



Report of the: Assistant Chief Executive (Planning, Policy and Improvement)

To: Executive Board

Date: 6 January 2010

Subject: Children's Services Improvement Board

Electoral wards affected:

All

Specific implications for:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the gap

Eligible for Call In

Not eligible for Call In

(Details contained in the report)

1.0 Purpose of this Report

- 1.1. To update Members of Executive Board on the proposal to establish an independently chaired Improvement Board to oversee the implementation of the Council's improvement plan for children's services.
- 1.2. This interim report provides an update on the developing proposals for the new board.
- 1.3. Discussions on the remit of the new Board will continue into mid-to-late January 2010. We also need to await publication of the more recent inspection of Leeds Safeguarding and Looked After Children services (to be published 7 January 2010) in order to finalise the council's improvement plan.
- 1.4. A further report will be prepared for the Executive Board meeting in February 2010, which will include proposed terms of reference for the new board and an outline of the proposed reporting arrangements.

2.0 Background Information

- 2.1. Members will be aware of the outcome of the July 2009 unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment services which identified a number of 'priority areas for action'.

- 2.2. The unannounced inspection significantly influenced the Comprehensive Area Assessment which was published in December 2009, particularly the rating applied to children's services, which was judged as 'performing poorly, as well as the 'red flag' related to safeguarding.
- 2.3. Members will be aware that the 2009 annual children's services assessment concluded that "the majority of the local authority's inspected and regulated services and provision in children's services are good or better". However, the report also referenced "significant weakness in areas of social care provision" which had a significant impact on the overall result for children's services.
- 2.4. As Members would rightly expect, the performance deficiencies in the area of children's social care provision have been the focus of significant attention since the unannounced inspection in July 2009.
- 2.5. The council responded quickly, establishing a Children's Services Improvement Board, chaired by the Chief Executive and consisting of senior corporate officers and senior Elected Members, to oversee the improvement plan in response to the unannounced inspection.
- 2.6. The work of this board has helped to provide a greater degree of reassurance that children in Leeds are safe from the potential risk of serious harm.
- 2.7. However, during November 2009, with the known outcome of the unannounced inspection and with the pending CAA announcement, both Elected Members and senior officers had detailed discussions with Ministers and officials from the DCSF.
- 2.8. These discussions were focussed on the need to satisfy both ourselves and the DCSF that we are responding to our children's services performance deficiencies at the required pace, and with the necessary support and challenge in place, to bring about the required improvement.

3.0 Proposal

- 3.1. Whilst the internally led improvement board has provided an increased focus on the work required to respond to the outcomes of the unannounced inspection, discussions with the DCSF have led to the proposed establishment of an externally led Improvement Board which can provide additional challenge and oversight of Leeds' improvement priorities regarding children's services.
- 3.2. A proposal regarding the establishment of the new Board was formally proposed to Dawn Primarolo MP, Minister of State for Children Young People and Families, in a letter from the Leaders of Council dated 4 December 2009 (attached as appendix 1), which also included an early draft of our improvement plan (attached as appendix 4).
- 3.3. The Minister responded on the 7 December 2009 (attached as appendix 2) confirming her support for our proposal and this was then subject to a press announcement by the Minister on the same day (7 December 2009) of the action being taken. A copy of the press statement is attached as appendix 3.
- 3.4. The Board will be led by an independent chair and Bill McCarthy, Chief Executive of NHS Yorkshire and the Humber, has kindly agreed to fulfil this role. He will be supported by a small strategic board consisting of the following representatives:
 - i) Cllr Golton, Lead Member for Children's Services.

- ii) Paul Rogerson, Chief Executive of Leeds City Council.
 - iii) Chief Superintendent Gerry Broadbent, Leeds North East Divisional Commander, West Yorkshire Police.
 - iv) Peter Roberts, Chief Executive of Leeds City College.
 - v) John Lawlor, Chief Executive of NHS Leeds.
 - vi) An external children's services professional (e.g. a DCS from another authority or Chair of a Safeguarding Children Board) – to be appointed.
- 3.5. The Board will also be attended by key officers of the Council, including the Assistant Chief Executive (Planning, Policy and Improvement), who will be the key corporate officer supporting the Chair. Senior colleagues from children's services and Education Leeds will also report into the Board as required.
- 3.6. We have also extended an invite for a GOYH representative, as well as a member of the DCSF Intervention team, to also attend the Improvement Board in an observer capacity.
- 3.7. The work of the Improvement Board will be enshrined in an Improvement Plan (early draft attached as appendix 4), incorporating not only the key inspection findings from both the unannounced and the more recent announced inspections, but also the outcomes of the significant review of children's services leadership, governance and partnership arrangements that we have been conducting over recent weeks and which will report shortly.
- 3.8. We also propose to include within the Improvement Plan other key performance issues, such as our response to the National Challenge on school performance; improvements on NEETs and other related children's services priorities.
- 3.9. Whilst a draft copy of the Improvement plan is attached for Members attention at appendix 4, Members should note that we will be finalising this Improvement Plan following publication of the inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children services which will be published on 7 January 2010. It is anticipated that this Improvement Plan will be finalised and approved by both the Council and the Improvement Board during February/March 2010.
- 3.10. The Minister of State for Children, Young People and Families has also indicated that she may issue an Improvement Notice which would set out the targets and milestones the Minister expects to see delivered over the coming months.
- 3.11. If the Minister is minded to issue such a notice, we will receive a draft copy of this prior to formal issue and our improvement plan will need, therefore, to be amended to incorporate relevant aspects of such Improvement Notice.
- 3.12. The Chair of the board will report every two months to both the city council leadership and the Minister of State for Children, Young People and Families.
- 3.13. It is also proposed that the internally led improvement board continue, in order to provide a supporting role for the externally led board, but also to ensure that sufficient corporate focus is given to responding to the improvement issues identified. In order to avoid any confusion between the two boards, the internally led board is proposed to be re-titled as the "Children's Services Improvement Support Group".

4.0 Resource Implications

- 4.1. There are no additional resource implications arising from the proposal to establish an independently led improvement board. However, in developing the Improvement Plan, it is likely that there will be resourcing issues arising. These matters will be considered as part of the budget setting process for 2010/11.

5.0 Recommendations

- 5.1. Members of Executive Board are asked to:
- i) Endorse the proposal to establish an independently led Improvement Board;
 - ii) Receive a further report at their February 2010 meeting with proposed terms of reference for the new board; an outline of the proposed reporting arrangements and an updated Improvement Plan.

Background Documents:

- Unannounced Assessment and Referral Inspection letter dated 14 August 2009
- Letter to Dawn Primarolo MP dated 4 December 2009 (appendix 1)
- Children's Services Annual Performance Assessment dated 9 December 2009
- Response from Dawn Primarolo MP dated 7 December 2009 (appendix 2)
- Press notice from Dawn Primarolo MP dated 7 December 2009