

Report of the Director of Children's Services

Report to Scrutiny Board (Children and Families)

Date: 12th January 2012

Subject: Children Services Improvement Update Report (January 2012)

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

1.0 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report provides the Children and Families Scrutiny Board with an update on key improvement activity that is continuing across Children's Services in Leeds. For some time the Board has received these regular, wide ranging update reports and since the government placed an Improvement Notice on Children's Services in Leeds in March 2010, they have been used to update the Board on progress against this Notice. This has been an important part of the monitoring and accountability arrangements for the work of the service.
- 1.2 Given a number of recent developments in relation to this improvement work it is now timely to update the Board again and to also provide a brief update on some other important areas of activity.

2.0 Background information

- 2.1 During 2009 a range of performance information and in particular the outcomes of the unannounced and announced Ofsted inspections relating to safeguarding and looked after children's services, highlighted significant performance challenges. As a result of the concerns highlighted and in response to the shared improvement aspirations of the local authority, partners across the city and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (now the DfE) a number of measures were put in place that aimed to underpin significant and rapid improvement in Children's Services.

- 2.2 Foremost amongst these measures, the Department issued an Improvement Notice setting targets for the level and nature of improvement expected of Leeds in order to sufficiently strengthen services for children and young people. These targets were set for completion within an 18 month timescale, with clear interim monitoring and reporting arrangements.
- 2.3 Leeds developed a detailed Improvement Plan setting out how it would work to address these targets. An Improvement Board, with an Independent Chair, Bill McCarthy and representatives from key partners across the city, was established to monitor and challenge progress.
- 2.4 Since March 2010 rigorous monthly monitoring reports have been provided to the Improvement Board to enable them to monitor and challenge progress. Additionally, interim reports have been provided to the DfE in May and October 2010 and May 2011, which have formed the basis of the progress review meetings between the DfE and Leeds. Bill McCarthy has also provided regular reports to the Minister of State from his perspective as chair of the Improvement Board. All of the above performance monitoring information has been used to provide detailed quarterly progress updates to the Council's Executive Board, Children and Families Scrutiny Board, and a Cross Party Member Reference Group, the Children's Trust Board, the LSCB and other stakeholders.
- 2.5 There have been a number of developments during 2011 that have highlighted the progress being made. The unannounced Ofsted inspection in January 2011, the announced inspection in September 2011 (both reported to the Scrutiny Board), other services inspections (such as the fostering and adoption services, the Youth Offending Service and Children's Centres) and the Annual Performance Assessment published in November 2011, all noted significant progress. More broadly the service has been undertaking an ambitious reorganisation to put a new, integrated structure in place, the Leeds Education Challenge has been launched, city partnership arrangements have been strengthened and there is a clear vision in place for what Children's Services is aiming to achieve and how it will do this.

3.0 Main issues

Improvement Update

- 3.1 In view of the progress mentioned in 2.5 above, and the original timescale set out in the Improvement Notice, during the last quarter of 2011 work took place to enable Ministers and the DfE to take a view on the position in Leeds and the approach to ensuring further improvement in the future. There have been two particularly critical elements to this:
- 3.2 Firstly, a review meeting held in November between officers, the Executive Member and partner organisations from Leeds, with DfE representatives, in which the progress made against the Improvement Notice was reviewed in detail, a summary is attached at appendix A. In short, many areas of the Improvement Notice have been achieved in full, for example targets for Initial and Core Assessments. Some of the 'process' areas of the Notice are well on the way to being achieved but will be a journey of continuous improvement, for example, the quality and consistency of

practice. There are also a few areas of the Improvement Notice that have not been met such as the very challenging NEET targets. These are now being picked up in the Children and Young People's Plan and in the Leeds Education Challenge. Overall, significant progress has been made in all areas, as recognised in recent Ofsted reports.

- 3.3 Secondly, the latest letter from the Chair of the Improvement Board, Bill McCarthy, to the Minister for Children and Families, Tim Loughton, sent on 8th December and attached at appendix B. In this letter Bill McCarthy states that:

'To their credit, the council has placed children's services right at the top of their priorities, with continuous leadership focus from the new Chief Executive and Director as well as from political leadership across all groups... My view is that the council has reached the point... where the Improvement Notice and Improvement Board arrangements can safely be removed'.

- 3.4 In light of the review meeting, the letter from Bill McCarthy and a range of wider performance and contextual information the Minister for Children and Families wrote to the Leader of the Council on 21st December and detailed his assessment of the progress made in Leeds and the position moving forward. This letter is attached at appendix C and confirms the Minister's decision to lift the Improvement Notice with immediate effect.
- 3.5 This decision is another positive endorsement for the progress being made across the city. Following from the unannounced and announced inspection outcomes this year it highlights the greater confidence now in place that Leeds has the self awareness and 'grip' to take forward its own improvement agenda, using external support and challenge on an ongoing basis.
- 3.6 The Minister's letter does highlight areas where particular focus needs to continue, specifically to maintain the momentum around safeguarding and especially to address some key issues around education. The DfE have asked to meet with Leeds in March 2012 to monitor our progress. Plans are in place in each of the areas highlighted.

Maintaining the Focus on Improvement

- 3.7 The developments outlined above demonstrate the progress made, but are only the foundations for the much more ambitious improvements we want for all children and young people in Leeds. During the term of the Improvement Notice and Improvement Board many changes have taken place in children's services, in particular the strengthening of governance arrangements through the Children's Trust Board and Local Safeguarding Children Board. We have also developed a stronger vision for what we want to achieve, captured in the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) and forming an important part of the city's planning framework.
- 3.8 The Children's Trust Board is now operating well and has an ambitious and widely owned CYPP, which includes areas where there are significant outstanding challenges in terms of outcomes for children and young people in the city. The Leeds Education Challenge supports the CYPP as an ambitious plan to improve

learning in the city given the outstanding performance challenges in this area. The Local Safeguarding Children Board plays a crucial challenge role to the arrangements with its quality assurance focus and Children's Services can now be more confident about being effective in its key independent role.

- 3.9 It is important to complement these arrangements so that we maintain strong and extensive external support and challenge. As such it is proposed that we establish a Leeds Children's Services Challenge and Support Panel. The panel will have input across a range of partners and disciplines and from inside and outside the city. It will meet twice a year to maintain the focus on improvement. The panel will draw on experts on Outcomes Based Accountability, Restorative Practice, workforce development, and other key drivers for positive change, and the authority will partner with at least one 'Excellent' authority so that we make the most of peer learning opportunities.
- 3.10 We are also putting in place a new Improvement Plan for children's services in Leeds. The new plan is concentrating on bringing together the issues that are potentially outstanding from the current Improvement Plan/Notice, issues from the annual assessment and Ofsted recommendations from the most recent safeguarding inspection. It is likely to be a signposting document rather than a detailed plan as the different elements are now being monitored in detail elsewhere, for example through the Leeds Education Challenge. The plan will offer the coherence of related areas and provide an assurance that Children's Services is not being complacent.
- 3.11 Elected Members will continue to have a critical role to play in the ongoing monitoring of progress. Update reports will be brought at timely intervals to the Children and Families Scrutiny Board and to Executive Board, half yearly performance reports detailing localised information will continue to be produced for Area Committees. Elected Members continue to have a role on the Children's Trust Board and LSCB. In addition, the Member Management Committee have now approved the appointment of elected members to each of the Children's Services Cluster Partnerships across the city. These local partnerships of schools and other key services will play an increasingly critical role in overseeing, prioritising and delivering local services to children and families.

Ongoing Developments

- 3.12 The foundation that these developments lay for ongoing improvement in Children's Services will enable some key areas of work to progress over the coming year. In summary, some of the main areas to be progressed are:
- Taking forward the Leeds Education Challenge: This will be a critical year for the development of the relationship with schools and the work to address some important performance challenges around the learning agenda. A report to the November Executive Board outlined the rationale for the Education Challenge approach and the proposals for how this work is being taken forward. Senior Officers are working closely with Leeds Headteachers to build the momentum around this and put in place the practical arrangements that will strengthen this approach. At the same time, discussions with the Department for Education

are continuing to ensure effective steps are being taken to increase the pace of improvement in those schools facing particular challenges.

- Work is continuing to embed the use of outcomes based accountability across the partnership, and to use restorative practice as unifying way of working together and of working differently with children and families.
- Work is also progressing with the procurement and planning for a new Electronic Social Care system for children's services, the Scrutiny Board will continue to be kept up-to-date on this through its working group.
- The implementation of the new structure for the Directorate is progressing well, a number of key leadership posts at Head of Service and Senior Manager level have now been made and this process is continuing at the current time. Officers appointed so far have taken up post and are taking forward the design and development work to deliver closer integration of services and ultimately better outcomes for children and young people.

3.13 On each of these issues more details can be provided for Members at the Scrutiny Board meeting, or through specific information reports if requested.

4.0 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

4.1.1 There are no specific implications under this heading.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

4.2.1 There are no specific implications under this heading.

4.3 Council Policies and City Priorities

4.3.1 Improvements in Children's Services across Leeds are a priority for the city. Significant partnership focus has been addressed to this over the last two years, so the decision to lift the Improvement Notice is an important and positive further development. Along with the inspection outcomes reported previously to the Scrutiny Board, this provides the foundations from which the service can move forward towards realising our bigger ambitions in terms of what we want to achieve for children and young people in Leeds, as set out in the City Priority Plan.

4.4 Resources and Value for Money

4.4.1 There are no specific implications under this heading.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

4.5.1 There are no specific implications under this heading.

4.6 Risk Management

4.6.1 There are no specific implications under this heading.

5.0 Conclusions

5.1 The decision to lift the Improvement Notice with immediate effect illustrates the progress made across the city over the last two years and provides a further basis on which the pace and ambitions for future improvement can continue.

Background documents

A number of regular 'Improvement Update' Reports have been produced for the Scrutiny Board since the Improvement Notice was put in place in March 2010. The last full Improvement Update was in July 2011.

The Scrutiny Board have also received reports on key Children's Services Inspections.