

Independent Review of Children's Social Care – update on implementation

Date: 27th March 2024

Report of: Director of Children & Families

Report to: Children and Families Scrutiny Board

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

Brief summary

In September 2023, a report was considered by the Board which outlined government plans for implementing the recommendations of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, led by Josh MacAllister, the Stable Homes Built on Love government response to that review, and where Leeds's policies and practices were already in alignment with the findings and recommendations of the review.

Since September 2023, the government has published a number of key strategic documents, including updated statutory guidance, in support of the approaches set out in the Independent Review. This report outlines the key content of each of these documents and our current understanding of the actual and potential implications for Leeds.

Recommendations

- a) The Board to note the content of the update report, and the changes to statutory guidance which it outlines.
- b) The Board to receive a further update report in autumn 2024, in line with further anticipated developments outlined in this report.

What is this report about?

- 1 This report is an update to a report considered by the Board in September 2023, which outlined the key points of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care¹, led by Josh MacAlister, and how the findings and recommendations for the review related to the vision, practice, strengths and challenges of social work and early help with children and families in Leeds.
- 2 Since the September 2023 meeting of the Board, there have been a number of national developments in relation to the implementation of the findings and recommendations of the Independent Review, and this report seeks to provide an overview of these developments and provide the Board with as much information as is currently available about the implications for children and families social work and early help in Leeds.
- 3 The Independent Review of Children's Social Care (hereafter referred to as 'the Review') was published in May 2022, and the government's response to the review and their proposals for implementation and consultation were published in February 2023 in a document entitled 'Stable Homes, Built on Love'² (hereafter referred to as Stable Homes).
- 4 One of the key recommendations of the Review was to make care experience a protected characteristic recognising the inequality and discrimination faced by care leavers. This recommendation was not adopted in Stable Homes however Leeds City Council, along with many other councils across England, have recognised care experience as a protected characteristic as agreed at Executive Board in February this year following a powerful deputation by young people who are care leavers at full council in January this year.
- 5 The Review concluded that the children's social care system was in need of a 'radical reset,' as it is currently characterised by crisis intervention, poor outcomes, and rising costs. The Review argued that many of the challenges within the system could be improved with a renewed focus on relationships, asserting that the system too often tries to replace organic bonds and relationships with professionals and services, and does not sufficiently draw on the resources of children's wider family and community.
- 6 The Review made a number of significant recommendations for change as part of its 'radical reset, which were costed at £2.6bn to implement over the course of four years. Proposed changes included: amalgamating targeted early help and child in need work into the concept of Family Help, to be delivered by multi-disciplinary teams based in community settings, and working alongside expert child protection practitioners with the responsibility to make key child protection decisions; greater recognition and support for kinship carers; the establishment of Regional Care Co-Operatives to take on responsibility for the creation and running of all new public sector fostering, residential and secure care, as well as commissioning all external not-for profit and private sector care as necessary; a new deal for foster carers with regards to support and training, supported by a new national foster carer recruitment programme with the aim of recruiting an additional 9,000 carers over three years; a new five-year Early Career Framework for social workers, linked to national pay scales, that provides progression and rewards expertise with higher pay; and a set of new rules relating to agency staffing, designed to limit reliance on agency workers and improve recruitment and retention.
- 7 The Stable Homes government response to the Review, published in February 2023, committed the Department for Education to funding less than 20% of the £2.6bn the Review had costed for its proposed 'radical reset', and over half the suggested timeframe, with £200m over two years.

¹ [Independent Review of Children's Social Care – Final Report](#)

² [Children's Social Care – Stable Homes Built on Love](#)

This funding would be allocated to local authorities to act as ‘pathfinders’ for different aspects of the proposed reforms over a two-year period, before being rolled out to the rest of the sector.

- 8 The pathfinders³ are grouped into the Families First for Children (FFC) pathfinder, which tests reforms in family help, child protection, family network support packages and safeguarding partners; and the Family Network Pilot (FNP) which will test the impact of providing flexible funding for extended family networks and increase the use of family group decision making.
- 9 Leeds is not one of the local authorities selected to be an FFC pathfinder, in either phase, and has not yet been selected as a pathfinder for the FNP; the first phase of local authorities have been announced, and Leeds has bid to be a pathfinder in the second phase but the decision has not yet been announced (it was due in January 2024). To date, the selected pathfinder local authorities do not include a core city, or a local authority within the Yorkshire and the Humber region. Leeds has also bid, alongside other local authorities in the region, to pilot the Regional Care Co-Operative proposals, and is awaiting a decision on this from the Department of Education. Leeds continues to have a voice and influence nationally through Tom Riordan’s membership of the National Implementation Board, and Cllr Venner’s membership on the LGA Children and Young People’s Board.
- 10 This report will update the Board on four key national developments since the publication of the Review and the Stable Homes implementation proposals: the publication of the December 2023 update to the Working Together to Safeguard Children statutory guidance⁴; the publication of new statutory guidance for children’s social care, the Children’s Social Care National Framework⁵ (published in December 2023); the publication of the first national Kinship Care Strategy⁶ (also December 2023); and the announcement in October 2023 of the national rules on the use of social work agency staff⁷, to be implemented in autumn 2024.

Working Together to Safeguard Children – December 2023 update

- 11 The Working Together statutory guidance was initially published in 1999 and set out how all agencies and professionals should work together to promote children’s welfare and protect them from abuse and neglect. It was revised in 2006 following the public inquiry undertaken by Lord Laming into the death of Victoria Climbié, and has undergone further updates, for example in response to Lord Laming’s 2008 progress report and Professor Eileen Munro’s 2011 review of child protection in England. The 2023 update has been explicitly linked to delivering the proposals set out in Stable Homes.
- 12 In addition to simple factual updates (e.g. to include references to recent legislation such as the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, updates to the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements – MAPPA – process to reflect updated statutory guidance, and references to the pre-proceedings stage of the child protection process, to reflect existing guidance), the 2023 update includes some substantive changes to the content. Although it should be noted that no statutory roles or functions have been removed from the guidance.
- 13 The 2023 update begins with a new chapter, titled ‘A Shared Responsibility’. This chapter brings together new and existing guidance to emphasise that successful outcomes for children depend upon strong multi-agency partnership working. The chapter includes principles for working with parents and carers which focus on the importance of building positive and trusting relationships

³ [Policy paper - Families first for children \(FFC\) pathfinder programme and family networks pilot \(FNP\)](#)

⁴ [Working Together to Safeguard Children – 2023 update](#)

⁵ [Children’s Social Care National Framework](#)

⁶ [Championing Kinship Care – National Kinship Care Strategy](#)

⁷ [Child and Family Social Worker Workforce – government consultation response](#)

– which has already been a focus for Leeds through our long-standing commitment to restorative practice – and expectations for multi-agency working that apply to all individuals, agencies and organisations working with children, young people, and families.

- 14 The second chapter, on multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, strengthens how those arrangements (between local authorities, police forces and integrated care boards, or ICBs (Integrated Care Board), in health) work to safeguard and protect children locally. Changes include distinguishing between Lead Safeguarding Partners (LSPs) and Delegated Safeguarding Partners (DSPs). The guidance states that for a local authority, as for an ICB (Integrated Care Board) (Integrated Care Board), the LSP will always be the Chief Executive, and for police forces it will be the Chief Officer for Police. LSPs are responsible for appointing DSPs who are sufficiently senior to be able to speak with authority, take decisions on behalf of the LSP and hold their sectors to account. The guidance emphasises the role of education in safeguarding arrangements and encourages agencies to consider the importance of including third sector organisations within their arrangements and safeguarding work.
- 15 The third chapter covers the provision of help, support, and protection, within three sections: early help; safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children; and child protection. The early help section strengthens the role of education and childcare settings in safeguarding and support, including information on a child's right to education and potential risk factors and indicators that a child or family may benefit from early help support. This section also emphasises one of the common themes throughout the guidance about the importance of family networks and their inclusion in family decision making, including stronger guidance on the use of Family Group Conferences. This is directly related to one of the central themes of both the Review and Stable Homes.
- 16 One of the most significant changes in the guidance is included in the safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children section of this chapter, which states that a broader range of practitioners can be the lead practitioner for children and families receiving support and services under section 17 of the Children Act 1989; that is, children receiving Child in Need support and/ or on a Child in Need plan. Previously, the lead practitioner for these cases could only be a social worker; in the new guidance, this role can be undertaken by other practitioners, but they would need to be supervised by a manager who is social work qualified. The new guidance states that local authorities and their partners need to agree and set out local governance arrangements in relation to this.
- 17 This section of the guidance also clarifies the role of social work in supporting specific groups of children, young people, and their families, including disabled children, those at risk of harm outside the home and those at risk from people in prison or who are supervised by probation services. Local authorities are encouraged to appoint designated social care officers (DCSOs), senior social work leads for special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). This role would oversee social care's contribution to SEND provision, including education health and care assessments, plans, and reviews as well as strategic planning of services for disabled children, such as short breaks.
- 18 The child protection section of this chapter introduces new national multi-agency child protection standards. It also clarifies the expected multi-agency response to risks of abuse and exploitation outside the home, and the consideration of whether children are experiencing risks outside the home in all children's social care assessments.

- 19 In response to the Working Together update, colleagues have circulated details of the changes in the guidance to all Children and Families staff via email, and an updated Working Together One Minute Guide is being drafted and will be uploaded to the Council website. The Leeds Safeguarding Children Partnership have added a [page](#) to their website highlighting the changes. The Leeds Safeguarding Children Partnership Executive has agreed an improvement plan as a response to the guidance, which they will oversee. Three priorities have been agreed for the next coming year which includes, Safeguarding Adolescents, with a focus on the prevention of knife crime and exploitation at the early, targeted, and later intervention stages. Safeguarding Children Affected by Domestic Abuse, with the focus on reducing the rates of Domestic Abuse whilst ensuring that children are appropriately safeguarded and have access to support and Safeguarding Children through Family Help, with the focus of this priority being to ensure that within the planning of developing family help services, plans for safeguard children from neglect and abuse in the long-term are included.
- 20 Also, in response to the safeguarding risks to children in Leeds, a working group within Children and Families is meeting regularly to consider the implications of the new guidance at both strategic and operational levels, and how the changes can be implemented in both practice and policy.

Children's Social Care National Framework – new statutory guidance

- 21 This new statutory guidance was published in December 2023, alongside the Working Together update, with the stated aim to cover: 'the principles behind children's social care, its purpose, factors enabling good practice and what it should achieve.' The guidance sets out six principles for children's social care, three enablers and four outcomes, as detailed below.
- 22 The six principles set out in the guidance are as follows:
- a) Children's welfare is paramount – decisions about their help, protection and care must always be made in their best interests, as established in Children Act 1989.
 - b) Children's wishes and feelings are sought, heard, and responded to – children's views should be sought and heard, with assistance as appropriate, at every stage of support and they should contribute to decisions made about their lives wherever possible.
 - c) Children's social care works in partnership with whole families – practitioners should build strong relationships with families based on respect, acknowledging strengths, and recognising that families and family networks will often have solutions to their difficulties.
 - d) Children are raised by their families, with their family networks, or in family environments wherever possible – a recognition that for most children, growing up in their own families or family networks will be the best option for them, and where that is not safe or possible, then care provided by the local authority needs to be safe, stable, consistent and promote loving relationships. Children also need to be supported to maintain their relationships with siblings, family members and their wider family network.
 - e) Local authorities work with other agencies to effectively identify and meet the needs of children, young people, and families - local authorities foster strong supportive relationships with other safeguarding partners and relevant agencies, including education settings, to coordinate their services and to respond to the needs of children, young people, and families holistically.
 - f) Local authorities consider the economic and social circumstances which may impact children, young people, and families – practitioners recognise the differences between, and are confident to respond to, circumstances where children experience adversity due to poverty

and acute family stress, and situations where children experience or are at risk of harm due to parental abuse and neglect. Leaders and practice supervisors create and maintain a culture of practice where the individual and protected characteristics of families are respected, and the diversity of needs and experiences are addressed through the support provided.

23 The guidance defines an enabler as: *'aspects of the children's social care system that facilitate effective support for children, young people, and families. The enablers are foundational to good practice.'* For each enabler, the guidance outlines an overview and summary, and practice expectations which articulate how senior leaders, practice supervisors and individual practitioners can support the enabler in practice.

24 The guidance identifies three enablers:

- a. Multi-agency working is prioritised and effective - Local authorities, police, health, and other relevant agencies, including early years, education settings, and voluntary organisations, have responsibilities to work together so that children and young people can be supported for their safety and wellbeing. The National Framework recognises that local authorities cannot achieve the outcomes for children without the support of multi-agency partners, and the guidance advises that partners should read the national framework alongside other statutory guidance, including Working Together and the SEND Code of Practice, to understand and deliver good practice for children, young people and families, as well as their statutory roles and responsibilities.
- b. Leaders drive conditions for effective practice - All leaders from local authorities and children's trusts, including Chief Executives, Directors of Children's Services, Directors of Public Health, and Lead Members for Children's Services, should conduct their responsibilities in ways that support and empower the wider children's social care workforce to achieve the best possible outcomes for children, young people, and families. They promote the use of evidence to inform and improve how services are commissioned and delivered.
- c. The workforce is equipped and effective - The whole children's social care workforce plays an instrumental role in delivering good outcomes for children, young people, and families. They should bring empathy, energy, and motivation to their daily work. They should be supported, by their organisation, to use the breadth of their knowledge and skills to transform the lives of children, young people, and families.

25 An outcome is defined by the guidance as: *'what children's social care should achieve for the children, young people, and families they support. They reflect the core purpose of children's social care.'* For each outcome, the guidance provides an overview, a summary, and an expectations of practice section, which outlines what the local area should achieve, as well as breaking down practice expectations into how leaders, practice supervisors and individual practitioners can achieve each outcome in practice.

26 The guidance identifies four outcomes, as follows:

- a. children, young people, and families stay together and get the help they need - children's social care helps children and young people by supporting whole families and their networks. They work in partnership with parents and carers to address difficulties that families face and are committed to keeping children and young people within their family, wherever it is safe to do so.
- b. children and young people are supported by their family network - children's social care supports children and young people by building relationships so that key people in the lives of children and young people, who form their family network, can help to provide safety, stability,

and love. Involving family networks needs to happen at every stage, when children and young people are supported by children's social care, including if they are going to, or have, entered care. When children are being raised by someone in their family network, we refer to this as kinship care.

- c. children and young people are safe in and outside of their homes - children's social care acts swiftly to protect children and young people from harm, whether that is at home, where they live, or outside in their wider neighbourhood, community and online. Children's social care manages the uncertainty and nuances of the complex circumstances in which harm takes place, working in partnership with other agencies to increase safety.
- d. children in care and care leavers have stable, loving homes - children's social care provide homes that offer love, care, protection, and stability for children and young people who are cared for by the local authority, or who are care leavers. The care that children and young people receive helps to address experiences of adversity and trauma and gives them the foundations for a healthy, happy, life.

27 The Department for Education offered sessions in February 2024 for Local Authorities to attend in relation to the new Working Together and National Social Care Framework. Leeds City Council officers were in attendance to learn and share ideas on how to embed the new frameworks. Leeds Children's Services are still in the initial stages of identifying the impacts of this for services and will continue to work with the Department for Education and other Local Authorities to implement the changes.

Championing Kinship Care: National Kinship Care Strategy – published December 2023

28 As noted above and in the September 2023 report to the Board, both the Review and the Stable Homes response recognise and emphasise the importance of strong, loving relationships for children's safety and wellbeing. In line with this emphasis, both documents featured kinship care as a central aspect of reform, and the Stable Homes document committed to publish a national kinship care strategy by the end of 2023. The government met this commitment in December 2023.

29 The kinship care strategy defines kinship care as: *'any situation in which a child is being raised in the care of a friend or family member who is not their parent. The arrangement may be temporary or longer term.'* As noted in the September 2023 report to the Board, kinship care has been prioritised for many years within Leeds, supported through the establishment of specific teams to assess and support potential kinship carers, as well as dedicating a number of our Mockingbird carer support hubs for kinship carers. We have also opened up the support of our Therapeutic Social Work Team and aspects of our foster carer training offer to kinship carers.

30 The strategy outlines a number of measures at strategic, operational, and practical levels that are intended to improve and standardise the support that kinship carers receive from local authorities and partner agencies across the country⁸. The strategy commits to further strengthening this support with new statutory guidance for local authorities on kinship care, to be published in Spring 2024 (this is not yet available at the time of writing). The key measures included in the strategy are as follows:

- a. A four-year trial of financial allowances in up to eight local authorities (which have not yet been named) with an investment of £16m, which will see Special Guardians who care for children

⁸ [This summary was written using the information provided by the charity Kinship in their National Kinship Care Strategy Hub](#)

who were previously looked after receiving a kinship carer allowance at the same rate as the foster carer allowance. This trial will be evaluated to look at the impact on local government finances.

- b. A £3.8m investment to expand the role of Virtual School Heads, to include championing the educational attendance, attainment, and progress of all children in kinship care, regardless of their legal order. This will also include kinship carers with Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) or Child Arrangement Orders (CAO) being able to request advice and information from the Virtual School.
- c. New government guidance has been published which provides an overview of best practice for supporting kinship carers at work, including adapting HR policies, and developing cultures of support. The Department for Education have committed to introduce a new leave and pay entitlement for kinship carers within their own workforce.
- d. The Adoption Support Fund to be renamed the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund; the fund is used by local authorities and regional adoption agencies to pay for therapeutic support for kinship families where the child was previously looked after and is currently living on an SGO or CAO. There will be no changes to the eligibility of the fund, but the strategy does commit to analysing applications and therapies provided to understand how it is being used by kinship families.
- e. A new National Kinship Care Ambassador will be appointed in Spring 2024 to advocate for kinship carers and work with local authorities to improve their services and support. The existing Kinship Carer Reference Group that advises the Department for Education will be retained, and a new National Kinship Care Advisory Board of sector experts established to advise ministers on policy development and future funding.
- f. Updated local authority guidance will encourage local authorities to implement Family Group Conferences. The Department for Education will work towards every family being offered access to an FGC (Family Group Conference) at the pre-proceedings stage.
- g. Ofsted will provide their inspectors with additional specific training around kinship care and will also review their published guidance to ensure references that strengths and areas for development in relation to kinship care are included in their inspection reports.
- h. The Law Commission will carry out a review into the legal statuses and orders for kinship carers and make recommendations to government on how the legislative framework could be simplified and improved.

31 The Kinship Care Strategy has been broadly welcomed by stakeholders, with the charity Kinship welcoming the recognition it gives to kinship carers and the commitment to improving support available to them, which complements the previously announced commitment to establish a new national offer of training and support for kinship carers. The Kinship charity was awarded a £3m contract to deliver a bespoke package for all kinship carers in England, including those in informal arrangements, which will launch in spring 2024.

32 However, the charity expressed disappointment that the Strategy did not go further⁹; they note the number of carers who will be excluded from increased allowances by the four-year pilot in a limited number of local authorities when kinship carers are dealing with financial difficulties now, and that while the guidance encouraging businesses to improve their support to employees is welcome, it falls short of introducing a right to paid statutory leave similar to that which is available to people adopting a child. Similarly, while the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS)¹⁰ welcomed the focus on kinship care and the commitment to simplifying the breadth of

⁹ [Kinship charity response to publication of the National Kinship Care Strategy](#)

¹⁰ [Kinship Care Strategy – ADCS response](#)

legal arrangements used for kinship carers, they argued that this may still bring carers into legal processes unnecessarily when financial support could be offered to carers through the welfare system instead, for example through an enhancement to child benefit payments.

- 33 Leeds Children's Services currently provide all approved kinship carers aligned with level one, a fostering maintenance allowance. Approved Kinship Carers can progress through Levels 2 – 4 on the fostering structure if they are able to evidence the appropriate skills and knowledge. This would provide them with the equivalent professional fostering fee, alongside the level one maintenance allowance. All approved Kinship Carers and Special Guardianship Order (SGO) carers (including those caring for children not previously looked after) can access Leeds City Council fostering training.
- 34 Leeds have been part of work across West Yorkshire around a regional Special Guardianship support offer led by One Adoption West Yorkshire to provide consistency across the region. A revised offer was presented and approved at the Executive Board on 13th March. The revised offer includes the removal of the age of the child and placement duration criteria and entitlement for ongoing post Special Guardianship Order support payments for young people remaining with their special guardianship carers between the ages of 18 and 21 becoming a universal entitlement where the carers were the young person's previous foster or kinship carer. Where a Special Guardianship Order has been made for a child who has not previously been a child looked after, any financial support to this arrangement will be means tested unless carers are already on means tested benefits. The principle underpinning the Leeds offer is that children who cannot live with their parents should be supported to grow up with permanent care arrangements that have the least statutory involvement as possible. The revised offer will support the ambition in the Children and Young Peoples Plan of safely reduce the number of Looked After Children.
- 35 All children in Leeds who are subject to Child Protection plans or Public Law Outline are entitled to the offer of a Family Group Conference. There is a Family Group Conference offer to all Kinship Carers during the assessment and care planning stages of any placement. There is a named person within the virtual school who supports families subject to Special Guardianship Orders where children have previously been looked after. The Special Guardianship support team can support families to access the Adoption Support Fund. They will also work alongside other, lead professionals to complete the Adoption Support Fund assessment if this is more appropriate for the family.

National rules on the use of agency social work staff – announced October 2023

- 36 The Review highlighted the problem within the social work sector of an over-reliance on agency staff to fill vacancies and described the 'profiteering' of staffing agencies taking advantage of competition between local authorities for staff. They estimated that the increased costs of agency staffing take around £100m per year out of social work budgets that could be better spent on working with children and families. The Review recommended a set of rules to be implemented for local authorities and social work staffing agencies.
- 37 In response to this, the Department for Education launched a consultation in February 2023 on proposed national rules for the use of agency staff within children's social work. The results of this consultation were published in October 2023¹¹. The original implementation date for the statutory guidance which will include these rules was intended to be spring 2024. However, as

¹¹ [This summary was written using information provided in this Community Care article](#)

outlined in their response to the consultation, the Department for Education now plan to issue draft statutory guidance for local authorities on implementing the rules in spring 2024, with a view to implementation in autumn 2024.

38 The rules will include the following:

- a) Councils are required to work within their region to agree and comply with agency social work price caps. This rule has been changed following the consultation; national hourly rate price caps, linked to the average pay for a permanent worker, were originally proposed.
- b) All social workers, regardless of when they qualified, must have acquired three years of experience in a permanent role before taking up an agency post; but this does not have to include completing the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE). Again, the original proposal was more stringent; social workers who qualified after the implementation period would have needed five years of experience, including completing their ASYE, before taking up an agency post.
- c) Notice periods for agency staff must be aligned to the notice periods for permanent social workers in the same/ equivalent roles.
- d) It will not be permitted to engage social workers as locums within three months of them leaving a permanent post within the same region.
- e) Social work agencies often supply project teams; groups of practitioners who are often managed by the agency, rather than the local authority. The original proposed rule would have prevented local authorities from using agency project teams, but following consultation the rule will be that project teams are permitted, but their practice must be fully managed by the local authority, and the engagement of each worker must comply with the rest of the rules on agency staffing.
- f) All new contractual arrangements for hiring agency staff must comply with the rules from the point of implementation, with existing contractual arrangements transitioning to comply with the rules over time.
- g) Local authorities will be required to supply the Department for Education with quarterly survey data on the use and cost of agency social workers – including those engaged through project teams.

39 The proposed new rules have been contentious across the sector, between staff and employer groups and between permanent and agency social workers. This was illustrated well by the published results of the consultation, which was responded to by 453 permanent social workers and 309 agency social workers. In relation to support for the new rules in principle, 84% of permanent social workers were in favour, compared to only 16% of agency staff. 75% of permanent social workers supported the original implementation date of spring 2024, compared to only 10% of agency staff. And 81 % of permanent social workers felt there should be more consistency in social work salaries between local authorities, compared to 27% of agency staff.

40 Similarly, the ADCS response to the results of the consultation and amendments to the proposed rules expressed concern that project teams would still be allowed, as they argued that agencies are increasingly only supplying staff through these teams and not supplying individual practitioners, which increases costs to local authorities and often prevents local authorities from managing these teams of agency staff. They also emphasised the need to move at pace with the implementation of the rules, citing the number of local authorities on the brink of issuing section 114 notices.

41 Leeds Children's Services has a robust workforce plan which focuses on attraction, recruitment, retention and progression for social work and wider social care workforce. Leeds City Council has minimal use of agency workers only to cover essential vacant posts and do not use managed project teams.

What impact will this proposal have?

42 There are no new proposals in this report for the Board to consider; it is an update and summary of recent national developments in relation to the implementation of changes recommended by the Independent Review of Children's Social Care.

43 The four developments discussed above represent different ways in which the Independent Review of Children's Social Care and the Stable Homes, Built on Love government response are influencing reform of the children's social work sector. All the developments are recent, and as such colleagues in the Children's Social Work Service are working through what the changes mean for the ways in which we work with our corporate colleagues and our partners to provide effective, respectful, and restorative support for the children, young people, and families of Leeds. As noted in the September 2023 report to the Board, many of the themes of the Review and the Stable Homes response were introduced in Leeds as part of our improvement journey, and aspects of our strategic vision, ambition and practice – like our focus on the importance of relationships through restorative practice, and our commitment to ensuring that children and families have a voice, have influence and can effect change – are already embedded in our directorate.

44 In relation to the specifics of practice, we will of course meet our statutory obligations as set out in the updated Working Together and the Children's Social Care National Framework, and colleagues are working to update our practice and procedures in line with the changes required. We will also be preparing for the implementation of the new rules around the use of agency social workers from autumn 2024. However, for some of the other developments outlined in this report, we await further detail from the Department for Education; for example, in relation to the statutory guidance for local authorities in supporting kinship carers, which has not yet been published, and we await the Department for Education decisions on whether Leeds will be a pathfinder for phase two of the Family Network Pilot (FNP), and whether we will be invited to test the approach to Regional Care Co-operatives. Being selected for either of these initiatives could have a significant impact on policy and practice in Leeds, but we are not yet in a position to outline what that might be.

How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?

Health and Wellbeing

Inclusive Growth

Zero Carbon

45 There are no new proposals in this report for the Board to consider; it is an update and summary of recent national developments in relation to the implementation of changes recommended by the Independent Review of Children's Social Care.

46 However, the developments outlined in the report are expected to have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of children in Leeds, and most are in alignment with the work we have been doing in Leeds for a number of years, to recognise the importance of relationships and promote the strengths of families and family networks to support the health and wellbeing of children and young people.

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

Wards affected: Not applicable

Have ward members been consulted? Yes No

47 There are no new proposals in this report for the Board to consider; it is an update and summary of recent national developments in relation to the implementation of changes recommended by the Independent Review of Children's Social Care.

What are the resource implications?

48 There are no new proposals in this report for the Board to consider; it is an update and summary of recent national developments in relation to the implementation of changes recommended by the Independent Review of Children's Social Care.

49 The national developments outlined above will likely have some resource implications for Leeds, and colleagues are working through the detail of what these recent developments will mean but the directorate is not currently in a position to outline these in detail. It is likely that the new rules around agency staffing will have the most direct and significant implications with regards to resources, but these will not be implemented until at least autumn 2024, and without a more specific timescale we are not able to forecast what those implications may be. The new rules are intended to cut the costs of agency staffing for local authorities, but it is not yet clear whether these rules will also have an impact on the recruitment and retention of social workers, and what that impact might look like.

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

50 As noted above, the four developments outlined are all recent, and colleagues are working on the detail of their implementation and what the implications and risks may be. We are not currently in a position to share these with the Board.

What are the legal implications?

51 The Working Together update and the Children's Social Care National Framework are both statutory guidance which set out the roles and responsibilities that the local authority and its partners must meet. Similarly, the Kinship Care Strategy commits to the publication of statutory guidance which will need to be followed in relation to support for kinship carers, and the national rules on the use of agency social workers will be published as draft statutory guidance in spring 2024, with a view to implementation from autumn 2024.

Options, timescales and measuring success

What other options were considered?

52 There are no new proposals in this report for the Board to consider; it is an update and summary of recent national developments in relation to the implementation of changes recommended by the Independent Review of Children's Social Care.

How will success be measured?

53 There are no new proposals in this report for the Board to consider; it is an update and summary of recent national developments in relation to the implementation of changes recommended by the Independent Review of Children's Social Care.

What is the timetable and who will be responsible for implementation?

54 There are no new proposals in this report for the Board to consider; it is an update and summary of recent national developments in relation to the implementation of changes recommended by the Independent Review of Children's Social Care.

Appendices

- None

Background papers

- None