

Report of the Director of Children's Services

Report to Children's and Families Scrutiny Board

Date: 26th April 2012

Subject: Review of children's homes

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

The review of children's home provision in Leeds has been undertaken with the full involvement of children, staff, and partners. The main themes emerging from the consultation exercises and research is given under separate headings within this report. The review of in-house provision will inform the overall Placement Sufficiency Action Plan which is timetabled for completion by the end of April 2012. The development plans for children's homes will form part of this plan as will a plan of improvements to current provision.

Recommendations

Children's scrutiny board are asked to note the contents of this report and accept the direction of travel in relation to children's homes in Leeds.

1.0 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report is to update scrutiny board members on progress with the review of Leeds City Council children's homes. The review will be used to inform the placement sufficiency plan.

2.0 Background information

- 2.1 All local authorities are required to produce and publish a placement sufficiency plan. This plan must state how each local authority aims to meet the regulatory requirement to provide sufficient placements within its own area to meet the identified needs for looked after children. The 'duty of sufficiency' requires that children should only be placed outside the city or its immediate environs if they require highly specialist placements which are unreasonable for a local authority to be able to provide themselves.
- 2.2 This duty to provide for looked after children within the boundaries of the city fits neatly with the strategic objectives of Leeds City Council to ensure that Leeds children are cared for by Leeds' own carers and staff wherever possible.
- 2.3 There are currently a large number of looked after children who are in placements outside of Leeds in independent foster care or residential provision. This is not in the best interests of children and young people and is very expensive.
- 2.4 The children's home review aims to ensure that the appropriate high quality provision exists here in Leeds to meet the needs of looked after children and young people.

3.0 Main issues

- 3.1 The review of children's homes has been conducted as a strand of the obsession to reduce the need for children to become looked after. Outcomes for looked after children are generally poor and in many situations earlier effective intervention can prevent the need for this to happen. In addition to the benefits to children, young people and their families, it is highly cost-effective. Reducing the number of children requiring a placement also ensures that the most appropriate provision and placement can be provided locally for those children who really do need to be looked after.
- 3.2 There are four key elements to Leeds City Council's strategy to reduce the need for children to become looked after:
- Effective and coordinated preventative and early intervention services;
 - Targeted services to support children remaining within their family and community networks;
 - Greater placement choice to improve matching;
 - Improvements in care planning to ensure swift action to secure permanence for all children.
- 3.3 Greater effectiveness in early intervention and prevention will nevertheless result in a number of children and young people for whom it is appropriate to become looked after. It is important for these children and young people that the period of time they are looked after is as short as possible. Some children may be able to return home

to their families and research suggests that where this is possible, it should take place within six to eight weeks otherwise children are likely to be looked after for two or more years.

- 3.4 Children who cannot return home require permanent care arrangements, wherever possible in a family situation through adoption or special guardianship. All other placements for children and young people should form part of a plan to prepare children for permanence.
- 3.5 A number of children experience periods of time where living in a family setting becomes too difficult due to their needs and behaviours. Residential care can provide for their needs at this time. The primary focus for all residential care provision however, should be to assist the child to develop the skills necessary to live within a family environment.
- 3.6 Evidence suggests that on the whole outcomes for children living in residential care are most successful in small homes where there is a clarity of purpose and staff have the skills and knowledge to achieve these objectives. It is vital, therefore, that there is clarity and purpose in the statement of function for all residential homes and that children are placed as part of a proactive plan of intervention.
- 3.7 Leeds currently has a mixed provision of eleven children's homes of varied size, three of which provide services for disabled children. The mainstream homes range between providing placements for five to twelve children.
- 3.8 In addition to this, over one hundred children are placed in independently provided residential care in a number of locations across the country.
- 3.9 The aim of the review is to assess the current in-house provision against the assessed needs of looked after children in Leeds in order to develop a strategy to improve the provision in line with evidence of what works for children. It is being undertaken within the context of the strategic objectives to reduce the need for children to be looked after; where necessary children are looked after in family settings by Leeds' own carers; to ensure permanence in the shortest possible time and where residential care is needed, this is provided in Leeds unless there are very specific high levels of need that can only be provided elsewhere.
- 3.10 The review has involved gathering information from:
 - Consultations with children living in residential care in Leeds, their parents, staff from the homes and key partners
 - A buildings review of all the homes
 - A needs analysis of all children in residential provision, in Leeds or external and those children identified as requiring residential provision
 - Trend and demographic information
 - A review of the statements of purpose and function of all the homes
 - Analysis of staffing levels and training needs of staff
 - Analysis of cost of internal and external provision
- 3.11 Whilst the analysis is not yet complete there are some significant early indications about the type of provision required to ensure an appropriate and high quality residential care service for Leeds City Council.

3.12 A number of themes are emerging about the type of provision required including:

- The need to replace the larger homes with smaller and more homely provision within appropriate community settings
- The need for children's homes with education provision in very close proximity or on the same site as the home
- The need for children's home that can provide some level of therapeutic input or a therapeutic environment for children
- The provision of services for children with sexually harmful behaviour
- Provision for young people to be supported into independence
- Residential provision for mother and baby assessments

These themes will be used to inform the sufficiency plan and to shape current provision.

3.13 Consultation with looked after children living in children's homes in Leeds

3.13.1 All children and young people living in Leeds provision have been consulted as part of the review either in groups or individually according to their preference. The work was undertaken by Barnardo's Children's Rights service and some of the key messages that the children and young people expressed were:

- The care home environment should be more "homely" including only internal locks should be on children's bedroom doors (with a key for staff), there should be no staff office, information should not be on posters on the wall but sensitively presented and kitchens should be accessible for children and young people to be able to actively use.
- The homes should be 'normal' houses on a normal street and located in all different parts of city. Some children want to be near the city, others want to be in secluded places. Children and young people want to be involved in decorating and DIY to help develop skills. Homes for children with disabilities need more specialist resources in the home.
- There should be a good mix of children and young people living in each home; gender, ethnicity, culture and religion. There should be a good mix of staff; gender, ethnicity, culture and religion. Children and young people want to be involved in recruiting new staff; they want consistent staff rather than agency staff.
- There should be access to more activities. Children and young people want to link in with disability homes sometimes and do things together. They want to travel and have holidays abroad. They want their home to have its own transport. There should be more independent visitors to visit, take out and support children and young people.
- Some children and young people wanted the age ranges of the homes to be broader than they currently are. They wanted to have involvement in deciding who comes to live in their home in the future.

3.13.2 All of these comments reflect the children's desire to live in pleasant homes that reflect family life for the majority of young people, with staff who care for them with dedication and commitment.

3.14 Consultation with staff in our children's homes

3.14.1 All residential staff have been consulted by a service delivery manager from the service and the key messages from them were:

- To improve the relationships with partners and colleagues, in particular with schools. To ensure “joined up” working to support children and young people.
- To ensure children and young people are placed in homes based on a good quality assessment of their needs and a match with the statement of purpose of the home.
- Standardised information about children’s homes in Leeds which sets out their statement and function and can be presented to social workers making placement, schools for their information and a consistent presentation to inspectors.
- All looked after children should have access to full time education.
- There should be streamlined routes to specialist support for looked after children and young people. Children’s homes staff need to have more training in areas such as disability and mental health and need more knowledge around ADHD and autism.
- Support the developments with looked after children teams to drive care plans for children and young people and avoid drift.

3.15 Consultation with children’s services and partner agencies

3.15.1 Key partners participated in an ‘Outcome Based Accountability’ exercise to develop shared proposals for action. The group produced a range of ‘best ideas’ which echoed themes from both the children’s and staff groups including:

- Structured support for children’s homes staff to enable them to meet the emotional health and wellbeing needs of children in care.
- Multi agency teams working with children’s homes, using the healthy care standard as a benchmark.
- Closer links between homes, their communities and local schools.
- Development of restorative practice across all homes.
- Review of the conditions of service and training and development needs of residential staff in Leeds.
- Involvement of children and their parents in all aspects of decision making.
- Smaller homes with a family feel with high quality professional care.

3.16 Messages from research: best practice factors

3.16.1 The dominant theme of all findings is the fundamental importance of the relationship between staff and young people. This is seen in two interrelated ways: the manner in which staff work with individual young people and the extent to which young people are involved in or feel part of the home. Other key and consistent points are summarised below:

- Voices of children, young people and their families should be at the heart of service design and delivery.

- Children's home managers need to be hands-on, able to unite their staff team behind a shared purpose and be transparent and open in their expectations and pursuit of excellence.
- There needs to be clarity of vision which is focused on the experience of children and young people and which is uncompromising in its ambition. It must also be based upon a commitment to continual improvement.
- Homes should be small, preferably four to six young people, thus reducing the potential for peer conflict and allowing for more focused attention on individual needs.
- The service must encourage and develop warm and caring relationships between children and their carers in order to nurture attachment, create a sense of belonging so that the child or young person feels safe, valued and protected.
- There needs to be meticulous care planning that engages young people and responds in detail to their individual needs so that their experience of care is highly personalised, combined with a commitment to never 'give up' on a child or young person and to do everything possible to maintain the placement.

3.17 Staffing review

3.17.1 A review of staffing across children's homes has been conducted and a number of issues will require attention including the management structure, number of staff in each home and how children's homes may be grouped together to provide support and cover arrangements between them. Consistency in how the homes are run and managed is also required as is attention to the development needs and succession planning for managers.

3.18 Next steps

3.18.1 The review of our in-house provision will inform the overall Placement Sufficiency Action Plan.

In outline, the sufficiency action plan will consider:

- The review of children's homes
- The recruitment and retention plan for fostering services
- The recruitment plan for adopters in Leeds
- Current and trend data on the profile of and placement needs of all children looked after in Leeds
- National data and population data
- Commissioning arrangements currently in place and options for consideration
- Regional and sub regional partnership developments

3.18.2 The sufficiency plan is timetabled for completion by the end of April 2012 and the development plans for children's homes will form part of this plan as will a plan of improvements to current provision. It is intended that all children's homes in Leeds are rated as good or outstanding by Ofsted.

4.0 Corporate considerations

4.1 Consultation and engagement

- 4.1.1 The review has been conducted in full consultation with children and young people resident in children's homes, residential staff, representatives from all key strategic partners including three elected members of the corporate carers group. Progress reports have also been presented to the corporate carers group on a regular basis.

4.2 Equality and diversity / cohesion and integration

- 4.2.1 All children resident in Leeds City Council children's homes have been supported to participate in the consultation. Children in the disability homes had specific support to ensure their voice was heard. The parents of children in the specialist homes also participated in coffee morning consultation groups and parents of all children were written to and asked for comment. Consultation took account of any specific learning need or language need and all consultations included questions about equality and diversity.

4.3 Council policies and city priorities

- 4.3.1 The work with looked after children is a significant priority across the council and is central to the ambition to be a child friendly city. The council is required to act as a good corporate parent and to have the needs of looked after children at the centre of all plans. Children's homes are highly regulated and Ofsted judgements have implications for ratings of the council as a whole.

4.4 Resources and value for money

- 4.4.1 As outlined earlier, this strand of work is part of the obsession to reduce the need for children to be looked after. This requires more effective early intervention and prevention avoiding the need for them to become looked after. This not only means improved outcomes for children but results in more cost effective interventions.
- 4.4.2 The Barnardo's and Demos report 'In loco parentis' 2010 supports the view that prevention is most effective; that decisions to look after children in crisis situations can result in poor outcomes and a number of expensive placements and that good assessment and high quality care planning result in good outcomes and stable placements.

4.5 Legal implications, access to information and call in

- 4.5.1 This report is subject to call in.

4.6 Risk management

- 4.6.1 Failure to act to develop and improve service provision risks poor outcomes for children and young people, poor inspection outcomes and increased costs of use of external placements following placement disruption.
- 4.6.2 This work is part of the very high priority attached to the work on reducing the need for children to become looked after and is governed by the deputy director for safeguarding, targeted and specialist services.

5.0 Conclusions

- 5.1 The review of children's home provision in Leeds has been undertaken with the full involvement of children, staff, and partners. It is clear that there is a need to focus on children's homes being smaller and more integrated within their local communities. They should have stable and well supported staff teams who can nurture positive relationships that prepare children for family life or independence.
- 5.2 Relationships between children's homes staff, education and health providers should be much closer and replicate relationships with parents as a whole. Further specialist provision should be developed in partnership with the health service and education colleagues to develop therapeutic interventions and to provide education in very close proximity to children's homes.
- 5.3 The review of children's homes must be considered in line with the key strategic objectives for all looked after children and as part of the overall sufficiency placement plan. The work undertaken as part of the review will now feed into this plan.

6.0 Recommendations

- 6.1 Children's scrutiny board are asked to note the contents of this report and accept the direction of travel in relation to children's homes in Leeds.

7.0 Background documents

- 7.1 Report of the Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) inquiry into external placements