

**Making  
Leeds a child  
friendly city**



**Transforming Life Chances**  
**for Children, Young People and Families in Leeds, UK**  
**Using Outcomes-Based Accountability**

Leeds is the third largest city in the UK, with a diverse population of more than 750,000 people, including 180,000 children and young people. It is an affluent and prospering city, but also has some of the most deprived communities in the country. In July 2009, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) carried out an inspection of city services for vulnerable children and young people, as part of an ongoing high-profile national inspection programme. The inspection was extremely critical of services in the city, finding that the city failed to adequately safeguard children and young people. Subsequently the government gave the local council a 'notice to improve' and for a short time established an independently chaired improvement board to guide and support improvements.

In 2010 the council responded by making some significant changes. A new Chief Executive, Tom Riordan and a newly elected Executive Council Member for Children's Services, Councillor Judith Blake, appointed Nigel Richardson as Director of Children's Services. This appointment, along with a new leadership team, acted as the catalyst for a new 'whole system' approach to services for children and young people. From the outset, Outcome based accountability (OBA) was chosen as the means through which the Council and the wider partnership would manage and judge the effect of their collective efforts.

Working with a partnership of key service providers, a new plan for children's services was developed and implemented. This plan centred on creating a single, unifying narrative about the ambition for children in the city: To be the best city in the UK to grow up in, and to be recognised as a Child Friendly City. At the heart of this ambition was an emphasis on adopting three fundamental behaviours to guide every aspect of work with children and families: The first centred on listening to the voice of the child so that their thoughts and feelings would guide the decisions practitioners make that affect them. The second was about using approaches, techniques and language that works *with* families to solve problems, rather than doing things to them, for them, or not doing anything at all. This restorative approach empowers families to safely and appropriately find their own solutions to the problems they face. The third behaviour was about using OBA to constantly and consistently question whether anyone is better off as a result of the work being done and to shape and improve services accordingly. The combination of these three behaviours, within a whole-system, city-wide approach, has underpinned the improvement journey in Leeds between 2010 and 2015.



The new Children and Young People’s (CYP) Plan for the city was designed using OBA principles and practice. Under the Child Friendly City vision, it set out five outcomes and 12 priorities that would guide all work for children, young people and families. It identified the need to relentlessly focus on three areas in particular, referred to as the Leeds three ‘**obsessions.**’ Based on the theory that ‘anywhere leads to everywhere’, making an impact on these areas would have a positive knock-on effect right across all work with children and families. The three obsessions are:

- Safely and appropriately reducing the need for children to be looked after.
- Reducing the number of young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)
- Improving school attendance

The OBA methodology was used to develop turning the curve ‘scorecards’ for each of the obsessions. These scorecards have been regularly employed to report progress to the city’s Children and Families Trust Board – comprising of senior figures from services working most closely with children and young people. . Crucially, the scorecards were used to track the effectiveness of the partnership’s collective efforts to ‘turn the curve’. The reports made it possible to visualise the difference between the likely course of events based on the historical trajectory (e.g. if the number of children in care had continued to increase in line with past trends), and the impact that the various interventions were having on helping to ‘turn the curve’ (e.g. the number of children looked after declines from its current level). By using such graphs Leeds was able to show the impact of new initiatives and investment at different times during its improvement journey. The example in Figure 1 demonstrates this in relation to the number children in care in Leeds:

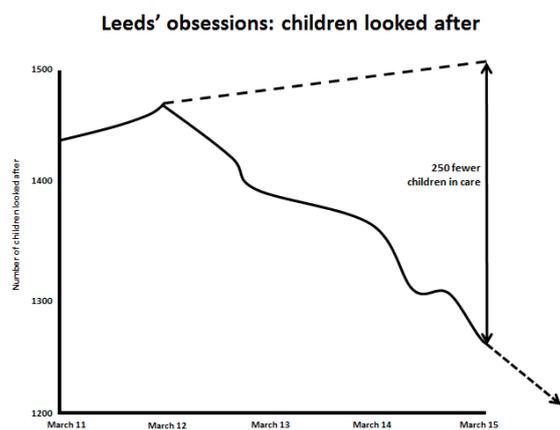


Figure 1

Although this approach provided a framework for using OBA to track progress, the bigger challenge for a city as large and diverse as Leeds was implementing and then embedding the outcome-based approach consistently across all of its work, including frontline practice as well as in ‘enabling’ services such as human resources (HR), information technology (ICT), finance, asset management. To do this, over five years Leeds consistently emphasised an outcome-based approach as one of the three fundamental behaviours that underpinned work with children and families. In addition the city took a number of incremental steps from awareness-raising, through training and then application at a local and city-wide level, to embed OBA across different areas of work.

Leeds has particularly emphasised the use of OBA across local ‘clusters’ of services. In Leeds clusters are the local partnerships between schools and the other services within a given area that must work together to provide a holistic approach to improving outcomes for children and young people.



This includes children's centres, health professionals, youth services, voluntary sector organisations and the police, local elected members also sit on clusters linked to their ward. In total there are 25 clusters across the city.

Each cluster has completed an OBA workshop on each of the three obsessions, drawing together partners to focus on how to make a difference at a local level. OBA has become a key tool for clusters to review and refocus their work. The clusters used OBA as a basis for developing the 'top 100 methodology', identifying those families causing the greatest challenges for service providers in the local area. This has then enabled a more targeted, co-ordinated and consistent approach to multi-agency support for those families.

Across its wider improvement work, Children's Services used OBA to progress a variety of specific projects where a clear impact could be demonstrated. For example:

- OBA was used as the methodology to address school place planning across the city, providing a framework to tackle a shortage of places given a rapidly growing population. Over 1400 additional primary school places have been created through this work.
- An OBA session followed the launch of the custody pathfinder programme (which aims to reduce the need for children to be remanded or sentenced to custody). The actions implemented reduced custody "bednights" by almost one third over 18 months.
- The OBA approach has been used to launch and develop the Families First initiative in Leeds (part of the UK's national troubled families programme). It looked at how to use data and what each partner could bring to the programme. It enabled the programme to progress quickly and with clear focus, Leeds successfully supported all 2500 families involved in the first phase to achieve improved outcomes and was nationally recognised for its approach.

In each case it was the combination of the three Leeds 'behaviours': using an OBA methodology; running events and planning in a way that works restoratively *with* people; and ensuring the voice of children and young people featured strongly in the process; that proved a successful combination for turning talk into action in a way that involved people in decisions that affected them.

OBA was increasingly adopted in Leeds not just by children's services, but as a city-wide approach for any issue where the methodology could help find solutions. In 2014 the city launched a series of high profile 'breakthrough' projects – on issues such as housing need, city centre improvement, domestic violence and healthy living. These cross-cutting projects were intended to bring multi-agency partners together to concentrate attention on some of the most difficult issues facing the city. In each case an OBA launch session and methodology was used to drive the planning and development of this work and ensure consistency of approach across different partners.

With OBA established as a city-wide approach, Leeds Children's Services sought to broaden ownership of the feedback data it generated right across the city, to ensure everyone could see how their work was contributing to a collective effort to address the biggest priorities. This work is best demonstrated by the use of a weekly 'Obsessions progress tracker', (see the example shown below). It was produced in a format that enabled all staff/partners to quickly see the difference their collective contributions were making.



# Weekly obsessions tracker



Week commencing: 20 July 2015

Obsession	Latest position this week	Change since last Week	% change since CYPP start	Change since CYPP start	Progress since CYPP start
Safely <b>reduce</b> the number of children looked after	1247	-5	-12.2	-175	
<b>Reduce</b> the number of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET)	1595	7	-22.8	-479	
<b>Reduce</b> school absence: primary	4.4	0.6	n/a	-1.9	
<b>Reduce</b> school absence: secondary	7.2	-3.3	n/a	-2.5	

Figure 2

The tracker, which became known in Leeds as the ‘Thing of Beauty,’ arrived weekly in people’s inbox and was used in various meeting agendas to inform key discussions and debates about the three OBA performance questions - *How much did we do? How well did we do it? Is anybody better off?* Leeds also broke this data down to a ‘cluster’ level. This enabled city-wide *and* local performance data to be considered against the three obsessions so that action could be taken quickly to target areas where progress was lagging. Mike Pinnock, who has been involved in the introduction and development of OBA in Leeds, emphasised that the tracker was an example of how feedback data could be used to engage and energise staff across the partnership, “We deliberately chose a graphical format that people would associate with the sorts of data they use in their daily lives – like a weather report or a stock market index. The intention was to bring some focus and immediacy to the partnership’s efforts. Like a weather report, the primary role of the weekly “Thing of Beauty” was to keep people’s attention on something that was important – not to explain it”.

In January 2015, the Ofsted inspectors returned to Leeds and found a transformed service. Between 2011 and 2015, the number of looked after children had safely and appropriately reduced from 1,450 to less than 1,300. Primary school attendance and secondary school attendance increased by 2% and 2.2% respectively. The number of young people not in education employment or training declined by nearly 500 (a 22% decline). The Inspector’s final report stated... ‘The application of the outcomes based accountability approach... is facilitating a shared understanding of priorities for children... (and) the ‘three obsessions’ are providing a sharp focus for strategic and operational thinking’. The inspectors rated the services as ‘good’ overall and ‘outstanding’ for leadership, management and governance, the highest rating available for the strand, which incorporates performance management.

