

CHILDREN SUB-COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 8 March 2017

Present:

Councillors	A Brighthouse A Davies M McLaughlin	C Meaden W Smith D Burgess Joyce (for W Clements)
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Co-optee: G Peters

Apologies

Co-Optee Mr D Cunningham
Mr M Harrison

Councillors: W Clements
C Povall

24 **MINUTE'S SILENCE**

The Chair referred to the recent death of Councillor Denise Roberts and the Committee stood for one minutes silence in memory.

25 **MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

Councillor Chris Meaden declared a personal interest in the items on the agenda by virtue of her daughter's employment within the Children and Young People's Department.

26 **MINUTES**

Some errors were identified within the attendance list of the Committee.

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

27 **IMPACT OF THE IFIP PROGRAMME (TROUBLED FAMILIES) IN WIRRAL**

A Presentation lead by Elizabeth Hartley, Senior Manager Targeted Services highlighted to Members the impact of the Intensive Family Intervention Programme (IFIP).

Members heard how during the period April 2012- March 2015, 910 families were involved in the IFIP programme. This pertained to Phase 1 of the contract It was explained how the eligibility criteria was as follows:

- School attendance less than 85%
- Involvement in crime or anti-social behaviour
- Parent in receipt of out – of –work benefits

Expected outcomes to the programme were reported as follows:

- School attendance of 85% or above over 3 school terms
- Reduction in crime (by 33%) and anti-social behaviour by 67%
- Parents into employment
- Parents evidencing progress to employment.

In delivering this programme, Members were informed of how there were dedicated staff teams, staff fully trained in level 4 working with parents model, learning on what works from national and local IFIPs and a number of professionals from partner agencies had been seconded to assist. The governance of the scheme had been through a multi-agency IFIP board and regular reporting to the Wirral Safeguarding Children Board, Children's Trust and Children's Joint Commissioning Group. The Model was described as a whole family approach involving one lead worker, an assessment and a plan.

It was then explained that 834 families achieved outcomes against school attendance and/or crime and or/social behaviour, 65 families achieved continuous employment and 97 families achieved progress to work.

Members were then made aware of Wirral statistics in line with the national average and the TF aggregate. It was explained that Wirral on average had a higher percentage of: lone parent families with an average of 2 children, families who rent their home; households with no one working and with a net household income of £7,800 - £12,479.

Overall, it was reported that:

- 92% of families self – assessed that their parenting capacity had improved.
- 70% of families with substance misuse issues engaged with support to address their problem.
- 84% of families self – reported an improvement in mental health; and
- 67% of families were supported to register with a GP and/or dentist.

The Senior Manager for Targeted Services then reported how the scheme has been expanded to work with 3010 troubled families during the period April 2015 – March 2020. The Eligibility criteria had been adapted to include:

- School attendance (increase from 85% to 90%)
- Parents in receipt of out – of work comments.
- Crime and anti-social behaviour

It was further explained that the eligibility criteria has broadened to include:

- Parents and children with mental health problems
- Families experiencing domestic abuse
- Children in need of help.

The Senior Manager then responded to questions from Members and the Committee were advised that the expanded scheme involving 3010 families did not include the initial 900 families involved in the first phase. The Committee were then informed that out of the 3010 families, only 15 had been re – deferred by the initial phase of the project.

Resolved – That the Senior Manager, Targeted Services be thanked for her presentation

28 SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP ORDERS

A report by the Group Manager for Adoption and Fostering provided an update of the progress achieved since the previous report in January 2016 regarding the assessment of potential Special Guardianships and Post Special Guardianship support offered throughout childhood.

Members heard how the recently published Special Guardianship (amendment) regulations 2016 had set out the requirement for a stronger evidence base for the assessment, stating an assessment of the prospective special guardian's parenting capacity including:

- (i) Their understanding of , and ability to meet the child's current and likely future needs, particularly, and needs the child may have arising from harm that the child has suffered;
- (ii) Their understanding of, and ability to protect the child from any current or future risk of harm posed by the child's parents, relatives or any other person the local authority consider, relevant, particularly in relation to contact between said person and child; and
- (iii) Their ability and sustainability to bring up eth child until the child reaches the age of eighteen.

Members were advised that the above amendments are required by the social worker to be explicitly addressed in compiling court reports. In addition, this report also requires an assessment of the nature of the prospective Special Guardian's current and past relationship with the child.

Members then heard how since September 2016, Permanence Panel has had 30 cases presented for a recommendation regarding applications for Special Guardianship Orders and 29 of those cases had been approved as Foster Carers prior to being presented to the Panel. It was also reported that the Department for Education had recently brought in requirements of all local authorities to report on the number of Special Guardianship Orders granted on a quarterly basis and details such as the relationship the special guardian has with the child must be included.

The Group Manager for Fostering and Adoption informed the Committee that in Spring 2016 the Government extended access to the Adoption Support Fund to include children subject to a Special Guardianship Order who have previously been Looked After by the Local Authority. A newsletter had been sent to all of Wirral's Special Guardians explaining the changes to the Adoption Support Fund, with details of how to apply. Members heard how the response nationally to the use of the Adoption Support Fund to extend to Special Guardianship exceeded expectations and concerns were raised regarding the Governments budget for the fund not being able to meet the needs of all those making applications. In order to address this, the Government introduced a 'Fair Access Limit' of £5000 per child per year, locally, the fair access limit and match funding had not been required.

The Committee were informed that Wirral Grandcare (formally known as Bringing up Grandchildren), an independent support group and network had developed to include all connected carers, rather than grandparents alone. The group had met Social Workers from the Adoption and Permanence service regularly and their groups provide support, advice, newsletters, training and signposting. From this group two members have accessed the adoption support fund to attend the therapeutic training course, SafeBase and have passed on their learning to other carers through the support groups. The group also has a small library of books covering a variety of subjects pertinent to caring for children who have suffered trauma and loss.

In response to questions from Members, the Committee were advised that if a child has been placed in Wirral with their Special Guardian but had originally come from another area, then the information should be shared and a support plan should be in place.

Resolved – That the Committee note the contents of the report.

29 **SCHOOL STRATEGY**

A presentation by the Lead Commissioner for Schools informed Members of the Wirral Schools Strategy. It was reported that the Chief Executive had

requested a strategic view of the education offer/provision. Members heard that at this stage, all school leaders had been given the opportunity to complete an online questionnaire in July 2016 and that a steering group is to be set up by the end of September to determine strategy priorities. A strategy went out for consultation in January 2017.

Members were advised that in response to the consultation, a total of 58 schools had responded (40 Primary, 11 secondary and 7 special schools). Responses had been broken down by locality (Birkenhead 34.5%, Wallasey 27.3%, and South and West Wirral 38%). Major priorities identified were for pupils to achieve well and improve outcomes. Main barriers to pupils doing well in school were identified as

- a) As issues in the home (56.3%);
- b) Low expectations from family (47.9%); and
- c) Mental health issues of parents (39.6%)

Pupils identified as a priority for improvement were explained alongside support to improve teaching and learning. Members heard how the best way to support vulnerable pupils were early intervention/ family support (55.5%) were highlighted as the best way to support vulnerable adults. Services that were felt could make the biggest impact were: parenting support, education psychology, speech and language therapy and advice and support from the early help team.

Members then heard how barriers to progress were ranked as:

- a) Mental health issues of pupils;
- b) Change of placement;
- c) Low aspirations of foster carers;and
- d) Contact visits

The Lead Commissioner for Schools explained Aims of the strategy to the Committee and described how she anticipated success to look like. Aims were identified as follows into three broad priorities:

- Ensure all of Wirral's children and young people attend schools which are judged as 'good' or better by Ofsted.
- Raise the aspiration of children and young people with a particular focus on Wirral's most vulnerable pupils, so they are ready to learn, resilient to change and have the skills and confidence to lead successful lives.
- Ensure all Wirral's children and young people are educated in the school which is right for them and best meets their needs.

Members heard how some examples of how success would be measured were as follows:

- Every family will have the opportunity to send their child to a good or outstanding local school, full-time education, or college.
- Mainstream schools will be equipped to support more children and young people with additional educational, mental health or physical health needs.
- More pupils in Wirral will achieve a good level at GCSE in English and mathematics.
- Every young person will leave school with nationally recognised qualifications and a clear destination to continue their development through an apprenticeship, further study or employment.
- Every young person is ready for work .

Members were then informed that in order to successfully implement the strategy responsibility lay upon School and School Leaders, School to School Partnership Board, Locality Boards and the Local Authority in order to achieve the three broad priorities (as identified above).

Resolved – That the Lead Commissioner for Schools be thanked for her presentation

30 EXCEPTION REPORTS

The Lead Commissioner for Schools presented Ofsted Outcomes from the period September 2016 – February 2017.

Members were informed of the following:

- Two primary schools are currently below the floor target;
- No primary schools are considered to be coasting schools;
- Four secondary schools are currently below the floor target;and
- Six secondary schools are considered to be coasting schools.

Members then heard the following Ofsted outcomes from September 2016 as follows:

- 15 schools/education establishments have been inspected since September
- 12 Primary Schools, 2 Secondary schools and Birkenhead sixth form college.
- 3 Schools have been downgraded (a primary school and 2 secondary schools)
- 2 schools have been upgraded (a primary school and the College)
- 10 have stayed the same grade (6 remain good, 4 still require improvement)

A breakdown of Ofsted Outcomes for Schools were provided to Members and Birkenhead Sixth Form College was commended for its outstanding rating.

Resolved – That the Lead Commissioner for Schools be thanked for her presentation

31 **WORK PROGRAMME FOR FUTURE MEETINGS**

The Chair referred to the work programme update. Members were updated on progress towards delivering the work programme

Resolved – That Members approve the Children’s Sub Committee work programme for 2016/17.

32 **ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS ACCEPTED BY THE CHAIR**

The Director for Children’s Services requested that the next scheduled meeting be rearranged and the clerk agreed to arrange this.

The Scrutiny Officer reminded Members that a workshop for Committee Members had been arranged for 29 March 2017