important part of managing the key corporate risks relating to safeguarding and inspections. Continued progress in this area is vital to ensure better outcomes for children and families, manageable pressures for front line staff and financial sustainability for the Council.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 Whilst the headline figures showing a rise in the number of children looked after may appear to be a cause for concern this report shows that the picture is more complex. Once population growth, asylum trends, rising deprivation and national legal changes are taken into account the data suggest Leeds is actually continuing to make some promising progress, particularly in reducing the need for children to be looked after in some of the more deprived communities in Leeds.
- 5.2 This more nuanced analysis does not mean that there is any complacency and it is clear that the next few years will require a similar level of reform, innovation and effort to make the next step in the strategy to make Leeds a Child Friendly City where even more families can stay together safely whatever the challenges posed by the national context of a growing population, rising deprivation and austerity.
- 5.3 Whilst the city's current strategy has had an impact on the numbers of children and young people becoming looked after it is time for change to continue to adapt and improve and to respond to the key risks in this area such as reduced numbers of children leaving care, a growing number of adolescents in care, reduced funding from government and intensifying deprivation in some parts of the city.
- 5.4 In response the Children and Families Directorate is working with local partners, and, importantly, local families with experience of children's services, to refresh our strategy. The report sets out a range of key areas where reform is planned including developing a more integrated and targeted approach to supporting adolescents and their families, with a particular focus on adolescents on the edge of care and those who are vulnerable to a range of exploitation; building on the successful innovative and evidence informed services like RES Teams, Futures and the Family Drug and Alcohol Court.
- 5.5 Leeds' progress over the past decade shows what is possible with a whole council, and indeed a whole city approach to investing in better help for children and families. The values and approach has proved effective – work restoratively, listen to children and families, invest in prevention and early help and ensure children are at the heart of the growth strategy for the city region. National and local changes

offer new challenges so the strategy needs to adapt and all local partners need to find new ways of working together to achieve the ambitions for Leeds to be a child friendly city.

6. Recommendations

6.1 The Board is recommended to:

- Note the contents of the report
- Endorse the proposed approach for the next stage of the strategy which will be progressed by the Director of Children and Families over the next 12 months. A further update will then be provided to Executive Board.

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.