



Commissioning Board

A special health authority

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Tim Loughton
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
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Dear Minister

LEEDS CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT BOARD

I am writing to update you on progress with the work of the Leeds Children's Services Improvement Board.

The Improvement Board first met in January 2010 and I have submitted regular reports to Ministers since then.

As set out in the Improvement Notice, Children's Services in Leeds have had a great deal of work to do and ground to make up to achieve the aims of giving every child in the city a safe environment and the best chance of achieving their potential. I am pleased that the unannounced and announced safeguarding inspections undertaken this calendar year and the overall performance assessment by OFSTED have confirmed that significant improvement has been made – services are now judged to be adequate with good prospects for the future. The announced inspection of safeguarding saw measurable improvements in six of the nine categories, with five now good including ambition, capacity to improve, leadership and performance. This is very encouraging. But we should not underestimate the distance still to travel to achieve consistent excellence.

Since I started chairing the Improvement Board, I have been looking for evidence of self-generated momentum and sustainability of change. Three factors are, in my view, essential:

- an open outlook, benchmarking Leeds against other areas and searching out the very best practice to adopt;
- a culture of performance with a rigorous and unrelenting focus on key measures and indicators of impact on children and young people's outcomes;
- strong leadership.

At its inception, the Improvement Board needed to compensate for weaknesses in each of these critical areas – we brought an expert, external perspective to the work of the council and its partners; we required the improvement plans to be monitored rigorously and ensured that members and council leadership fora had progress reported regularly; we gave support and direction to two interim Directors and advised on leadership arrangements.

I am satisfied that capability and focus is now very different. 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. Through his own initiative, the new Director has brought national and international expert advisers to the development of services; and is proposing to establish a twice-yearly reference event to take external advice. Partnership arrangements across the city are much improved and characterised by shared commitment and responsibility. A fully-refreshed leadership team has been recruited, and I have been assured that a granular and hard-headed approach to implementing and sustaining improvement plans will be maintained and hard-wired into the council's own corporate performance governance arrangements and the Children's Trust Board.

Our judgement is now how best to accelerate improvement into the future. I am confident that leaders in the city are honest and fully aware of the work still to be done. The language of ambition and obsession for young people in the city is an authentic reflection of the developing culture.

My view is that the council has reached the point, on the basis of the steps outlined in the paragraphs above, where the Improvement Notice and Improvement Board arrangements can safely be removed. Indeed, I believe this would reinforce local momentum and commitment as well as being a fair response to the progress made.

I hope this is a helpful summary and recommendation.

Yours sincerely



Bill McCarthy
Managing Director – NHS Commissioning Board Authority
Independent Chair for Leeds Children's Services Improvement Board