

Report of the Director of Children’s Services and Director of City Development

Report to Children’s Services Scrutiny Board

Date: 17 January 2013

Subject: Response to Scrutiny Inquiry Report – Private Care 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 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 sets out the response of the director of children's services to the Recommendations of the Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) inquiry into Safeguarding Children – Private Care Homes, published on the 8th of November 2012.

2 Background information

2.1 As a result of the Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) inquiry into the External Placement of Looked After Children, which reported on the 28th of February 2012, Board members were aware of the issues and vulnerabilities for looked after children placed in private and independent residential children’s homes.

2.2 As a result of the concerns regarding the sexual exploitation of looked after children in Rochdale the Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) resolved to undertake an inquiry which looked at the regulation of Private Care Homes and the influence that Leeds City Council has to safeguard and promote the welfare of looked after children placed in private care homes outside of the local authority.

2.3 In undertaking its inquiry the Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) gathered and evaluated a wide range of evidence including written reports, and verbal evidence from external experts. The report made two recommendations to strengthen current local arrangements in relation to private care home.

- 2.4 The report also identified the need to strengthen the regulatory framework in relation to private and independent children's homes and the Chair of the Board wrote to the Children's Minister. This letter was well received by the Children's Minister who indicated that it would contribute to the review of regulations that is currently underway.
- 2.5 The Director of Children's Services has welcomed the report and has accepted the recommendation of the Board that relates to Children's Services.
- 2.6 The Director of City Development has also accepted the recommendation of the Board that relates to planning.

3 Main issues

- 3.1 This section sets out the response of the Director of Children's Services to the Board's recommendation that, **The Director of Children's Services provides a progress report on the development of the Children's Residential Homes Charter as part of his formal response to Board early in the 2013/14 municipal year.**
- 3.2 Children's Services have established positive relationships with local providers of private children's homes. The authority is part of the White Rose partnership which has developed a regional commissioning framework for external residential placements.
- 3.3 Children's Services are working with local private children's home providers to develop a local charter for Leeds setting out how the homes and council will work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of all looked after children placed in the authority.
- 3.4 The Director of Children's Service will provide an update to the Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) early in the 2013/14 municipal year on this work.
- 3.5 A further recommendation was made to the Director of City Development which states that **the Director of City Development explores the interpretation of planning regulations to identify if a different approach can be implemented which requires all private children's care homes to seek planning permission, regardless of size. The Director is required to report the viability and potential impact of implementing a revised interpretation in his formal response to the Scrutiny Board.**
- 3.6 The Director of City Development accepts this recommendation and has provided the requested report as appendix 1. This determines, after further investigation, that the rules are set nationally and that the interpretation of the rules must be based on the facts of each case on their merits.

4 Corporate considerations

4.1 Consultation and engagement

4.1.1 The Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) consulted widely as part of their review.

4.2 Equality and diversity / cohesion and integration

4.2.1 Equality and diversity screening was not required as a response to the recommendations of the Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) recommendations. These issues will be considered in the report to the Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) early in the 2013/14 municipal year.

4.3 Council policies and city priorities

4.3.1 There are no immediate implications for council policy and governance.

4.4 Resources and value for money

4.4.1 The recommendations will be resourced from within existing Children's Services staffing and budgets.

4.5 Legal implications, access to information and call in

4.5.1 None

4.6 Risk management

4.6.1 The risks associated with the recommendations are managed by the Looked After Children Programme Group which is chaired by the deputy director (safeguarding, specialist and targeted services)

5 Conclusions

5.1 The Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) inquiry into Safeguarding Children – Private Care Homes has identified some significant issues in relation to how the welfare of looked after children placed in private and independent children's homes can be safeguarded and promoted. The report recommendations will strengthen local arrangements. In addition, through its letter to the Children's Minister, the Board has contributed to the development of improved national regulation of private and independent children's homes.

6 Recommendations

6.1 Members are requested to approve the proposed responses as outlined in this report.

7 Background documents

7.1 Report of the Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) inquiry into external Placements and the Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) inquiry into Safeguarding Children – Private Care Homes.