

CHILDREN SUB-COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 16 December 2015

Present: Councillors A Brighthouse M McLaughlin
W Clements T Norbury
A Davies W Smith
P Hayes

10 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair announced that following a meeting of the full Council held, Monday 14th December, Mr Mark Harrison, Parent Governor Representative was appointed to the Families and Wellbeing Policy and Performance Committee.

Mr Harrison was in attendance to observe the Children's Sub Committee and was introduced to all present.

11 MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN SUB-COMMITTEE

The minutes of the Children's Sub Committee held 23 September 2015 were considered by Members

Councillor W Clements identified an inaccuracy in respect of minute number 1 and requested that her Declaration of Interest be amended to reflect her employment to be in an 'Early Years Setting.'

Resolved – That subject to the above amendment the minutes be approved.

12 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Members of the Sub-Committee were asked to consider whether they had any disclosable pecuniary interests and/or any relevant interest in connection with any items on the agenda and if so, to declare them and state the nature of the interest.

No such declarations were made.

13 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S DEPARTMENT ANNUAL STATUTORY COMPLAINTS REPORT 2014/2015

Simon Garner, Corporate Safeguarding Manager outlined a report giving information on representations and complaints received by children's specialist services within the Children and Young People's Department for the year 1st April 2014 to 31st March 2015. The report demonstrated an overview

of complaint trends, performance and areas for development. Members were informed that the report could be accessed on the council's website in line with statutory framework.

Members heard that the vast majority of complaints had been resolved by Council staff or the Customer Resolution and Information Team at an early stage, preventing the need for resource intensive formal complaint investigations and providing the customer with a timely response. Complaints that mostly related to financial matters had been dealt with more proactively in order to minimise the volume of stage 2 complaints.

It was explained that complaints over a perceived breach of confidentiality had been justified as being in line with Working Together to Safeguard Children guidance, whereby the need to share such information had been a requirement in the circumstances of the case.

Members then heard that when reviewing effectiveness, it had been identified that the number of complaints received by children and young people continued to be low in comparison to the number of Looked After Children. It was explained that action taken following consultation with the Children in Care Council; including the provision of a freephone complaints number for children and links within the Right Side of Care website, had not resulted in a marked increase in the number of complaints received from Children and Young People. It was identified that there is a need to be more innovative and creative in involving children and that some work is being undertaken to introduce an advocacy service for those children subject to a Child Protection Plan.

It was further explained that the Customer Resolution and Information team are commissioning a new IT solution with the view to enable a wider range of representations to be recorded and reported on in order to enhance the information available to the department and assist with learning and development.

In response to questions raised by Members, the Corporate Safeguarding Manager advised that an advocacy service is currently being piloted in Wallasey and the project is taking a proactive approach. Members heard that all correspondence is responded to include any verbal or written material that could be considered to be a representation and that early intervention with complaints is working well. Members were then advised that at present there is no timescale for implementing a working protocol between Specialist Services and MST, however, any progress would be reported to a future meeting.

Following a query from Councillor Brighthouse regarding comparison with neighbouring authorities, the Corporate Safeguarding Manager informed

Members that he did not have this information to hand, however, he would ensure it is included in any future reports.

A recommendation was made for Members to include the Annual Complaints Report to their work programme for consideration ahead of publication.

Resolved - That committee note the report.

14 **SCHOOLS STANDARD REPORT - ATTAINMENT AT GCSE AND A LEVEL 2015**

Sue Talbot, School's Commissioning Manager, gave a verbal presentation to Members on the School Standards Report – Attainment at GCSE and A level 2015.

Members heard how:

- Measure in A* - C grades, for English and maths, Wirral had performed 1 % above the national average;
- 3 + levels performance – Wirral had performed 2 % above the national average for English and 1% below the national average for maths;
- Attainment in maths is an issue both nationally and locally, children who receive free school meals are below the average in the subject;
- The A level pass rate had dipped nationally, the average grade attained is now a C;
- There is a real concern that the inequality gap, in education, is not being closed;
- Sixth form provision has become a key line of enquiry for Ofsted inspections; and
- There are some schools with small sixth form colleges that are not as able to offer the breadth of courses to pupils.

A discussion was had regarding the potential for larger sixth form colleges, offering pupils a much wider range of subjects, proving to be more cost effective as secondary schools are experiencing cuts to sixth form funding. It was felt by some Members that in their experience, sixth form colleges are a better use of resources than those associated with particular secondary schools.

A further discussion was had regarding the inequality gap that remains an issue in Wirral Schools with regards to attainment. It was suggested that Members should be involved with visits to schools in order to observe strategies in place as a means to narrow the gap.

Resolved – That Members note the contents of the presentation.

POST 16 QUALIFICATIONS AND THE IMPACT ON NEETS - UPDATE

Paul Smith, 14 – 19 Strategy Manager, outlined to Members the content of his report that identified the number of young people transitioning in to post 16 learning and training opportunities whilst also assessing how successful they are by pathway. The report made reference to Post 16 qualifications and the impact on levels of young people not engaged in employment, education and/or training (NEET)

Members were informed that Wirral has a complex post 16 education and learning landscape. It was explained that Wirral young people making the transition at age 16 in to further education and training have a number of options and pathways including, school sixth form, further education (including study programme provision) and Apprenticeships.

Members heard how, locally, post 16 participation rates are good with some 92.9% (adjusted figures as at June 2015) of the 16 to 18 cohort (11,409 young people) participating in some form of employment, education and training (EET). It was explained how the proportions of Wirral young people not in employment, education and/ or training (NEET) have, for the last 12 months, been the lowest ever recorded. The local authority NEET national indicator, published March 2015, detailed the average NEET (adjusted) to be 4.3 percent. It was stated that projected figures for next year are thought to be around 4.8 percent.

Members were informed that the highest attaining young people at age 16 generally progress in to schools sixth form provision at a grammar school and the majority of young people choosing vocational options do so at Wirral Met College where the specialist resources exist. Those young people who are considered to be more vulnerable with a lower level of academic achievement would access first steps provision at an independent provider as a stepping stone to further education and/or training.

The 14 – 19 Strategy Manager explained that the biggest challenge is the level 3 progress measures and it was reported that as 26 percent of schools (5x schools) had statistically significant negative overall academic qualification progress scores.

Members then heard how Apprentice provision in Wirral has always been very strong with high success rates of level 3 vocational courses.

Some associated risks were identified including the fundamental national challenges in relation to post 16 funding and curriculum reform (including Study Programme) and the perception that this is likely to have a significant negative impact on local post 16 participation and levels of NEET.

The 14-19 Manager responded to questions from Members around levels of vocational training and Members were informed that this would be targeted. Members then heard how new providers in education would be emerging and a free market approach would be adopted to commissioning services in schools to move them away from the LA's control. Members were then advised that vulnerable young people and schools with larger inequality gaps would be targeted.

Resolved - That committee note the report

16 **WORK PROGRAMME FOR FUTURE MEETINGS**

A Report by the Scrutiny Support Officer updated members on progress towards delivering the work programme for the Children Sub Committee as agreed for the 2015/16 municipal year.

Councillor Clements requested that a performance report indication be included in the work programme to update Members on Children's Centres progress.

It was proposed by Councillor Norbury that devolution of the Further Education Budget and the Apprenticeship Framework be added to the work programme for the new municipal year.

Resolved – That Members note the contents of the work programme for the Children Sub Committee for the 2015/16 municipal year.