

**Report of the Director of Children's Services**

**Report to Scrutiny Board (Children and Families)**

**Date: 13<sup>th</sup> December 2012**

**Subject: Children's Social Work: Improvement Plan**

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input 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**

- 1.1 The 'Supporting Children and Families, Strengthening Social Care' improvement plan for social work and safeguarding (Appendix A) reviews progress in Leeds over the past year, identifying both areas of success and areas for development. This is supported by a summary of recent audit and quality assurance activity, (Appendix B) which has underpinned the plan. The review of progress identifies key areas of success, e.g. in beginning to 'Turn the Curve' in reducing the need for children to be in care; improvements to the quality and timeliness of support for vulnerable children, and investment and reform of social work and wider services. However, the review also identifies.
- 1.2 Whilst there has been considerable progress, the review also highlights areas where further work is needed. Key areas include: strengthening the involvement of children and families; further improving the quality and skills of social workers; and ensuring better support for frontline services.
- 1.3 The improvement plan is organised around nine key strands of work, as set out below:
  - Strengthen the voice and influence of children and young people
  - Improve provision for looked after children and young people
  - Strengthen the role of families

- Develop social work practice
- Improve communication and engagement across social care
- Improve ICT Systems and the estate for social work and families
- Develop peer support and challenge
- Strengthen quality assurance and performance management
- Strengthen Early Help / Early Intervention and Prevention

## **Recommendations**

1. It is recommended that the Board:

- Consider areas where the Board's work can provide support and challenge to the 'Supporting Children, Strengthening Social Care' Action Plan

## **2 Purpose of this report**

2.4 The purpose of this report is to provide the Board with a review of progress and the details of the improvement plan for children's social work and safeguarding.

## **3 Background information**

3.1 Children's social care and safeguarding in Leeds is improving. In 2009, OfSTED judged safeguarding in the city to be 'inadequate'. As a result, the government intervened with a formal Improvement Notice in March 2010. More recent inspections judged that safeguarding practice was getting better and the Council and its partners had good capacity for further improvement. After the last OfSTED inspection of autumn 2011, services were judged to be 'adequate' and the Improvement Notice was lifted.

3.2 Since 2011 there has been significant reform and developments within children's social work and the wider safeguarding system. Council services have been radically restructured and new arrangements such as the Duty and Advice Team and the Independent Safeguarding Unit have been created to strengthen capacity further.

3.3 Local and national policy demand significant change from social work and safeguarding services. Locally, the Children and Young People's Plan and the ambition for Leeds to be a Child Friendly City require new approaches to working restoratively with children, families and communities to improve outcomes. Nationally, the government and OfSTED are rightly raising expectations for social work and safeguarding in light of the Munro Review and the social work reform agenda. This has been shown clearly in recent inspection reports from OfSTED, and in recent speeches and policies from the Department for Education.

## **4 Main issues**

4.4 The 'Supporting Children and Families, Strengthening Social Care' improvement plan for social work and safeguarding (Appendix A) reviews progress in Leeds over the past year, identifying both areas of success and areas for development. This is supported by a summary of recent audit and quality assurance activity, (Appendix B) which has underpinned the plan. The review of progress identifies key areas of success, e.g. in beginning to 'Turn the Curve' in reducing the need for children to be in care; improvements to the quality and timeliness of support for vulnerable children, and investment and reform of social work and wider services. However, the review also identifies.

4.5 Whilst there has been considerable progress, the review also highlights areas where further work is needed. Key areas include: strengthening the involvement of children and families; further improving the quality and skills of social workers; and ensuring better support for frontline services.

4.6 The improvement plan is organised around nine key strands of work, as set out below:

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## **5 Corporate Considerations**

### **5.1 Consultation and Engagement**

- 5.1.1 The Improvement Plan has been shaped by a wide range of input, including from frontline staff, service managers, partner agencies and feedback from service users, inspections and national experts.

### **5.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration**

- 5.2.1 Key areas of the plan will be subject to targeted equality impact assessment to ensure equal support for all children and communities across Leeds.

### **5.3 Council policies and City Priorities**

- 5.3.1 The improvement plan supports the Council and City Priorities relating to the 'Top 25' Child Friendly Leeds priority and wider priorities for improving outcomes for children and young people.

### **5.4 Resources and value for money**

- 5.4.1 The resource requirements for the improvement plan are contained within the children's services budget strategy.

### **5.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In**

- 5.5.1 None.

### **5.6 Risk Management**

- 5.6.1 The improvement plan supports mitigation of key corporate and directorate risks, particularly those relating to safeguarding.

## **6 Conclusions**

- 6.1 As the improvement plan makes clear, there has been significant progress over recent years in social work and safeguarding, but there is much more to do to meet the city's ambitions for children and young people.

## **7 Recommendations**

- 7.1 The Board is recommended to:

- Consider areas where the Board's work can provide support and challenge to the 'Supporting Children, Strengthening Social Care' Action Plan

## **8 Background documents<sup>1</sup>**

- 8.1 None

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<sup>1</sup> The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.