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Report of the Director of Children's Services

Scrutiny Board (Children's Services)

Date: 12 October 2006

Subject: Safeguarding Children

Electoral Wards Affected:

All

Specific Implications For:

Ethnic minorities

Women

Disabled people

Narrowing the Gap

1.0 Purpose Of This Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Scrutiny Board on key issues for Safeguarding Children
- 1.2 The report also addresses recommendation 11 of the Secondary Achievement Inquiry: '... that the Director of Children's Services reviews the adequacy of the safeguarding arrangements in relation to work experience and work placements, to ensure that children and young people are not being exposed to risk when accessing these opportunities'.

2.0 Main Issues

2.1 Leeds Safeguarding Children Board

- 2.2 The Leeds Safeguarding Children Board has been fully operational since 1 April 2006, in accordance with national guidance.
- 2.3 The board is embedded in the provisions of children's trust arrangements agreed by the Council's Executive Board on 20 September 2006.
- 2.4 It is currently chaired by the Chief Officer (Children and Families) within the Social Services Department. However it has been agreed that independent chairing of the Board should be pursued, and a national recruitment process for this is being taken forward.

- 2.5 Revised national guidance, 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' was published in February 2006. As a result of this it is necessary to update local Inter-Agency Child Protection Procedures. Following discussion between Safeguarding Board representatives across West Yorkshire it has been agreed to pursue West Yorkshire wide Child Protection Procedures. This has long been an aspiration of agencies organised on a West Yorkshire-wide basis, eg Police, Probation, but presents a significant challenge for others, such as Local Authority departments, where there may be significant differences in structure and practice.
- 2.6 An independent company - Tri-X - has been commissioned to undertake this work, which will be done under the close scrutiny of a working group with representatives of the five Boards. The Procedures are planned to be in place in February 2007.
- 2.6 A further requirement of the revised 'Working Together' is significantly strengthened processes for analysing and responding to child deaths. The process of Serious Case Reviews following the death of a child, linked to abuse, which has been in place for a number of years, remains. However two additional processes are now to be required: a Committee of the Local Safeguarding Children Board to review all deaths of children in Leeds, and make recommendations about measures that might minimise these; and an active process of inquiry into Sudden Unexpected Infant Deaths. Both these processes are to be implemented from April 2008. However the Leeds Board (and previously the Area Child Protection Committee) has been undertaking a Pilot Project, in anticipation of these developments, for the last 18 months. Representatives of Social Services, Health, Police and Early Years have together reviewed 30 deaths of young people in Leeds that were notified to Social Services. A report is currently being prepared on the lessons learnt from this work, which will be used to steer the future processes, and also feed into inter-agency training.
- 2.7 Inter-agency Child Protection Training is a prime responsibility of the Safeguarding Board. As well as running an ongoing programme of training to meet the needs of the large numbers of staff working with children and families across Leeds (25 events across the city, annually), the Local Safeguarding Children Board held its first large scale Conference in June of this year. This was on the subject of Working with Neglect, and attracted 170 people to the Town Hall. Demand for places was such that the event is to be repeated in December.
- 2.8 Safeguarding arrangements for work experience and work placement opportunities
- 2.9 Although not compulsory, each year in Leeds around 8000 young people in Year 10 are involved in a two week work placement. Schools are supported in organising these placements by the Work Placement Unit at Education Bradford which carries out checks to ensure that providers have current Employer Liability insurance and meet Health and Safety standards, with a particular focus on ensuring that the environment is appropriate for young people. These checks are funded through an annual grant awarded by West Yorkshire Learning and Skills Council. There is no obligation at the present time for staff working for placement providers who are involved with young people on two week block placements to be CRB checked. However, Education Leeds recommends that where a placement involves a student engaging with potentially vulnerable groups such as in a primary school, nursery or care home the young person should have a CRB check completed, to be arranged and funded by the school.

- 2.10 Schools have a duty of care to ensure that all students have a pre- and post-placement interview and are visited by a member of staff in the workplace at least once in any five day period of a placement. This provides an opportunity to interview the student and provider in order to ensure that health and safety standards are being adhered to, that activities and relationships in the workplace are appropriate and that the student is attending as required.
- 2.11 At present there is no obligation on placement providers to be CRB checked if a student is on an extended placement where a student spends no more than one day per week for a period of one term or less. However, DfES recommends that the supervisor in the workplace responsible for a student on an extended placement of a longer duration has a current CRB check. The responsibility for completion and costs related to this process are the responsibility of the school. As with the two week block schools also have a duty of care to visit students in the workplace at least once in any five day period of a placement.
- 2.12 West Yorkshire Learning and Skills Council do not fund the cost of completing health and safety checks on providers of extended placements. These checks are completed by Education Bradford at a cost of £35 each; however, the total costs are usually capped at £2000 per school. In the academic year 2005/06 around 1500 KS4 and KS5 students were engaged in extended placements.
- 2.13 The Work Placement Unit in Bradford operates a robust, effective and proven reporting system in the event of an accident or any other issue arising during the period of a placement. Should a parent/carer arrange a placement that in the view of either the school, Education Leeds or the Work Placement Unit is inappropriate e.g. working with a tattoo artist, the placement will be refused.
- 2.14 With regard to students placed with Work Related Learning providers, Education Leeds has an approved provider list from which schools can select in the knowledge that they meet health and safety requirements and that teaching staff have current CRB checks. Education Leeds has recently introduced a comprehensive quality assurance programme for providers which is raising the quality of the programmes provided and increasing the availability of places by adding more approved providers to the list.

3.0 Recommendation

- 3.1 Members are asked to consider the contents of this report.