

Scrutiny Board (Children and Families)

External Placements

Terms of reference

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Scrutiny Board has been tasked with carrying out a piece of work this year on each of the three Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) obsessions. The first of these relates to reducing the number of looked after children.
- 1.2 The council has adopted an Outcome Based Accountability approach to addressing the obsessions, drawing up plans to 'turn the curve' and improve performance. In relation to this particular obsession, earlier intervention is seen as key to achieving the Children and Young People's Plan priority to help children and young people to live in safe and supportive families.
- 1.3 The Board is also aware that the key budget challenge for Children's Services is managing expenditure on external placements for looked after children. This includes both the use of independent fostering agencies in addition to council foster carers and also residential placements for children and young people outside of the council's own residential provision, in some cases outside of the Leeds area.
- 1.4 The current trend of both an increasing dependence on external placements and rising costs is not unique to Leeds, but it is an area that we must address if we are to be able to manage our budgets effectively at a time of diminishing resources, and also be able to reinvest in early intervention to meet our aspirations for 'turning the curve'. We have therefore decided to focus our scrutiny inquiry for this obsession on the issue of external placements.
- 1.5 We also want to emphasise at the outset that we are clear as a Scrutiny Board that safeguarding our children and young people cannot be compromised, as reflected in the CYPP outcome that our children and young people should be safe from harm. Any recommendations we make will take account of the need to ensure that our children and young people are safely provided for.

2.0 Scope of the inquiry

- 2.1 The purpose of the Inquiry is to make an assessment of and, where appropriate, make recommendations on:
 - Opportunities to safely reduce reliance on external placements; and
 - Scope to reduce the costs of external placements that continue to be needed.

- 2.2 The Board hopes that its findings will provide a timely and positive contribution to tackling this particular obsession within the Children and Young People's Plan.

3.0 Comments of the relevant director and executive member

- 3.1 This inquiry is included in the Scrutiny Board's terms of reference, reflecting one of the three obsessions in the Children and Young People's Plan, which is the multi-agency city priority plan.
- 3.2 Specific suggestions regarding additional evidence and potential witnesses have been incorporated into the final terms of reference.

4.0 Timetable for the inquiry

- 4.1 The inquiry will take place in September and October 2011, with a view to issuing a final report by the end of 2011 in order to inform the budget process.
- 4.2 The inquiry will conclude with the publication of a formal report setting out the board's conclusions and recommendations.

5.0 Submission of evidence

- 5.1 The Board will receive evidence through a combination of formal Board meetings and smaller working group meetings or visits with stakeholders and relevant service providers.

5.2 Scrutiny Board meetings – 8 September and 6 October 2011

The following evidence will be required for the Board meetings:

- The CYPP action plan relating to the Looked After Children obsession, as background and context to the inquiry
- Data on the numbers of external placements, trends and costs
- Comparative information regarding internal placements
- Information on the actions being taken to manage demand for and costs of independent foster care placements
- Information on the actions being taken to manage demand for and costs of external residential placements
- Information on joint funding of placements and information on commissioning activity including regional and joint working
- Information on activity to increase internal capacity
- Information on activity to review options for exit from care
- Evidence of impact of the early adopter programmes for the cluster based model
- Evidence of the ongoing research by Prof David Thorpe into referral and assessment arrangements.
- Information on best practice from other local authorities

The October session will also include consideration of the findings from working group meetings and visits.

The board will then consider emerging conclusions and recommendations to inform the production of the final inquiry report.

5.3 Working Group meetings and visits

These will be scheduled as far as possible between the two formal Board meeting inquiry sessions.

- 5.4 The following potential working group meetings and visits have been identified:
- Local authority residential care provision
 - External care provision
 - Independent fostering agency
 - Group of foster carers
 - Attendance as observer at Head of Service Decision and Review Panel and/or Placement Panel
 - Attendance as observer at Joint Funding Panel

6.0 **Witnesses**

- 6.1 The following witnesses have been identified as potential contributors to the Inquiry:
- Children's Services officers – Children and Young People's Social Care, finance and commissioning
 - Partner agencies – joint and regional funding
 - Prof David Thorpe
 - Other local authorities/C4EO (Centre for Excellent Outcomes) – re good practice
 - Children and young people (via the children in care council)
- 6.2 The Board will always seek to include the views of children and young people and their parents and carers as evidence to its inquiries wherever possible and practicable.

7.0 **Equality, Diversity and Cohesion and Integration Issues**

- 7.1 Where appropriate, all terms of reference for work undertaken by the Scrutiny Boards will include
- To review how and to what effect consideration has been given to the impact of a service or policy on all equality areas, as set out in the council's Equality and Diversity scheme, and on the council's Cohesion and Integration Priorities and Delivery Plan.
- 7.2 The objectives of this inquiry particularly reflect the following theme from the council's Equality and Diversity scheme:
- Service Delivery – Leeds City Council provides fair access to services which meet the needs of our diverse communities and individuals.

8.0 Monitoring Arrangements

- 8.1 Following the completion of the scrutiny inquiry and the publication of the final inquiry report and recommendations, the implementation of the agreed recommendations will be monitored.
- 8.2 The final inquiry report will include information on the detailed arrangements for monitoring the implementation of recommendations.

9.0 Measures of success

- 9.1 It is important to consider how the Board will deem whether its inquiry has been successful in making a difference to local people. Some measures of success may be obvious at the initial stages of an inquiry and can be included in these terms of reference. Other measures of success may become apparent as the inquiry progresses and discussions take place.
- 9.2 The Board will look to publish practical recommendations.