



Report of the Director of Children's Service

Scrutiny Board (Children's Services)

Date: 11th January 2009

Subject: Safeguarding Children In Leeds: An Overview of our Leeds Safeguarding Children Board and the wider current context

Electoral Wards Affected: All

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

1.0 Background

1.1 'Safeguarding' describes the multi-agency responsibility of all those who work with children and young people to ensure that they are safe, protected and well cared for, giving them the best chance to develop and grow up healthy, and well prepared for adulthood.

1.2 Safeguarding children and young people is a shared responsibility across all those working in children's services in Leeds. Putting safeguarding at the heart of children's services work underpins much of the policy and legislation that the government introduced through and since the 2004 Children Act. In Leeds this shared responsibility is clearly reflected in the Children and Young People's Plan which states that:

'Fundamental to achieving our aims is the need for building a culture of safeguarding in everything we do – to ensure we all work to make children and young people safe and to promote their wellbeing. Safeguarding is an essential part of everyone's responsibility across the partnership'.

1.3 The *Children Act* 2004 heralded a broader approach to safeguarding children and young people. It widened the previous focus on the 'child protection' of children and young people suffering, or at risk of suffering, significant harm to include preventative and universal services and community safety. Significantly, every agency delivering services to children and young people (or coming into contact with them in the course of their work) were made responsible for contributing to the 'safeguarding and promotion of their

welfare.’ Children and Young People’s Social Care was no longer to be viewed as the sole agency with responsibility for their safety.

- 1.4 The *Act* required each local authority to establish a Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB), replacing Area Child Protection Committees. Detailed guidance was provided in Chapter 3 of *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2006*.
- 1.5 The LSCB is the key statutory mechanism for agreeing how the relevant organisations in each local area will co-operate to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people and for ensuring the effectiveness of that work. The LSCB therefore helps to co-ordinate and performance manage safeguarding functions across multiple agencies.
- 1.6 The Leeds Safeguarding Children Board is part of the wider children’s trust arrangements in Leeds. It works alongside the Children Leeds Partnership and Integrated Strategic Commissioning Board to help ensure that safeguarding considerations inform planning, development and commissioning of services. However, the Board also maintains a degree of independence (reflected in the appointment of an Independent Chair not connected with the local authority) to help it undertake its monitoring role objectively.
- 1.5 As it is the responsibility of the LSCB to take the overview of safeguarding work across partner agencies in Leeds, this report provides more detail about the Board’s work, the current national context and the position in Leeds in relation this. The report is complemented by two appendix, the first is the Board’s Annual Review completed in July 2008, it gives a sense of the range of the work the Board is involved in, how this links to safeguarding activities and awareness within services, and some of the areas of work the Board is currently developing. The second document is the Board’s business plan, which again demonstrates the range of safeguarding work taking place in Leeds and how this is managed by the Board over the year. These documents and further information about safeguarding Leeds are available on the Leeds LSCB website: <http://www.leedslscb.org.uk/>.
- 1.6 In Leeds it is recognised that the effective safeguarding of children and young people comes both from the practices people undertake and also the culture that underpins this practice. As such the Safeguarding Board’s work, and wider safeguarding considerations aim to address not only the practical side of people’s work, but also the support and guidance they receive to do this more effectively.

2.0 The Development of the Leeds Safeguarding Children Board

- 2.1 Leeds made the transition to LSCB in April 2006, appointing a board manager in April 2007. A 3 year business plan (2007 – 10) was agreed by the Board in July 2007, focusing on the objectives and functions detailed in guidance. The plan was refreshed in July 2008 to take account of increasing expectations and responsibilities and continues to be updated on a quarterly basis. The

Annual Review 2007/08 (attached at appendix 1) reported on progress made and identifies areas for further attention. Key areas of progress included updating safeguarding procedures across the region (working with regional partners) and initiating an audit process of partner agency compliance with Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 ('Duty to Safeguard'). Areas the Review identified for further development include the monitoring of incidents of domestic violence and continuing to adapt serious case review processes in light of changing Ofsted expectations (discussed further below).

- 2.2 Leeds appointed an Independent Chair of the LSCB in July 2007. Working in liaison with the Director of Children's Services and the Executive Lead Member, she has brought an external objectivity to the work of the Board and a clarity about its role in holding partner agencies to account for their safeguarding activity.
- 2.3 The refreshed LSCB Business Plan 2008/09 has taken account of the recommendations made in the third Chief Inspectors' report on safeguarding and progress is being made against objectives outlined therein.
- 2.4 An audit of partner agency compliance with s(11) of the Children Act 2004 ('duty to safeguard') has been initiated, indicating good progress overall and identifying areas for improvement. An audit of Third Sector agencies is ongoing.
- 2.5 By the end of 2007/08 the LSCB had recognised the increasing importance being attached to the undertaking of and learning the lessons from Serious Case Reviews and staffing resources within the LSCB support team have been reconfigured to support the increased workload involved.
- 2.6 A multi agency standing Serious Case Review Panel has been established, meeting on a monthly basis, to consider serious child care incidents in Leeds and to make recommendations about undertaking reviews to the Independent Chair.
- 2.7 Since 2007 five Serious Case Reviews have been initiated in Leeds, two being accepted by the Board in July and one in November 2008. To date Ofsted have supplied details of their evaluation on one of these, judged to be 'adequate. ' Two Serious Case Reviews are in the final stages of completion and will be presented to the Board at its meeting in January 2009
- 2.8 The importance of external objectivity in undertaking reviews has been acknowledged in procedures developed by the Board. Four of the Overview Reports of these reviews have been commissioned from consultants external to Leeds. Multi agency implementation of action plans resulting from serious case reviews are monitored by the LSCB Performance Management sub group.

3.0 Recent National Developments

- 3.1 In July 2008 'Safeguarding Children: the third Chief Inspectors' report on *Arrangements to Safeguard Children*' was published, with a response from the Department for Children, Schools and Families, '*Safeguarding the young and vulnerable*' in November.
- 3.2 The recommendations seek to further embed the reforms initiated by the *Children Act 2004* with an emphasis on ensuring consistent implementation by all partner agencies. Particular attention is given to the safeguarding needs of children and young people who are particularly vulnerable e.g. 'looked after', in the Secure Estate and those living in the context of parental mental health problems, substance mis-use and domestic violence.
- 3.3 LSCBs are charged with improving the consistency with which decisions to undertake Serious Case Reviews are taken and the implementation of lessons learnt from the process.
- 3.4 In the autumn of 2008 the DCSF announced plans to undertake a national review of the effectiveness of LSCBs and of the impact of Serious Case Reviews (where a child has died or suffered a serious injury and abuse or neglect is viewed as having been a factor in the death) on improving safeguarding services for children and young people. These have subsequently been included in Lord Laming's independent review of progress being made across the country in implementing effective arrangements for safeguarding.
- 3.5 Events in Haringey in November 2008, following the criminal trial with respect to the death of 'Baby P', have shone a national spotlight on safeguarding services, inspection arrangements undertaken by Ofsted, the independence of LSCBs and the outcomes of Serious Case Reviews.
- 3.6 A decision was taken that Ofsted, the Healthcare Commission and the Chief Inspector of Constabulary should carry out an urgent inspection of safeguarding in Haringey. The findings were critical of several elements of safeguarding practice. Like many authorities, Leeds is checking its own practice in light of the findings and the wider context of the Baby P case.

4.0 The Current Position of the Safeguarding Board In Leeds

- 4.1 Leeds has contributed to the Laming Review of safeguarding through the submission of the Association of Directors of Children's Services, outlining areas of good practice and identifying barriers to the implementation of improvements.
- 4.2 Key partner agencies in Leeds are undertaking reviews of their safeguarding services in the light of concerns raised about Haringey by Ofsted. Children and Young People's Social Care are auditing the cases of children and young

people subject to a Child Protection Plan, to assess compliance with procedures and identify areas for improvement.

- 4.3 The LSCB, through its standing sub groups, is considering the implications of issues arising from Haringey and undertaking a 'stocktake' of its compliance with its statutory responsibilities. A full review is an agenda item at the LSCB meeting in January 2009.

5.0 Conclusions

- 5.1 Safeguarding is a priority for all Children's Services in Leeds and a responsibility of all those working with children and young people across the city. Recent national developments have highlighted the importance of this and raised the profile of safeguarding work.
- 5.2 The Leeds Safeguarding Children Board has a key role in taking an overview of safeguarding work across the city. This report (and its appendix) demonstrates the variety of responsibilities this incorporates. The Board has made good overall progress and impact since its introduction in Leeds. In light of recent national developments it is therefore well placed to carry out the learning, monitoring and advisory role that will be essential to ensure lessons from these developments contribute to stronger safeguarding practice in the future.

Background papers

None