

Funding for Children's Services Improvement Partnership with Stoke

Date: 28/6/21

Report of: SFPC Lead

Report to: Programme Director, Strengthening Families Protecting Children

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

What is this report about?

Including how it contributes to the city's and council's ambitions

- This report seeks formal approval to accept Department for Education (DfE) funding that will support Leeds work with Stoke to help them improve their children's services
- A costed plan has been agreed with DfE, Stoke and Leeds. Formal approval for funding this plan has now been given by the DfE. Leeds now needs to accept this and inform DfE for work to commence.
- As Leeds is an 'outstanding' children's services Council, it works with government and other councils to help improve the sector as a whole. This offers significant opportunities for Leeds to promote the Leeds approach to social care reform at a national level, to generate income and to provide opportunities for learning and career development for Leeds staff.

Recommendations

- a) The Programme Director (SFPC) is recommended to formally accept the DfE funding.

Why is the proposal being put forward?

- 1 Stoke's children's services were judged by OfSTED to be 'inadequate' in their last inspection. As such DfE provide support through consultants or through help from another Council. Leeds was chosen as a possible improvement partner by Stoke's leaders and the DfE Commissioner appointed to oversee reform. After negotiation between DfE and elected members and senior officers in both councils a plan was agreed and joint work began in March 2020. The first year of joint work has gone well and been highly valued by DfE and Stoke colleagues. As such a further programme of joint work has been agreed. This report seeks formal approval of the funding to support this activity.

What impact will this proposal have?

Wards Affected:

Have ward members been consulted? Yes No

- 2 This proposal will secure £500k funding for the financial year 20/21. The work will be led by the Leeds Relational Practice Centre, set up by the Executive Board in November 2019 to lead the authority's sector led improvement work. The funding will be used for training and practice development activities, led by the LRPC team with input from the Children and Families' Directorate where this adds value and does not impact on local working.

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

- 3 Consultation has taken place as set out above to set up the partnership and to develop the plan for this financial year.

What are the resource implications?

- 4 Income will be up to a maximum of £505,200 in the forthcoming year. The final claim may be less than this due to delays in formal approval of the plan and the exigencies of coordinating work in an improving service that is subject to significant change.

What are the legal implications?

- 5 No direct legal implications.

What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

- 6 The key risks are financial and reputational. Financial risks will be managed by improved monitoring of activity and programme management that has been agreed for this year, with additional project support and weekly meetings with the improvement lead in Stoke. The reputational risks of working with an improving authority in a challenging context of covid and financial pressures are significant. To mitigate these risks there are regular reviews of progress and impact with DfE and Stoke colleagues and the LRPC is strengthening its own ongoing evaluation systems.

Does this proposal support the council's 3 Key Pillars?

Inclusive Growth Health and Wellbeing Climate Emergency

- 7 This proposal supports the aim of Health and Wellbeing by providing financial and developmental opportunities to children's services and promoting the Leeds approach to social care reform.

Options, timescales and measuring success

a) What other options were considered?

- 8 Halting the partnership was considered but in light of the progress made over the last year, and the productive partnerships between the two councils, this option was not chosen.

b) How will success be measured?

- 9 Success will be measured against the activity and impact measures in the agreed joint plan, and through review by DfE and independently by OfSTED.

c) What is the timetable for implementation?

- 10 Once approval is formalised the next stage of the joint programme will be initiated immediately. Planning and discussions have already begun between leaders in Stoke and Leeds.

Appendices

- 11 n/a

Background papers

- 12 n/a