



Children Sub-Committee

Date:	Wednesday, 8 March 2017
Time:	6.00 pm
Venue:	Birkenhead Town Hall

Contact Officer: Anne Beauchamp
Tel: 0151 691 8608
e-mail: annebeauchamp@wirral.gov.uk
Website: <http://www.wirral.gov.uk>

AGENDA

1. MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members are asked to consider whether they have any disclosable pecuniary interests and/or any other relevant interest in connection with any item(s) on this agenda, if so, to declare them and state the nature of the interest.

2. MINUTES (Pages 1 - 4)

To approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 8 February 2017.

3. IMPACT OF THE IFIP PROGRAMME (TROUBLED FAMILIES) IN WIRRAL

To receive a verbal presentation.

4. SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP ORDERS (Pages 5 - 10)

5. SCHOOL STRATEGY

To receive a verbal presentation.

6. EXCEPTION REPORTS

To receive a verbal presentation.

7. WORK PROGRAMME FOR FUTURE MEETINGS (Pages 11 - 14)

8. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS ACCEPTED BY THE CHAIR

CHILDREN SUB-COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 8 February 2017

Present:

Councillors A Brighthouse
D Burgess-Joyce (In place of W Clements)
A Davies

Co-optee Mr M Harrison

Apologies Co-optee Mrs G Peters

18 **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.

19 **APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR FOR THE MEETING AND VICE-CHAIR FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE MUNICIPAL YEAR**

The Sub-Committee was invited to appoint a Chair for this meeting.

On a motion by Councillor Chris Meaden and seconded by Councillor Walter Smith it was –

Resolved – That Councillor Angela Davies be appointed Chair for this meeting.

20 **MINUTES**

Resolved – That the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 14 December 2016 be approved.

21 **IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

The Director of Children's Services delivered a presentation to update Members in respect of the Improvement Plan.

Members were advised that a website had been set up in order that the Improvement Plan and minutes of the Improvement Board may be accessed. A number of comments from the Young People's Reference Group held in December were provided in order that Members were aware of the issues that the children had raised. It was reported that an engagement session had taken place between the Deputy Director for Children's Care Services, the Interim Strategic Lead for Improvement and a group of Social Workers in order that frontline managers could voice their concerns. Managers had highlighted that the emotional wellbeing of children was a big issue and that the waiting list for CAMHS was too long and the threshold too high. Another concern was that there was a lack of business support and that a stable workforce was needed to improve outcomes for children and young people.

The Director of Children's Services reported that a number of conferences had been held with partners which had been very well attended. She advised that the feedback from these conferences was positive and that it was felt that thresholds had been clarified.

The Director referred to the Improvement Plan and advised that this comprised three parts: People, Practice and Performance. People - focussed on getting the right people permanently in post. Members were advised that Simone White had been appointed as Deputy Director, Children's Social Care and that interviews were being held on 17 February for key Senior Manager posts. Carol Nixon had been appointed as the new Group Manager for Children in Care and Care Leavers and Kerry Metor had been appointed as the new interim Senior Manager, Children's Safeguarding. Practice - a number of conferences were being delivered and had been well attended by professionals. Manager's standards had been issued to all managers comprising eleven key points that were expected of them. Also, all front line managers had been undertaking training and a training session for elected members had been delivered in December. Performance - monthly performance clinics had been established which reviewed live data against core performance measures. Coaching and mentoring of staff had taken place as well as auditing and audit feedback workshops were being delivered from January 2017 onwards. The Improvement Plan had been submitted to Ofsted and DfE on 23 December 2016.

Members were informed that Ofsted had undertaken their first monitoring visit which had been carried out over two days. Six cases that had been referred since 1 December 2016 were audited and approximately twenty four sampled cases. It was reported that the findings of the visit would be shared with the Improvement Board and that feedback was expected at the end of February.

In response to questions from Members, it was reported that vacancies still existed for permanent social worker posts and that different ways of recruiting were being sought. The Director advised that work was continually being

undertaken with colleagues in Liverpool to explore the possibility of recruiting across Liverpool. Members were advised that changes in respect of the Children's and Social Care Bill were being followed and that representations had been made by professional associations. The Director stated that it was important to focus on core essentials.

The Director assured Members that the Improvement Board would show how outcomes for children would be improved and that the Department for Education Minister was checking progress, therefore strong external scrutiny was in place.

Resolved – That the Director of Children's Services be thanked for her presentation.

22 IMPROVEMENT PLAN PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Head of Quality, Performance and Improvement reported upon the core indicator areas that were currently being reviewed in order to develop insight and thereby establish the most appropriate actions that would be taken.

It was reported that detailed analysis was continuing in the key areas of Child Protection Plans and Children Looked After and that there had been a 73% increase in Wirral's rate of children who were subject to a Child Protection Plan in the year. Members were advised that Wirral's population of Children Looked After had fewer very young children and fewer older children but a significantly larger proportion of children in the age range 1-9 years than England. Further analyses have been undertaken to understand the reasons for this and inform the actions needed to bring this demand down.

A key area of concern in the Ofsted judgement in July 2016 was improving practice in 'staying in touch' with care leavers. It was reported that considerable work had been undertaken to improve this and that over 90% contact with care leavers had been achieved.

A key area of concern in the Ofsted judgement in July 2016 was improving practice in 'staying in touch' with care leavers. It was reported that considerable work had been undertaken to improve this and that over 90% contact with care leavers had been achieved. . An experienced manager has been working with the service, focussing on improving performance and additional resources had been agreed to ensure a quality service is offered to care leavers.

Members were advised that Children Looked After had been high in Wirral for some time and that there had been an increase since April 2016. There had been a decline in those leaving care and an increase in those coming into care.

Further to discussion amongst Members, the Director agreed that case auditing would be the key to identifying progress and Members welcomed receiving a regular report from audits.

Resolved –

- (1) That the Head of Quality, Performance and Improvement be thanked for her report.**
- (2) That a regular audit report be provided to Members.**

23 **WORK PROGRAMME FOR FUTURE MEETINGS**

The Chair referred to the work programme update. Members agreed the items proposed to be considered at the meeting to be held on 8 March 2017.

Members discussed the support provided by Merseyside Police and it was suggested that they be invited to the next meeting of the Sub-Committee.

The Chair requested that a workshop be convened to consider further items which may be added to the work programme.

Resolved –

- (1) That the items on the work programme be agreed and that a representative from Merseyside Police be invited to attend the next meeting of the Sub-Committee.**
- (2) That a workshop be convened with Members of the Children Sub-Committee and scrutiny officers.**



CHILDREN'S SUB COMMITTEE

8 MARCH 2017

REPORT TITLE	SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP ORDERS
REPORT OF	SUE LEEDHAM GROUP MANAGER – ADOPTION & FOSTERING

REPORT SUMMARY

This report provides an update of the progress achieved since the previous report in January 2016, regarding the *Assessment of potential Special Guardians and Post Special Guardianship support offered throughout childhood*.

RECOMMENDATION/S

The Children Sub-Committee is requested to note and comment upon the contents of this report. This is to provide evidence there continues to be scrutiny of Safeguarding Children in Wirral.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

It is clear that there needs to be ongoing scrutiny and reassurance that children subject to Special Guardianship Orders in Wirral are safeguarded throughout their childhood and enabled to reach their full potential.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

N/A

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3.1 The Scrutiny Review, sighted research into Special Guardianship, '*Investigating, Special Guardianship: Experiences, Outcomes and Challenges*' 2014 Department for Education. The research highlighted the positive contribution that Special Guardianship can make to children unable to remain in the care of their birth parents. This is especially significant for those children who have existing relationships with extended family members whose preservation would benefit the child rather than being severed as is often the case in adoption outside of the family.

The research also identified that for some very young children who have siblings living with family members, Special Guardianship would enable them to establish and maintain those relationships.

3.2 The two main areas that the Scrutiny Report Recommendations addressed in relation to Special Guardianship were, i) Assessment of potential Special Guardians in line with regulations and procedures and ii) Post Special Guardianship support offered throughout a child's lifetime.

UPDATE & PROGRESS

3.3 The recently published Special Guardianship (amendment) regulations 2016 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, an 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;*
- (iii) *Their ability and sustainability to bring up the child until the child reaches the age of eighteen;*

- 3.4 In June 2016 an updated report to the Court was published, to be used where there has been an application for a Special Guardianship Order. These amendments to the report require the social worker to explicitly address each of the amendments to the 2016 regulations as sighted above.
- 3.5 The report to Court also requires an assessment of the nature of the prospective Special Guardian's current and past relationship with the child.
- 3.6 Children's Services have embedded the updated report within the processes and procedures in light of the new regulations and supporting court reports. There has been a programme of training for social work staff to enable them to better evidence to Court the suitability of potential Special Guardians and to identify and address any safeguarding concerns.
- 3.7 Since September 2016, Permanence Panel has had 30 cases presented for a recommendation regarding applications for Special Guardianship Orders. Of those 30 cases 29 of the applicants had been approved as foster carers prior to being presented to Permanence Panel. There was 1 case where the applicant did not meet the fostering standards due to her previous criminal convictions and lifestyle choices and was therefore not recommended to be a foster carer. The Fostering panel were clear that their recommendation was not a reflection on the excellent care that the applicant was providing as a Nan for her granddaughter or on her ability to safeguard her now and in the future. In making their positive recommendation, Permanence Panel also recommended that a Supervision Order be applied for in order for the local authority to continue to support the family and for the support plan to reflect the ongoing advice and support recommended.
- 3.8 As reported previously to committee, as a means to support the transition towards Special Guardianship Children's Services may recommend to the court that a Supervision Order is issued in addition to a Special Guardianship Order, to strengthen the authority's responsibilities and duties to support the placement. This is particularly important regarding issues of supervising contact with birth parents and supporting carers to be able to identify and risks.
- 3.9 The Department for Education has recently brought in requirements of all local authorities to report on the numbers of Special Guardianship Orders granted on a quarterly basis. Within this report local authorities have to provide details such as the relationship the special guardian has with the child, if a supervision order was also granted and if the local authority is supporting the special guardian financially. This reporting when published will allow for analysis of the use of special guardianship as a permanence option for children, nationally and on a local level.

Support

- 3.10.1 In the Spring of 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. This has greatly enhanced the therapeutic support which can be offered to children and their Special Guardians. A 'Newsletter' was sent to all of Wirral's Special Guardians explaining the changes to the Adoption Support Fund, with details of how to apply. The feedback from those

who have received therapeutic intervention has been excellent, with families seeing a real difference this can make to their children's lives.

- 3.11 Within each support plan the Adoption Support Fund offer is address both for any therapeutic need which is current and also for potential future need. This support plan is presented to Permanence Panel at the time of making a recommendation for Special Guardianship and an annual update the plan by assessing any changes to support needs of the Special Guardians is offered.
- 3.12 The response nationally to the use of the Adoption Support Fund to extend to Special Guardianship exceeded expectations and concerns were raise regarding the Governments budget for the fund not being able to meet the needs of all those making applications. In October 2016 the Government introduced a 'Fair Access Limit' of £5000 per child per year, with a 'Match' funding offer to local authorities for therapeutic services over £5000. Locally the fair access limit has not proved to disadvantage any applications, as they have been within the limit and match funding has not been required.
- 3.13 Wirral Grandcare (formally known as Bringing up Grandchildren), an independent support group and network, has developed to include all connected carers, rather than grandparents alone. The group meet social workers from the Adoption and Permanence service regularly and their groups provide support, advice, newsletters, training and signposting. Those who attend find it to be an invaluable service.
- 3.14 Two members of the group 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. One carer wrote:

'The course was amazing and I was able to put into practice straight away the things I had learned, little tips that are so useful for children who are hyper vigilant and struggling to cope with their attachment issues, but most of all it's helped me look at the behaviours and understand why the do what they do, This has led to a calmer more understanding me.'

The group also has a small library of books which cover a variety of subjects pertinent to caring for children who have suffered trauma and loss. Some of these books were recommended and provided by the adoption team.

4 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None

5 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

None

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: ICT, STAFFING AND ASSETS

None

7 RELEVANT RISKS

None

8 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

None

9 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

No because there is no relevance to equality.

REPORT AUTHOR: Sue Leedham
Group Manager Fostering & Adoption
Telephone: (0151 666 5574)
Email: sueleedham@wirral.gov.uk

APPENDICES

REFERENCE MATERIAL

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date

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Children Sub Committee Wednesday, 8th March 2017

REPORT TITLE:	Children Sub Committee – work programme update
REPORT OF:	The Chair of the Committee

REPORT SUMMARY

This report updates members on progress towards delivering the work programme for the Children Sub Committee as agreed for the 2016/17 municipal year. The report also takes account of discussions relating to scrutiny of the implementation of the Ofsted improvement plan. Clearly the work programme of the Sub Committee should supplement, not duplicate, the work programme of the parent committee, the People Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

RECOMMENDATION/S

1. Members are requested to approve the proposed Children Sub Committee work programme for 2016/17, making any required amendments, including suggestions for additional items and changed priorities.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

To ensure members of the Children Sub Committee have the opportunity to contribute to the delivery of the annual work programme.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

Not Applicable

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3.1 CURRENT WORK PROGRAMME

Existing items on the work programme, agreed at the previous meeting of the Sub Committee on 8th February are:

Item	Format	Timescale	Lead Departmental Officer
Merseyside Police – Role in safeguarding procedures	Verbal report	To be agreed	
Outcomes of the audit of case files in children’s social care	Report	To be agreed	
Governance arrangements and the role of scrutiny in safeguarding	Report	To be agreed	
Devolution of the Further education budget and the apprenticeship framework	Report	To be agreed	
Quality Assurance process of care plans	Report	To be agreed	

Further items proposed at the workshop held on 7th November 2016 to discuss the implementation of the Ofsted improvement plan included:

Item	Format	Timescale	Lead Departmental Officer
Monitoring the key milestones of the Improvement Plan	Report	Standing item	
Reviewing the performance data tracker	Report	Standing item	
Early intervention / prevention, including the application of thresholds, partnership arrangements and the operation of MASH	Possible task & finish group	To be agreed	
The management of care plans and related performance; leaving care and IROs	Possible task & finish group	To be agreed	
Competent skilled workforce and the quality of social work practice	Possible task & finish group	To be agreed	
Scrutiny's place in long-term governance arrangements	To be agreed	To be agreed	
Follow-up to the original Looked after children scrutiny review (August 2013)	To be agreed	To be agreed	
Follow-up to the previous Safeguarding scrutiny review (December 2015)	To be agreed	To be agreed	

Prioritisation of these items plus the addition of any further items would assist in the planning and delivery of the work programme. It is now proposed that a further workshop will be held, hopefully during March 2017, to help members define an effective work programme for the Children Sub Committee, particularly in its role while the Improvement Board is in place.

In order to manage the work programme more effectively, it has been agreed that some meetings will be dedicated to scrutiny of Ofsted improvement-related issues while other meetings will focus on other issues within the remit of the Sub Committee. It is proposed that, for the remainder of the municipal year, meetings will be arranged as follows:

Meeting date	Agenda Items
8 th March	Other issues
5 th April	Ofsted improvement-related scrutiny

3.2 RELEVANT ITEMS FROM THE PEOPLE OSC WORK PROGRAMME

The People OSC has confirmed that the following items should form part of the work programme of the main committee:

Item	Format	Timescale	Lead Departmental Officer
Safeguarding governance - Scrutiny's relationship with the LSCB and other safeguarding bodies	Workshop	To be agreed	
Looked after children - Follow-up review	Evidence Day(s)	Deferred until post-Ofsted planning for scrutiny is complete	Liz Davenport
Children ready for school	Task & finish group	Deferred	Deborah Gornik

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Not Applicable

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Not Applicable

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: ICT, STAFFING AND ASSETS

The delivery of the scrutiny work programme will be met from within existing resources.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

Not Applicable

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

Not Applicable

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct equality implications.

REPORT AUTHOR: Alan Veitch
Scrutiny Support
0151 691 8564
email: alanveitch@wirral.gov.uk

APPENDICES

None