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Report of the Director of Children's Services

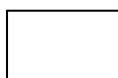
Children's Services Scrutiny Board

Date: 16th October 2008

Subject: The Leadership Challenge

Electoral Wards Affected:

All



Ward Members consulted
(referred to in report)

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity



Community Cohesion



Narrowing the Gap



1.0 Purpose of this Report

- 1.1 This report seeks to explain why we initiated the Leadership Challenge project, how we did it, what we did, what the outcomes were, what we learnt from doing it, and what we are going to do with what we have learnt. Throughout the report are a number of short inserts taken directly from comments made by those involved with the project, as a way of sharing their learning with members of the Children's Services Scrutiny Board.

2.0 Background

Why did we do it?

- 2.1 The Leadership Challenge was a collaborative action learning project between Leeds City Council, Children Leeds, and the Improvement and Development Agency for local government (IDeA). It enabled the seaming together of three specific strands of interrelated work:
- The role of elected members as community leaders and champions for equality and diversity
 - The evolving role of leaders and leadership within and around local communities
 - The remodeling of children's services collaborative working arrangements in localities to improve outcomes for children and young people

2.2 What would success for the project look like?

- Elected members would be actively involved and engaged locally and provide leadership to help unblock barriers to progress in improving outcomes.
- Connectivity between our local children's services leadership and our citywide children's trust arrangements would be better understood and improved.
- The skills and behaviors that leaders need in an integrated children's services world and the roles that we need locally to drive integration would be better understood
- The way we work with families and develop our collaborative problem solving skills would be improved
- Our frontline support staff would be actively involved in decision making processes and be supported to work well together on problem solving activities.
- Learning would be shared between those involved on the project, across the wedge, the city and nationally.

2.3 The Leadership Challenge centred on the NETWORKS extended services cluster around Carr Manor High School. The cluster was an advanced cluster with relationships between the high school, several primary schools, the Children's Centres and local voluntary youth provision already developing at a pace. It had been seeking to determine its future and as a consequence was enthusiastic about participating in the Challenge. Additionally, this cluster was of interest as it drew its children and young people from a number of ward boundaries - involving different political parties – and from across wedge and therefore service boundaries.

"This project has helped us, as leaders, to look towards building sustainable relationships with other services, which enable us to do our own jobs better"a local leader

3.0 How did we do it?

3.1 To initiate the project we brought together a diagonal slice of the key leadership components in three distinct strands:

- Equalities
- Local Leadership, and
- Strategic Commissioning

3.2 The Equalities Group was a delivery group of frontline practitioners many of whom had no history of working together. The Local Leadership Group were local children's service leaders, e.g. Head Teachers, Team Manager Children and Young People's Social Care, Children Centre Manager, or community leaders including elected members. The strategic commissioning group consisted of commissioners of a range of citywide children's services.

3.3 A project steering group was established consisting of the Deputy Director of Children's Services, the Locality Enabler for the North East, a senior manager from the Equalities Team, a senior manager from the policy, performance, and

improvement team, a regional associate from the IDeA, and IDeA consultant, and a member from the NETWORKS cluster management Group. The work was supported by two project officers. The role of the steering group was to manage the interrelationships of the three separate strands of work, to facilitate and drive the project, to negotiate the involvement of specific individuals as appropriate, to ensure shared learning opportunities within and across the strands was maximized, and to leverage key learning both citywide and nationally. The project was to run initially for 6 months – later extended to 9 months - from September 2007-July 2008.

"Within this cluster, the challenge has helped us to have an 'open door' policy between our services, though we recognise that there are other services who we need to help join this journey".....a local leader

4.0 What did we do?

- 4.1 It was quickly determined that the project required a problem solving activity to help initiate the work of the individual groups, to ensure a consistent connecting theme across the groups, and to elicit leadership behaviors to enable better understanding of what it took to unblock barriers to progress locally. It was agreed that the number of young people Not in Employment Education and Training within the city was a cause of concern. It had been identified that there were a number of common factors that led to a young person becoming NEET, however, many of these factors were being addressed with the young person in isolation and in the absence of a family approach. In discussion with the Locality Enabler, Primary Head Teachers and colleagues from Early Years had stated that the behaviors and conditions that led to young people becoming NEET at 16,17, and/or 19 years of age were clearly evident at an early age and that these behaviors were prevalent in families. Consequently, the problem-solving activity chosen to help initiate activities and elicit leadership behaviors through the course of the project was to develop a family based response to NEET.

"The learning from this project has also enabled us to think creatively about how a locally based commissioning pilot could work!".....a strategic commissioner

- 4.2 Families were identified by Head Teachers and Children Centre Managers from within the extended service cluster. Criteria for selection ranged from school attendance, difficulties in engaging pupils/parents, carers, and siblings, troubling or challenging behaviors, and difficult or challenging family backgrounds. It was determined that the identified families were low income families living in deprived neighborhoods and that domestic violence was prevalent in some.
- 4.3 It became clear through the course of the Leadership Challenge that the common assessment framework (CAF) was fundamental to developing and landing an integrated response from children's services. Ideally, the CAF should help to identify the gaps in services that a family or an individual may need to improve their outcomes and serve as an evidence base for what is needed to do so, so that barriers to progress may be unblocked and resolved at the level closest to the family.

"Having the opportunity to meet with each other and not to have to work in isolation has been really helpful. At the meetings we have been able to discuss our families, sharing knowledge and information. What has been really useful is that at some of our discussions colleagues know of some agency or somewhere to contact with issues that have arisen from their family on a CAF".....a frontline practitioner

- 4.4 For many frontline practitioners the CAF was new and time was taken to provide training, development and follow-up support for the CAF process. Practitioners supported by their line managers found the CAF process easier to adopt than those practitioners that were less well supported. Nevertheless, through the course of the Challenge the interrelationships between the equalities group and the local leadership group developed to such an extent that support to those practitioners less well supported was secured.

"The leaders i.e. our line managers have been very supportive of the process. We have been encouraged to attend the meetings and to be fully active in the project. To be part of the project has been an empowering process for the group members".....a frontline practitioner

- 4.5 It also emerged through the period of the Challenge that the team around the practitioner within a service must be supportive of the CAF process for the practitioner to feel fully supported in implementing the changes that joint working arrangements demand. The project served to further highlight the expertise of those working directly with families and the need to further engage and harness this expertise in a way that is productive and that seeks to unblock barriers through local solutions.

"....the group members who are involved in CAFs and multi agency group meetings, (reported) that families are finding that the behaviour their child was displaying has improved, and that as the parent they can play a part in improving their child's behaviour".....a frontline practitioner

- 4.6 The local leadership group explored professional boundaries and service divisions that inhibited their ability to work together. In addition to wrestling with challenges for support and resources from the equalities group and improving their knowledge/understanding of strategic commissioning and their role in it, they explored leadership and the source of power, influence, and resources. Through the nine months of the project these local leaders became a more cohesive and cogent group. Attendance was high and increased over time as more local leaders joined the project, often actively seeking membership to the group. Apart from bringing knowledge or resources to the table, these Leaders brought unique relationship networks into play to help solve problems collaboratively. It became apparent that loyalty to the families increased and the notion of joint accountability to children, young people, and families became increasingly important. Having the right person, at the right place, at the right time was important to ensuring needs were being met. Involvement in this project offered opportunities, information, and insights that were unavailable to others. Often this leadership came from those not in positions of relative power or authority. Leadership meant coordinating the wealth of ideas to help people make the right choices in connection with others locally. This learning informed the

development of a specific role – the Integrated Services Leader – to add capacity and trial how this would work across neighboring clusters

“This project has helped us, as leaders, to look towards building sustainable relationships with other services, which enable us to do our own jobs better”a local leader

- 4.7 Attendance at the strategic commissioning group diminished over time but the group retained a small core membership for the lifetime of the project that continued to provide information, advice, and guidance to the local leadership on aspects of strategic commissioning. Both the equalities group and the local leadership group felt remote from strategic commissioning and wished to better understand the concept, their role in it, and how they could influence it through evidence based local intelligence or locally commissioned services. It felt to local leadership that strategic commissioners were often remote from the problems that needed to be resolved and were not using their local intelligence to inform and shape their commissioning work. In response, commissioners shared a simple 4-stage model of commissioning and worked with the other two groups to test the model against the NEET problem described earlier. Analysis of the local NEET picture provided by commissioners helped work on a joint response to NEET for the cluster, using outcome based accountability methods. This joint response led to discussions about how the local leadership group better aligned resources and service delivery to best fit the levels of local need. The collaboration resulted in the NetWORKS cluster contributing to the work on the commissioning specification for Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) services in the city.

“Through involvement with this project the Strategic Commissioning Group have recognised the need to engage with localities over the development of commissioning in Leeds”.....a strategic commissioner

5.0 What were the outcomes of the project?

5.1 In summary, the Leadership Challenge has:

- Developed action learning on the leadership behaviors needed locally through better integrated service delivery to improve outcomes for children, young people, and their families
- Promoted greater understanding of the changing roles of practitioners, local leaders, and strategic commissioners focusing on outcomes
- Explored what integration means at different levels of need and across service delivery through the CAF, directly supporting Narrowing the Gap and the governments' Place Shaping Agenda
- Introduced family based preventative approaches to children and young people at risk of becoming NEET
- Actively involved and engaged an increasingly broad range of partners and stakeholders including the voluntary, community, faith sector, elected members, the police and schools
- Provided a sense of local ownership through the development of local solutions

- Recognised the value of ‘diagonal’ slice working in improving outcomes for children, young people, and families

“As leaders we have a critical role in enabling a culture change amongst our staff, through implementing our learning from this project”a local leader

6.0 What have we learnt by doing it?

6.1 We have learnt:

- The value of the active involvement and engagement of elected members locally in challenging and supporting children’s services colleagues to help unblock barriers to progress in improving outcomes.
- How to better connect our local children’s services leadership and our citywide children’s trust arrangements and improved our understanding of the roles that may help foster this connectivity locally.
- The skills and behaviors that leaders need in an integrated children’s services world and the roles that we need locally to drive integration would be better understood
- How we can improve the way we work with families and develop our collaborative problem solving skills
- How our frontline support staff should be actively involved in decision making processes, supported in their work, and the methods we can use to help us solve problems and overcome barriers to progress.
- What we need to develop to help the learning from the Leadership Challenge to be shared between those involved on the project, across the wedge, the city and nationally.

“As a leadership group, our specific response to enabling leadership capacity to support integrated working, is through the appointment of an ‘Integrated Services Leader’ who will be enabled, with our full permissions to lead integration in our cluster”a local leader

7.0 What are we doing with what we have learnt?

7.1 We are:

- Informing the work of member development in the local authority in relation to leadership of children’s services locally.
- Informing the work of children’s services leadership development in the city.
- Developing products to use nationally so that others may aspire to their own leadership challenge and provide pointers on how to lead together that explore local joint accountability and the leadership skills and behaviors that underpin it.
- Informing the work on revising our strategic commissioning framework to bring in the benefits of local intelligence to inform city wide and local commissioning and bring meaning and connectivity to the integrated strategic commissioning strategy locally. In doing so, we have sought to

build in learning from the recent work of the Joint Preventative Commissioning Panel on wedge based innovation funding.

- Informing the work on our locality children's trust arrangements to deliver step-changes in the way children's services leaders collaborate together locally. Indeed, children services in the North East wedge have assembled a Children's Service Leadership Team based on their experience of connected leadership and are developing their working arrangements further to provide effective support for local solutions.
- Trialing a new role – the integrated services leader – in the cluster and across other extended service clusters to better integrate in an environment where there are movements of children and young people to attend learning or support.
- Providing CAF and lead professional training across the North East Wedge with increasing engagement.
- Exploring with Health, PCT, Police, the VCFS, and Housing how we better engage and have the right leadership in our leadership teams locally.

<i>"Connected leadership is something which will enable us to deliver better and more integrated children's services".....a local leader</i>
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8.0 Conclusions

8.1 Earlier in this report we articulated our success criteria as being:

- Elected members would be actively involved and engaged locally and provide leadership to help unblock barriers to progress in improving outcomes.
- Connectivity between our local children's services leadership and our citywide children's trust arrangements would be better understood and improved.
- The skills and behaviors that leaders need in an integrated children's services world and the roles that we need locally to drive integration would be better understood
- The way we work with families and develop our collaborative problem solving skills would be improved
- Our frontline support staff would be actively involved in decision making processes and work well together on problem solving activities.
- Learning would be shared between those involved on the project, across the wedge, the city and nationally.

8.2 We have made strong progress across all 6 criteria in completing the Leadership Challenge project. We have taken stock of our learning and are beginning to apply it in a range of further developments – fulfilling our original intention of action learning.

8.3 Creating strong, prosperous, and cohesive communities - in which the Council's role in providing community leadership and nurturing it in others is crucial - is both a corporate priority and an integral part of the Vision for Leeds. The Leadership Challenge has responded directly to the key requirements of the next

CPA Corporate Assessment and the 'Strong and Prosperous Communities' white paper in relation to leadership development and partnership working.

- 8.4 The Leeds Strategic Plan articulates a single shared set of outcomes and priorities for the city in agreement with partners. The Leadership Challenge has enabled a collaborative problem solving focus on a family approach to NEET that directly contributes to the achievement of these priorities and affords a new way to approach our individual and joint accountabilities in relation to the Strategic Plan and its local derivations.
- 8.5 The Leadership Challenge has directly influenced the shape of the locality dimension of our children's trust arrangements in the city. Children's services are developing leadership teams of officers from Children's Services and partnerships led by elected members to provide connected leadership of our collaborative work. It has also influenced our work on the revised commissioning framework and introduced important opportunities to commission services and develop our thinking on the roles that can help the integration of Children's services locally.
- 8.6 Finally, the Leadership Challenge has been both a local and a national collaboration. The opportunity for Leeds to contribute to national work on developing leadership in an integrated children's services world is significant and we will ensure that the opportunity is not lost.

9.0 Recommendations

It is recommended that the Board:

- Note the report
- Request a further report on the work to develop elected member roles around children's services aspects, the work to develop local children's trust arrangements and associated commissioning developments, and the products developed from the leadership challenge and their dissemination.

10.0 Background Papers

Report to Children's Services Scrutiny Board : 14.02.08 – Children's Services and the Children and Young People's Plan (3rd Update)