



Report of the Director of Children's Services

Executive Board

Date: 22 June 2011

Subject: Children's Services Improvement Update Report (June 2011)

Electoral Wards Affected:

Ward Members consulted
(referred to in report)

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)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report provides Executive Board with an update on the improvement activity that is continuing across children's services in Leeds. It follows a series of similar reports presented regularly to the Board to provide an overview of work across the service and partnership, particularly in the context of work of the Children's Services Improvement Board.
2. The report focuses particularly on the following key areas:
 - The wider context, in view of a number of significant national policy developments.
 - Improvement and Inspection Activity, updating on the latest performance information submitted to the Improvement Board, the latest progress review meeting with the Department for Education (DfE) and some significant developments relating to Ofsted's inspection arrangements.
 - The Children's Services Transformation Programme and some key strands of work contributing to this, including an update on the improvement and replacement of the Electronic Social Care Recording (ESCR) system for children's services.

Recommendations

1. It is recommended that Executive Board note the contents of this report and support the continuing direction of travel across children's services in Leeds and our preparations for a possible announced inspection during summer/autumn 2011.

Purpose Of This Report

- 1.1 This report provides the Executive Board with an update on the improvement activity that is continuing across children's services in Leeds. It follows a series of similar reports presented regularly to the Board as a means of giving an overview of work across the service and the partnership, particularly in the context of work of the Children's Services Improvement Board.
- 1.2 The report focuses particularly on the following key areas:
 - Wider context, in view of a number of significant policy developments.
 - Improvement and inspection activity, updating on the latest performance information submitted to the Improvement Board the latest progress review meeting with the Department for Education (DfE) and some significant developments relating to Ofsted's inspection arrangements.
 - The Children's Services Transformation Programme and some key strands of work contributing to this, including an update on the improvement and replacement of the Electronic Social Care Recording (ESCR) system for children's services.

1.0 Background Information

- 1.1 Executive Board has received a number of Improvement Update reports from Children's Services since March 2010, against the background of the Improvement Notice and the independently chaired Improvement Board which was established to monitor and challenge progress. These reports have noted an overall trajectory of improvements, whilst recognising that some significant challenges remain. It is now timely to present another update to the Board, given recent national and local developments, and to raise Executive Board's awareness of some key pieces of work and issues to address in the coming months.

2.0 Main Issues

Wider Context

- 3.1.1 Previous Improvement Update Reports to the Board have set the context of the changing national policy agenda. These considerations continue to be an important contributing factor to the wider direction being developed by children's services in Leeds. Recent months have continued to see a range of policy publications and activity that are shaping this direction. Across much of this policy development the service is still interpreting the key issues and identifying the implications for Leeds. This report cannot do justice to the full scope of these relevant developments, but a list of some of the main areas is included below. As we develop our understanding about the implications, we will determine those areas where it would be helpful to provide Members with more detailed information:
 - The Education Bill, based on the November 2010 White Paper *The Importance of Teaching* is currently progressing through the necessary readings and considerations. It signals some significant changes and moves schools towards a position of greater autonomy and more specific focus on attainment standards.
 - Linked to the Education Bill, the *Wolf Review of Vocational Education* was published in March 2011 and the government has accepted all of its

recommendations. These recommendations will have a significant impact on work currently being done in Leeds to look at the 14-19 learning offer and respond to changing learner needs and the changing policy and financial climate.

- Also published in March was an important Green Paper for schools and also for many other services that work with vulnerable children, young people and families – The Special Educational Needs Green Paper '*Support and aspiration: A new approach to special educational needs and disability*'. It proposes the first significant revisions to SEN policy and practice since the current Code of Practice was issued in 2001. It is the intention of Children's Services in Leeds to respond to this Green Paper as part of the consultation process.
- At the end of March, the Tickell Review of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) was published. It aims to simplify the current EYFS, including reducing 69 benchmarks for progress down to 17. There will be a key role for Children's Services to help childcare providers and others across the city to understand and adapt to these changes.
- Another significant report is the *Munro Review of Child Protection*, which has followed a year-long review of the child protection system. The review was published on 10th May and the government is expected to publish a response in July. If many of the recommendations are adopted, this will signal an important development for local social care services for children and young people, and for the wider services that support this work. It will be critical to understand, address and make the most of these proposals as we take forward new models for safeguarding and supporting vulnerable children, young people and families in Leeds. With this in mind, we will be considering the review in much more detail.
- Finally, and again of importance in relation to the priorities and drivers for Children's Services, is the publication of the current Government's first Child Poverty Strategy, which was published in April 2011. The Strategy continues to set ambitious targets in terms of eradicating child poverty and helps to highlight why Leeds has made tackling child poverty a cross-cutting priority in our new Children and Young People's Plan and in the other themed city plans.

- 3.1.2 The above list is not comprehensive, but it demonstrates the continuing pace of change and national developments to consider, as Leeds continues its improvement journey. Further consideration of the impact of these policy developments will be incorporated into future reports that relate to the specific areas affected.

Improvement and inspection activity

- 3.2 This section takes members through information about progress reported to the Improvement Board in May and June 2011 and discussed with the DfE in a Progress Review Meeting on 20th May. The section then discusses some important considerations, with implications for Leeds, in relation to the Ofsted inspection process.

Improvement Board and progress against the Improvement Notice

- 3.2.1 An interim improvement update, tracking progress against the Improvement Notice was discussed by the Improvement Board on 9 May, submitted to the DfE, and informed the Progress Review Meeting with DfE on 20 May. This update (reporting

performance at the end of March) noted that a recent stock take of improvement activity resulted in 20 strands of work being closed as completed, and outlined the current position of some specific pieces of work, including the transformation programme, future plans to improve consistency of practice across the directorate, and the financial backdrop of children's services funding from the Local Authority.

- 3.2.2 In view of this update and the discussions held with the children's services senior leadership team during their visit, the DfE has provided a formal note of the discussions which indicates their view on the progress being made, current position and next steps in relation to the Improvement Notice. This meeting note is attached at appendix 1. It is pleasing that this note recognises the significant improvements made, the increased confidence and clarity in the leadership, and the openness to external challenge and support. It also recognises, understandably, the ongoing challenges of consistency and sustainability. It suggests that the Improvement Notice could be lifted, as it comes to an end in October 2011, provided that the results of the next announced inspection provided evidence of improvement on the ground.
- 3.2.3 Of particular note with the recent stocktake of performance, and mentioned within the DfE note of the Progress Review Meeting, is the fact that Leeds has achieved and exceeded the targets relating to the percentages of initial and core assessments within children and young people's social care that are carried out within timescales. In both cases, the improvement in performance, despite a huge rise in the volume of cases, reflects the development of capacity in teams and continued effective use of iPerformer in ESCR by all levels of management. An area that remains an ongoing challenge is the timeliness of Initial Child Protection Conferences, although there have been improvements in this area recently against a backdrop of significantly increased workloads. The challenge now is to maintain the improved performance and build on it.
- 3.2.4 Alongside the feedback note from the DfE (appendix 1), in April 2011, Bill McCarthy, Chair of the Improvement Board wrote to Tim Loughton (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families) to update on the progress of children's services in Leeds (letter attached at appendix 2). Again, this letter acknowledges continuing improvement, but also recognises there is more to be done. The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families has responded to this letter (attached at appendix 3). His response confirms the progress made so far and the outstanding challenges, which include consistency of social work practice, quality of case recording and data collection. The letter acknowledges that the Council and its partners addressing these issues, and that the Improvement Board will be monitoring these areas.
- 3.2.5 At its June meeting the Improvement Board received its regular progress report against the outstanding issues within the overarching Children's Services Improvement Plan.. Using the red, amber, green (RAG) progress measure, of the eighteen recommendations still within the Improvement Plan, none are rated as red, 11 are assessed as amber and 7 are green. The main issues to be addressed that remain as 'amber' include the implementation of the Children's Services transformation programme, capacity to deliver of child protection conferences, work to support continued improvement in outcomes for looked after children, the development of a workforce strategy and the delivery of improvements needed to the ESCR and its replacement system (discussed below). In each case work, significant work is taking place to deliver these improvements, within the overall ambition for the city and the new Children and Young People's Plan (being discussed elsewhere on the agenda today).

- 3.2.6 Bill McCarthy, Chair of the Improvement Board, continues to attend the Children's Services Scrutiny Board for their quarterly performance monitoring meetings. The Member Reference Group, established in March 2010 as part of the overall arrangements for improvement, continues to meet, although now less frequently.
- 3.2.7 Taken together, the external commentary on progress in Leeds, evidenced in appendix 1-3, along with the updates provided to the Improvement Board, indicate that the overall direction of travel across children's services performance continues to be on a very positive trend. However, in meeting the city's ambition of excellence, there are some important areas that require a sustained focus in order to meet the city's ambition.

Ofsted Developments

- 3.2.8 A revised Ofsted framework for children's services assessment 2011 was published on 27 April 2011. The main changes relate to the publication date of the assessment, which will be November rather than December. There are particular implications for those authorities in intervention (like Leeds) and where authorities continue to carry an 'inadequate' safeguarding judgment (because there has not been a recent inspection). The approach to the assessment is similar to previous years, with information being drawn from three main areas:
- Block A. Inspections of all children's settings – eg schools, nurseries, residential homes, 6th forms, childminders etc
 - Block B. Inspections of children's services – announced and unannounced; and the rating of Serious Case Reviews
 - Block C. Performance across a range of indicators relating to outcomes for children and young people.
- 3.2.9 At present if a local authority has received an 'inadequate' safeguarding grade following an announced inspection of its safeguarding and looked after children's services, this acts as a 'limiting judgement' (for Block B), meaning that the authority in question is automatically given a 'poor' rating in its annual assessment. This was the case in the Leeds annual assessment in 2010, following the announced safeguarding inspection that took place in December 2009 which resulted in an 'inadequate' grade.
- 3.2.10 Following the changes to the assessment framework, local authorities that are still carrying an 'inadequate' rating from their last announced inspection (as Leeds is, having not been re-inspected since 2009) may be subject to re-inspection, with the new grade following re-inspection then counting towards the 2011 assessment.
- 3.2.11 To help Ofsted make a decision about those authorities it will re-inspect during 2011, it has written to authorities currently carrying an 'inadequate' safeguarding rating and asked them to submit evidence to help inform its inspection programme. Leeds submitted a pack of evidence about the improvement journey and following this exchange, we anticipate that Leeds will be the subject of an announced inspection by the autumn of 2011 at the latest. The necessary work is underway, with full corporate support, to make appropriate arrangements for such an inspection. If an inspection does take place by the autumn then it will inform the annual assessment, which will be published in November.

3.3 Wider Improvement Activity

Leeds Education Challenge

- 3.3.1 A letter was sent by Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education, on 1 March 2011, to all local authorities, advising of rises in floor standards for primary and secondary schools and requesting that each local authority develops plans for improving performance in all schools below the floor standards (in summary, the standards have risen from 30% of pupils achieving 5 or more GCSE A*-C grades including Maths and English, to 35%).
- 3.3.2 In response to this letter, Leeds submitted a copy of the Leeds Education Challenge, which responded to the issues raised by the Secretary of State, and set that response within a broader approach to school improvement and ambitions of the Children and Young People's Plan.
- 3.3.3 This submission to DfE is an important development for Leeds, particularly in the context of the national policy change for schools discussed earlier in this report. The Leeds Education Challenge very clearly puts schools themselves at the heart of driving improvement, whilst reflecting the supporting role and expertise that the local authority can offer, and placing schools at the heart of wider children's services locally. The plan represents work in progress, and is currently the subject of significant discussions with headteachers, governors, members and partners. Further updates will be provided when the plans have been refined in response to issues and ideas from those discussions.
- 3.3.4 In terms of the wider education context, another significant recent development has been an external review of education services in Leeds, carried out by Sir Tim Brighouse and another nationally recognised colleague, David Woods. This took place in March and included conversations with a wide range of colleagues including headteachers, education staff, senior officers and politicians. The report is not yet finalised, but it will be soon, and will be reported to those who were involved in the review and more widely to those who can help on the improvement journey.

Replacement of Electronic Social Care Records (ESCR) System for children's services – latest position

- 3.3.5 The ESCR system has been highlighted as a particular weakness within children's services in Leeds in a number of inspections, and its improvement and replacement are integral to the strategy for improving safeguarding systems in Leeds and supporting front line practice.
- 3.3.6 When Executive Board discussed the March 2010 Improvement Update, and the Ofsted 'unannounced' inspection letter on the same agenda, they particularly asked to be kept up to date with developments on this important area of activity.
- 3.3.7 Executive Board has received a number of reports on the ESCR system, and proposals for its replacement. In January 2010 Executive Board committed to procure a new system for children's services, which represented a significant step forward on the improvement journey. However, until this system is in operation and making a difference in support of high quality front line practice, the electronic system remains an issue for the service, staff and for inspections.
- 3.3.8 Within this context, there are two aspects on which to report to Executive Board at this time: maintenance of the current ESCR system and progress with procuring the replacement ICT system.

- 3.3.9 In relation to the current system, there has been an ESCR development plan in place across both children's and adults' social care. There have been some significant improvements to the current ESCR system, especially in relation to support for improved performance management, as reported in previous improvement updates and referred to in para 3.2.3 of this report.
- 3.3.10 However, some of the current problems with the ESCR system relate to work ongoing within the Council to implement Internet Explorer 8 (IE8), as part of the Council's Essential Services Programme, which has been agreed as a priority and is required to enable other technologies used across the council to operate effectively (Internet Explorer 6 is outdated, and many systems and applications will not work with it going forward).
- 3.3.11 As previously reported the technology underpinning the ESCR system is outdated (Over 8 years old). As a result, new developments on the system are not straightforward, problems arise that can elongate timescales for delivery. Additional issues are the incompatibility of the old system with other generic software to be used within the Council. These problems are only identified through rigorous testing, which can delay developments, and are only resolved through jointly working with Oracle (the supplier) on new patches for the system. Oracle's commitment and appetite on resolving issues with old versions of software is low.
- 3.3.12 Given the circumstances of implementing major changes to the existing ESCR system, there is renewed focus on looking creatively at what smaller scale improvements can be delivered that will support front line practice, but without significant development time or major risks. There is optimism that some small changes can be made in the term, without compromising the preparatory work for the new system. Progress on this and its impact will be reported in subsequent update reports.
- 3.3.13 In relation to the new system for children's services, current activity is focused on staff workshops to develop the detail of a statement of requirements, ready for the procurement stage. During April, more than 130 front line staff attended 16 workshops to support this development process. The workshops are an important aspect of making sure that the specification for the new system is right, and helpful to the broader change programme to ensure ownership of the new system. Additionally, there is work underway with potential suppliers to see what the market is doing in relation to taking account of potential policy and legislative change (for example in light of the Munro review). Our current planning assumption is that 'go live' will be in Autumn 2012.

3.4 Transformation Programme Update

- 3.4.1 Executive Board has, through these update reports, been kept regularly informed of progress towards the development of a new integrated children's services structure. Since the last update report, this work has continued to take some important steps forward, notably with the advertising of the four tier 2 senior leadership posts reporting to the Director of Children's Services, for which interviews will take place during June and July. The detail of the next tier of leadership posts is underway, and detailed design work is progressing for the specific service areas that will report into these posts. In addition, a number of specific areas of development are underpinning the wider implementation of new arrangements, several of which are outlined below:

- 3.4.2 As members will be aware, the Education Leeds contract was closed as of 31st March 2011. As a result, Education Leeds employees, via the TUPE process, are now employees of Leeds City Council. This process was conducted effectively and efficiently, with the relevant HR and ICT requirements met in a timely way.

Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA)

- 3.4.3 As outlined in the March report, the Children's Trust Board has endorsed the commitment of children's services to using a outcomes based accountability methodology to develop practical action plans for improving key performance trends. The roll-out of the approach, following successful pilot work in Bramley and Inner and Outer Pudsey, is continuing at a locality level, with trained facilitators allocated to each cluster and cluster chairs offered the opportunity to host OBA workshops on the three obsessions from the CYPP. This approach is helpfully sharpening the focus on performance information and reporting. CYPP dashboards have been created and regular report cards will be produced, in line with the OBA approach, which focuses on 'turning the curve'. These will be used for a variety of audiences to help with driving performance, including local cluster groups, service areas, Area Committees, Children's Trust Board, Scrutiny Board and Executive Board.

Restorative Practice

- 3.4.4 The restorative practice approach is also being developed across Leeds, with financial commitments made through partners and the Children's Trust Board to launch an initial programme to build capacity and offer training opportunities. The central tenet of restorative practice is that outcomes are more likely to be positive when those in authority do things with children, young people and families rather than to them, and all practitioners involved with a family have a shared set of values, shared language, and commitment to building relationships and connections with children, young people, families and other agencies. It is anticipated that a significant proportion of the restorative practice programme will be delivered through the cluster model.

Budget Re-Basing

- 3.4.5 As part of the integration of Children's Services and in the context of striving for greater efficiencies, it is necessary to look at how the services' budgets are currently organised and how they need to be organised in the future. To this effect the Children's Services Revenue Budget Re-Basing Programme has recently begun. The project will incorporate research into how other local authorities are operating within the current financial climate, alongside examining our own services and functions to effectively allocate resources to our biggest priorities and find additional savings. Phase one of the project will involve approximately thirty reviews of high-priority services or functions, which will look at costs, outputs, performance, pressures and new ideas, including opportunities for investing now to save later. It is important that we accurately 're-base', or change the level of service/ function budgets for 2011 – 12, so that we identify savings now to give us a new starting point for 2012 – 13. The project will run until the end of September 2011.

4.0 Implications For Council Policy And Governance

- 4.1 The improvement work taking place across children's services has a high profile, and is critical to meet our statutory responsibilities to children and young people of Leeds, and also for the council and the city's reputation. It is vital therefore that this work is carried through positively using all relevant council frameworks, capacity, approaches and governance.
- 4.2 There are no specific issues in relation to Equality, Diversity and Cohesion and Integration, except that there is a continuous theme of narrowing the gap and supporting the more vulnerable running through the children's agenda.

5.0 Legal And Resource Implications

- 5.1 There are no specific financial or resource implications arising from this report, although clearly the restructure work referred to has the potential for significant resource and particularly Human Resources implications. Discussions and activity around the handling of these issues are ongoing. The report makes specific reference to the children's services budget re-basing programme.

6.0 Recommendations

- 6.1 It is recommended that Executive Board note the contents of this report, and support the continuing direction of travel across children's services in Leeds and our preparations for a possible announced inspection during summer 2011.

Background Documents

Report to Executive Board March 2011: Children's Services Improvement Update Report