



Report of the Director of Children's Services

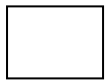
Scrutiny Board

Date: 21 July 2011

Subject: Children's Services – Report on current developments

Electoral Wards Affected:

All



Ward Members consulted
(referred to in report)

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 At its June 2011 meeting the Children and Families Scrutiny Board discussed its workplan for the coming year. As part of this discussion Nigel Richardson, Director of Children's Services agreed that the Board would be provided with an overview paper highlighting some key national policy and local developments that are critical to the ongoing improvement journey. This report provides Scrutiny Board with this overview. Members may find it helpful to read this report in conjunction with the Children's Services Improvement Update report submitted to 22 June 2011 Executive Board and consider it within the context of their role in developing the Children and Young People's Plan.
- 1.2 This report briefly highlights some key national developments and then focuses particularly on cluster developments for integrated locality service delivery and then on developments relating to the Leeds Education Challenge, these were the two areas where members identified a particular interest at their June meeting. The report will be supported by a presentation from Nigel Richardson and appropriate colleagues at the Scrutiny Board meeting.

2.0 Background Information

- 2.1 Scrutiny Board have played an important role, as part of the arrangements for improving children's services in Leeds. They have received regular reports about local developments and delivery against the Improvement Plan, including updates from the independent chair of the Improvement Board. These reports have noted an overall trajectory of improvements, whilst recognising that some significant challenges remain for the city to be able to deliver against the ambitions set out

within the Children and Young People's Plan. The Scrutiny Board has contributed to the improvement process through a number of relevant inquiries.

National Developments

- 2.2 There continue to be significant national developments influencing the local direction of the work to improve outcomes for children and young people. This section shows just a very brief highlight of some of these developments to inform Scrutiny's considerations of the local developments.
- 2.3 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. It also indicates some significant changes around the Admissions Code.
- 2.4 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.
- 2.5 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.
- 2.6 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.
- 2.7 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 has now published its response, in which it accepts all of the recommendations and sets out a series of proposals with their timescales for implementation. The report signals an important development for local social care services for children and young people, and for the wider services that support this work. We will ensure that we use the findings of the review to help us take forward new models for safeguarding and supporting vulnerable children, young people and families in Leeds.
- 2.8 Another important development 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.

Improvement and Inspection Activity

- 2.9 Whilst this report is not focusing on the progress against the Improvement Plan, it is important context to note the latest position following the regular progress meeting with Leeds and DfE. This meeting took place on 20 May and the outcome note is attached to this paper 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 provides evidence of improvement on the ground.
- 2.10 Ofsted has set out its revised approach to the annual assessment of children's services, in a publication 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). More detail is available for members if required, but the main implication of this is that Leeds will be subject to an *announced inspection of Looked after Children and Safeguarding* before October 2011. The necessary work is underway, with full corporate support, to make appropriate arrangements for such an inspection. The results of this inspection will then inform the overall annual assessment of children's services in Leeds, which will be published in November.
- 3.0 Cluster developments**
- 3.1 Members will be aware that clusters of schools developed in Leeds from about 2006, to deliver the 'extended schools' core offer. Initially, there were 38 clusters. Many of these, over time, developed into multi-agency clusters as the 'extended schools' became 'extended services' and the core offer could only be fulfilled with support and engagement from wider partners.
- 3.2 In working to deliver the Children and Young People's Plan 2006-2009, clusters were a significant development as a way of delivering the locality agenda set out in that plan, and as a way of trying to drive the integration of services locally. Many members are involved on cluster leadership groups directly, or aware of the developments from their role as school governors. Strong support has been provided to develop cluster based working, and funding has also been available to support this development.
- 3.3 As the integration of services has developed and been supported by tools and processes that enable people to work together, many clusters have become a significant focus for partnership working. As a result we now have 27 clusters, as many have worked closely together to enable better integration – for example a cluster where there is no high school has joined with the neighboring cluster so that transition issues can be better managed.
- 3.4 All the service redesign work done in 2010 (following the Children's Services Review published in March 2010) suggested we should use clusters as the basis for locality developments to help ensure we have strong universal and early preventative services, as well providing a means through which better targeted and

specialist services can be delivered. In April, the Children's Trust Board agreed to a set of minimum standards for clusters, covering, for example, the key partners to be involved in meetings, the frequency of meetings and key roles. The paper outlining these standards can be provided on request to the Scrutiny Board

- 3.5 It is not possible here to do justice to the full range of developments currently underway within each cluster and the city as a whole. However, there has for some time been growing momentum around this agenda, this is demonstrated in a number of ways:
- Cluster Chairs meet regularly and receive regular communications to support them in their leadership role.
 - Clusters are the basis through which we are organising the Leeds approach to using the outcomes based accountability (OBA) methodology (discussed in previous reports to scrutiny) to improve services.
 - Clusters have started using this OBA methodology to develop localised plans that respond to their specific cluster profile and work within the context of the funding allocated to them through the schools forum.
 - Some specific partnership based initiatives within clusters have delivered measurable improvements for particular groups of young people and demonstrated the value of the model.
- 3.6 The next phase of work will focus on developing more consistency and maturity across the different clusters to ensure they are able to address the full range of Children and Young People's Plan priority areas. Through the restructure work taking place in children's services, responsibilities will be aligned to support this work. There will also be a growing and more consistent role for elected members – over the summer proposals are being drawn up for elected member representation on the cluster partnerships, these will be considered by Member Management Committee at their next available meeting.
- 3.7 Also crucial to the next stage of the agenda is the use of data and performance information. Significant progress has been made on this area recently to build on work already done for clusters and Area Committees. We are now looking to ensure that performance data is available to clusters in the key areas that will help them address the 'obsessions' within the Children and Young People's Plan. Members may also be aware of 'early adopter' cluster where we are doing more intensive learning and development work for the services involved to inform wider roll-out and ensure improvements and greater consistency.
- 3.8 These cluster developments are being taken forward within the broader context of locality working across the city and the role of Area Committees. The direction of these cluster developments is consistent with the design principles set out.

4.0 The Leeds Education Challenge

- 4.1 Education has been an important issue for Leeds over a number of years and in recent years significant improvements have been achieved. However, there is still much more to do in terms of educational outcomes, both in overall improvements and particularly in respect of vulnerable groups. Scrutiny Board gave detailed recent consideration to some of these issues earlier this year when they discussed the Primary and Secondary standards reports.
- 4.2 In March, Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education, wrote 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%).

- 4.3 In response to this letter, Leeds developed and submitted a copy of the Leeds Education Challenge. This provided the necessary details to reply to the Secretary of State's letter and set that response within a broader approach to school improvement and the ambitions of the Children and Young People's Plan. The Leeds Education Challenge document will be provided for members of the scrutiny board to enable them to consider the detail. It sets out some very clear pledges and ambitions for change in the city.
- 4.4 This submission to the 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 – linking in to the discussion above about clusters. The plan represents work in progress, and is currently the subject of significant discussions with headteachers, governors, members and partners. During the summer term, these discussions culminated in a major conference for Leeds head teachers on 12 July. Over 200 heads attended this conference and at the Scrutiny Board meeting more detailed feedback will be provided about the key proposals made, issues discussed and feedback received.
- 4.5 Part of developing the Leeds Education Challenge was an independent review of education in Leeds, which has been undertaken 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 final report from this review will also be provided to members of the Scrutiny Board. The findings of the review were a key part of the conference on 12 July.
- 4.6 A Member's Seminar on current education issues is being organised for during August, as an opportunity to bring members up to speed with the latest developments and engage them in those developments. This will cover issues relating to schools governance, admissions and wider developments

5.0 Implications For Council Policy And Governance

- 5.1 The developments outlined in this report have a number of implications for Council policy and in some cases governance. The changing national policy agenda outlined at the start of the report is being considered both collectively and on a case-by-case basis to ensure that we are adapting to the shifting context. The work around clusters needs to be seen in the context of the wider developments around children's trust arrangements. As mentioned above, consideration is currently being given as to the best way to fully engage elected members in this work. The work with schools around the Education Challenge and the development of a new relationship with the local authority is also being taken forward with full awareness of how this interlinks with the changing national education agenda and the potential implications for school governance and how this is supported by the local authority.

6.0 Legal And Resource Implications

6.1 There are no specific legal or resource implications arising from this report.

7.0 Conclusions

7.1 This report provides members with an brief overview of some key developments relating to the children's services agenda in Leeds, it aims to help inform members in understanding the current context and development an effective work plan for the year ahead. It will be complemented by a presentation to members at the Scrutiny Board meeting and further background information being provided.

8.0 Background Documents

Sir Tim Brighouse report on Education in Leeds.

The Leeds Education Challenge

Children's Services Improvement Update Report to Executive Board June 2011