

Report of Head of Scrutiny and Member Development

Report to Scrutiny Board (Children and Families)

Date: 9th February 2012

Subject: Inquiry on External Placements – Draft Final Report & Recommendations

| | | |
|--|------------------------------|--|
| 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? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number: | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |

Summary of main issues

1. The Scrutiny Board had 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.
2. This inquiry has now been completed.
3. The draft scrutiny inquiry report will follow and will be available prior to the meeting.

Recommendations

4. Members are asked to consider the Board's draft final report and recommendations following completion of its deliberations on this issue.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Scrutiny Board had 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 was 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 must be addressed if we are to be able to manage budgets effectively and also be able to reinvest in early intervention to meet the Council's aspirations for 'turning the curve'. We therefore decided to focus our scrutiny inquiry for this obsession on the issue of external placements.
- 1.5 We emphasised at the outset 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 have made takes account of the need to ensure that our children and young people are safely provided for.

2.0 Corporate Considerations

(a) Consultation and Engagement

- 2.1 Scrutiny Board Procedure Rule 13.2 states that "where a Scrutiny Board is considering making specific recommendations it shall invite advice from the appropriate Director(s) prior to finalising its recommendations. The Director shall consult with the appropriate Executive Member before providing any such advice. The detail of that advice shall be reported to the Scrutiny Board and considered before the report is finalised."
- 2.2 The Director of Children's Services has been consulted and his advice and comments will be submitted to Members when considering their final report.
- 2.3 Where internal and external consultation and engagement processes have been undertaken with regard to this particular inquiry, details of any such action is referenced within the inquiry report.

(b) Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 2.4 Where consideration has been given to the impact on equality areas, as defined in the Council's Equality and Diversity Scheme, this will be referenced within the inquiry report.

(c) Council Policies and City Priorities

- 2.5 Children and Young People's Plan

(d) Resources and Value for Money

- 2.6 Details of any significant resource and financial implications linked to the Scrutiny Inquiry will be referenced within the inquiry report.

(e) Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

- 2.7 This report does not contain any exempt or confidential information.

(f) Risk Management

- 2.8 This section is not relevant to this report.

3.0 Conclusions

- 3.1 Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) has now completed its inquiry on external placements. The Board is now in a position to report on its findings and its conclusions and recommendations resulting from the evidence gathered.

4.0 Recommendations

- 4.1 Members are asked to consider the Board's draft final report and recommendations following completion of its deliberations on this issue.

5.0 Background documents

None