



Report of the Director of Children's Services

North West Inner Area Committee

7th December 2006

Subject: Children's trust arrangements for Leeds

Electoral Wards Affected:

All

Specific Implications For:

Ethnic minorities

Women

Disabled people

Council
Function



Delegated Executive
Function available
for Call In



Delegated Executive
Function not available for
Call In Details set out in the
report



Executive Summary

Children's trust arrangements for Leeds have been approved by Leeds City Council and are in the process of being implemented. The report describes the main elements and begins to set out how the arrangements will work to improve the lives of children, young people and their parents and carers. It also describes further work to be done to make some of the elements work in practice, including the 'locality' aspects of the children's trust arrangements.

1.0 Purpose of this report

On 20 September 2006, Executive Board approved proposals by the Director of Children's Services for children's trust arrangements to provide a framework for significantly improving the lives of children and young people in Leeds.

The purpose of this report is to provide Area Committee Members with a report on progress in implementing the Children Act and to summarise the children's trust arrangements that are being adopted in Leeds.

The report is intended to help Area Committees consider their role in improving the lives of children and young people at a local level.

2.0 Background Information

- 2.1 The 2004 Children Act placed a duty on all local authorities to appoint a Lead Member for Children's Services and a Director of Children's Services. Their brief is to review, lead and transform the delivery of services in a way that makes all agencies whose work touches the lives of children and young people act in partnership and co-operation, providing their services in a joined-up way.
- 2.2 The Director of Children's Services, Rosemary Archer, took up her post in March 2006 and Councillor Richard Brett was appointed Lead Executive Member for Children's Services in May 2006. The Director is supported by a small unit of staff temporarily seconded from various parts of the Council. The Lead Executive Member is supported by an Executive Member for Learning and two Lead Members for Children's Services.
- 2.3 A further response to the Children Act 2004 was the formation of a city-wide partnership, known as Children Leeds, and which is part of the city's Local Strategic Partnership, the Leeds Initiative. This highly inclusive partnership has worked to set the city's vision for its children and young people and in July this year, Leeds published its first-ever Children and Young People's Plan. The vision, as set out in the Plan, is for all children and young people in Leeds to be happy, healthy, safe, successful and free from the effects of poverty.
- 2.4 Over recent months the Director of Children's Services and her team have undertaken a review of current arrangements for delivering children's services in Leeds. They have developed proposals for the future, taking into account conditions that exist at a local level as well as the Children Act, national guidance and best practice.
- 2.5 The proposals were presented to Executive Board on 20 September and were approved. This paper will now go on to describe the children's trust arrangements for Leeds, including provisions for:
- involving children, young people and their parents and carers
 - locality working
 - safeguarding
 - commissioning services
 - the Children Leeds Partnership and
 - the future form of the Director of Children's Services Unit

3.0 Main Issues

- 3.1 Developing children's trust arrangements
Guidance issued alongside the Children Act requires all organisations involved in supporting children and young people to actively co-operate in improving services. All local authorities, through the Director of Children's Services, are required to create an environment where this co-operation can take place efficiently and effectively.
- 3.2 Initially, this was interpreted as the formation of a legal trust to bring together the many partners and the local authority. Pilot authorities took this interpretation literally, with a result that new 'Children's Departments' were created to pull together all the services a local council delivers for children, young people and their families.
- 3.3 However, it was quickly realised that in larger authorities, such as Leeds, this would create a department of unmanageable size, with the disruption caused by such

large-scale reorganisation more likely to impede improvement and partnership working, than to promote it.

- 3.4 In Leeds, therefore, the decision has been taken to develop children's trust 'arrangements', whereby agencies agree to work together in partnership, without taking the final step of setting up a formal, legal trust. This approach fully complies with national guidelines and, importantly, to build on what has been achieved already, partners have agreed that this is the best way forward for the city.
- 3.5 According to the children's trust arrangements that Leeds will adopt, the Director of Children's Services is accountable for achieving national and local targets and will, in turn, hold partners accountable for achieving the aims of the Children and Young People's Plan. The Children Act places a 'duty to co-operate' upon partners in doing this.
- 3.6 Involving children and young people and their parents and carers
Before a single word of the Children and Young People's Plan was written a major consultation exercise was carried out involving professional and voluntary organisations working in services for children. Above all, this included children and young people themselves and their parents and carers – some 8,000 people in total. Out of this came a strong message that children and young people and their families want to play a full part in identifying and prioritising needs and participation in designing and transforming services.
- 3.7 This is another reason for moving away from setting up a formal trust as participation of this nature would be difficult to maintain under the provisions of a formally established trust.
- 3.8 Locality and partnership working
The Council and partners across the city have a real commitment to improve services, improve equality and enable better standards of life for all our citizens. This is reflected in the Vision for Leeds, the Local Area Agreement and the Corporate Plan. It is also reflected in the Children and Young People's Plan, which goes on to make it clear that the most impact on identifying and targeting vulnerable groups can be made in localities and neighbourhoods, rather than working on a city-wide basis. This essential focus on communities has been a key consideration in developing the children's trust arrangements.
- 3.9 The requirement for local impact is also reflected through the Area Committees within the Council, District Partnerships within the Leeds Initiative and moves in the National Health Service from acute to community provision.
- 3.10 Safeguarding
The 2004 Children Act requires all local authorities to establish a Local Children's Safeguarding Board. This replaces the Area Child Protection Committee and will be chaired by an independent person appointed by the Director of Children's Services. Day-to-day work of the Board will be managed by a Safeguarding Manager. Its main roles are to set standards, identify best practice and investigate poor practice and complaints, for the purpose of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in Leeds.

3.11 Commissioning services

The approach Leeds has taken in drawing up its children's trust arrangements is very different from that taken by most other authorities, who have moved to set up 'children's departments'. The Leeds model draws a clear separation between *providers* of services and *commissioners* of services. This approach has recently been endorsed by a report prepared for DfES by Price Waterhouse Coopers, whose main recommendation is to separate strategic commissioning from provider services.

3.12 During the early part of 2006, the Director of the Leeds Initiative reviewed the work of partnerships centred on supporting children and young people. This review concluded that there should be a clearer definition of roles between a 'softer' advocacy, challenge and strategy role and the 'harder' role of commissioning services. In implementing the recommendations of this review, the Children Leeds Partnership (see para 14 below) will take on the softer role, while an Integrated Strategic Commissioning Board will address the harder issues of commissioning and budgets.

3.13 The Integrated Strategic Commissioning Board will be chaired by the Director of Children's Services and will comprise 'relevant partners' as set out in the Children Act, plus other key partners from within Leeds. Its role will be to commission services that meet the needs of children and young people, to set standards for service and to monitor performance. It will oversee and monitor the achievement of targets set out in the Children and Young People's Plan.

3.14 The Children Leeds Partnership

The Children Leeds Partnership will be responsible, as a sub-group of the Leeds Initiative, for providing advocacy and challenge to secure better lives for children and young people. In the short term, the Partnership will have a number of sub-groups, some of which already exist, to drive specific aspects of work to support children and young people. These will be reviewed over coming months to see if this can be done more effectively, now that the Children and Young People's Plan is clear about expectations and priorities.

3.15 The Partnership will be chaired by the Lead Executive member for Children's Services with two additional places for councillors (one from the Council's administration and one from the main opposition party). Other members of the Partnership include representatives from Education, Health, Police, Probation, the voluntary and faith sectors and independent service providers.

3.16 Given the importance of making a difference at a local level and having an impact on services which affect the lives of children, for example housing and regeneration, local aspects of children's trust arrangements are crucial. Therefore, at a district level, five Children Leeds Wedge Partnership Groups have been established, linking the Leeds Initiative's District Partnerships with the Council's Area Committees, ensuring there is good Member engagement with issues concerning children and young people.

3.17 Over time, the Children Leeds Wedge partnerships will develop to link more firmly with clusters of schools and children's centres and hence, to front-line children's services.

3.18 The Director of Children's Services Unit

Unlike most local authorities, Leeds's interpretation of the Children Act has not led to the establishment of a 'children's department' (see para 3.4 above). A small interim Unit (currently about 20 people) has been set up, staffed by secondments from across the Council. Recruitment to permanent posts will take place in two phases. The first phase (currently under way) will bring together resources to manage current priorities, further develop thinking and identify what resources will be required for the longer term. These resources will be added if and when necessary, in phase two.

3.19 The Director of Children's Services Unit will work to model changed ways of working and lead by example in every way. It is designed to operate in a number of interlocking layers, each consisting of teams with inter-dependent roles (see Appendix 1). New skills will be required, together with appropriate experience and knowledge. Individual team members will be constantly challenged to work differently and provide solutions in a flexible way, working across traditional boundaries to facilitate change.

3.20 Of particular interest will be the new post of Locality Enabler (one for each of the five areas of the city). This role is to assist the Director of Children's Services is acting as champions for the needs and aspirations of all children, young people and families across Leeds by strategically directing, leading and impacting change at a local level. The role is designed to focus on the needs of a local area, ensuring the smooth running of existing partnerships and turning the vision of Children Leeds into reality.

3.21 From the outset it has been envisaged that the Director of Children's Services Unit will need and benefit from additional support going beyond its basic establishment. This is where the importance of partnership working will come to the fore by linking the Unit with a range of organisations more closely working with the operational side of service delivery. This approach builds on many good examples of joint- or multi-agency working such as extended schools, children's centres and the West Leeds Project.

3.22 Corporate Parenting

In implementing the Council's Corporate parenting Guarantee and Action Plan for looked after children, ten councillors have been recruited (one from each of the inner and outer wedge areas) to bear a special responsibility for children in the Council's foster or residential care. Under the title 'Corporate Carers' Group', these elected members' roles take over monitoring the Regulation 33 inspection of children's homes, but go far beyond this, to include advocacy and championing children and families at a locality level.

4.0 Implications for Area Committees

4.1 The most important consideration when designing the children's trust arrangements has been the transformation and improvement of services for children, young people and families. The aim, as stated in the Children and Young People's Plan, is for all Leeds's youngest citizens to be happy, healthy, safe, successful and free from the effects of poverty.

4.2 A key task of the Director of Children's Services Unit is to bring about a cultural change, both within the Council and among partners – indeed among all the people of Leeds. This change is to encourage all citizens to 'think child' in everything they

do. This is already embedded in the 'traditional' services for children and families, such as social care, education and health. The greater challenge is to apply this in activity where the impact on children's lives is less obvious, such as planning, highways, cleansing (within the Council) and many developments and activities outside the Council.

4.3 Area Committees are in a strong position to use their influence to raise the profile of the children's agenda and ensure the impact on the lives of children and young people is taken into account when any decision is taken. Area Committees are asked to apply and capture a consideration of the impact on children and young people in decisions they take.

5.0 Recommendations

5.1 Area Committee members are asked to note the contents of this report