

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 20 June 2017

Present:

Councillor	T Usher (Chair)	
Councillors	M McLaughlin	W Smith
	A Brighthouse	J Stapleton
	W Clements	A Sykes
	P Hayes	W Ward
	T Jones	Wood
	B Kenny	G Ellis (In place of
	C Meaden	C Povall)
		S Williams (In place
		of T Anderson)

Apologies

Councillors	Mr D Cunningham	Mrs G Peters
	Mr M Harrison	

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted that apologies had been received for Councillors Tom Anderson and Cherry Povall, and co-opted members Damian Cunningham, Mark Harrison and Gill Peters.

Councillors Gerry Ellis and Steve Williams acted as deputies for Councillors Povall and Anderson respectively.

The Chair formally welcomed Deborah Gornik who was attending her first meeting since her appointment as Interim Director of Children's Services. She extended her welcome to Simone White (Deputy Director: Children's Social Care) Carly Brown (Head of Quality, Performance and Improvement, Children) who had recently joined the Council, and to Councillor Gill Wood (attending her first meeting since her election) and other Members who were also new to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee remit.

2 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 item(s) on this agenda and, if so, to declare them and state what they were.

Councillor Chris Meaden declared a personal interest in a number of items on the agenda by virtue of her daughter's employment within the Children and Young Peoples Department. She remained in the meeting and took part in the discussions.

3 BRIEFING PACK - CHILDREN & FAMILIES OSC

The Chair welcomed all to the first meeting of the Municipal Year and indicated that Item 3, Briefing Pack – Children and Families OSC (for noting) would be considered together with Item 4 – Committee Remit and Key Issues for the Municipal Year (presentation).

4 COMMITTEE REMIT AND KEY ISSUES FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR

The Committee considered a presentation introduced by Deborah Gornik, Director of Children's Services. The presentation updated Members on the review of scrutiny arrangements that had taken place during summer 2016 to align Overview and Scrutiny to the Wirral Plan themes, and to enable scrutiny to best support and add value to the delivery of the Wirral Plan.

The Director of Children's Services informed that a further review of the structure had taken place at the end of the 2016/17 Municipal Year prompted by Member concerns regarding the size/remit of the People Overview & Scrutiny Committee and an increased focus on the Improvement Plan for Children's Services following the OFSTED report. She added that as a result it was agreed to split the People Overview & Scrutiny Committee to create:

- Adult Care and Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee
- Children and Families Overview & Scrutiny Committee

The Committee noted its wider brief in respect of Wirral Plan Pledges, namely:

- Children are ready for school
- Young people are ready for work and adulthood
- Vulnerable children reach their full potential
- Reduce child and family poverty
- Zero tolerance to domestic violence

and to review and / or scrutinise the commissioning, management and performance of services for:

- Children's Care
- Children's Services
- Education
- Children's Safeguarding Cross cutting pledges

The Director of Children further informed that a number of additional cross-cutting themes also fell under the Committee's remit i.e. people with disabilities live independently (shared with Adult Care and Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee) and relevant issues relating to Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.

Members noted the Committee's responsibilities with regard to the review and scrutiny of service delivery, performance and management of services for Children's Social Care and Safeguarding and the Ofsted Improvement Journey.

Resolved – That the briefing pack and presentation be noted.

5 IMPROVEMENT PLAN - UPDATE

The Committee considered a presentation introduced by Deborah Gornik, Director of Children's Services. The presentation provided Members with an update on the Safeguarding Improvement Journey in respect of the Ofsted report published in September 2016 that had identified the majority of Children's Social Care services to be inadequate and outlined 19 recommendations for the local authority and 7 for the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

The Director of Children's Services informed that Work had begun immediately to address such areas through the creation of an Improvement Board and the required Improvement Plan, the Department for Education had appointed a Wirral Improvement Partner to work with the local authority and government had approved the Improvement Plan.

The Committee noted that many actions undertaken had created the conditions to support change and improvement, and within three elements of the plan – People, Practice and Performance - 103 actions had been developed – 89 had been delivered, with 14 that remained outstanding but within planned timescales.

The Chair asked the Director Children's Services about the timescales for the improvement plan, and noted that on average and given the starting point such a journey was expected to take in the region of 2 to 3 years to ensure the basics were in place and that to achieve a 'good' rating could take 4 to 5 years.

The Director of Children's Services informed that within the three elements of the plan the following actions had been addressed:

People

- Leadership, management and social work staffing structures had been reviewed to ensure there was sufficient capacity and capability across the service
- A senior, permanent, leadership team for the Children and Young People's Department had been recruited to drive forward improvement, integration and model expected behaviours and standards

- An Induction programme for new staff with clear standards and expectations for Children's Social Care had also recently been launched.

Practice

- Capacity had been increased to undertake strategy discussions and initial child protection investigations in a more timely way.
- Conference calls had been implemented within the 'integrated front door' to enable virtual strategy meetings to take place with all relevant professionals.
- A 'First Response Team' of Social Workers had been established to undertake all new Section 47 Enquiries and Assessments.
- The Social Workers and Managers practice standards had been issued to ensure clarity for staff on the standards of practice expected in relation to assessments, plans and the management of risk.
- Wirral had also hosted the 'Right Service, Right Time' and 'Early Help' conferences early 2017.

Performance

- Data quality assurance checks had been implemented to ensure that areas for inaccurate reporting were known and addressed starting with the areas identified by Ofsted.
- A range of performance information under the Performance Management and Quality Assurance Framework had been developed that included: Daily Headline Reports, Weekly and Monthly Performance Reports and a range of 'Self-Serve' reports.
- Joint working through the Children and Young People commissioning with partners across health, education and social care to develop an accurate needs assessment for Wirral had been promoted.

The Director of Children's Services reported that as part of Phase 2 of the improvement Journey the following actions would be developed:

- Through strong leadership 'siloes' delivery across the department and the districts will be reduced and an integrated offer promoted.
- Synchronising the work of the Improvement Board and that of the department transformation programme, whilst retaining individual core reporting and governance structures.
- Providing strategic support to the Improvement Board and the wider partnership arrangements to take an active role in developing and

understanding the impact of improvement activity to ensure that resources are targeted appropriately.

The Chair thanked the Director of Children's Services for her presentation.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

6 SCRUTINY SAFEGUARDING REVIEW – DECEMBER 2015: UPDATE OF PROGRESS

The Director of Children's Services introduced her report that would provide an update on the progress made in implementing the 20 key recommendations from the Safeguarding Scrutiny Review that the Families and Well-Being Scrutiny Committee had undertaken in December 2015. The report provided an opportunity to cross reference and ensure that any outstanding areas would be incorporated into the Ofsted Safeguarding Improvement Plan to ensure there was no duplication or omission with regard to priorities and reporting.

The Committee noted that the findings of the report were crucial to the delivery of the Children and Young People 20/20 pledges.

The report informed that since the Ofsted inspection of local authority services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers and review of the Local Safeguarding Children Board in July 2016, there had been a significant investment and activity with regard to the Safeguarding Improvement Journey. This had included the establishment of an Improvement Board (including an independent chair), the production of a high level Improvement Plan (see minute 5 above), a renewed Local Safeguarding Children's Board and a DfE Review of progress to date.

A Member requested that the Reality Check visits (Recommendation 16 – December 2015) referred to in the report be extended to include partner organisations e.g. practitioners, police, etc. The Director of Children's Services stated that the request for wider engagement would be explored.

In response to a question from a Member regarding the recruitment and retention of social workers, the Director of Children's Services informed that a review was currently underway and included a 'whole series of initiatives', looking not only at remuneration but training, communication, office accommodation and locations.

The Chair referenced that, in respect of the Director's comment regarding training, that no follow up note to the multi-agency development day planned for September 2016 had been made.

Members noted the issues affecting recruitment of Social Workers, and 'reality check' actions being undertaken by senior Officers to experience and

understand the Social Worker role by co-locating in district offices and access to the information systems used by staff.

Resolved – That

- (1) endorse the progress made against the 20 Safeguarding Scrutiny Review recommendations be endorsed;**
- (2) key areas of focus regarding the safeguarding of children and young people, as identified in the report produced by the Families and Well-Being Scrutiny Committee are cross referenced and captured in the Ofsted Improvement Plan be agreed; and**
- (3) Further training relating to the Committee's remit be provided for members.**

7 SCHOOLS STRATEGY

The Committee considered a presentation introduced by Sue Talbot, Lead Commissioner: Schools. The presentation provided Members with a comprehensive update on Wirral Council's Schools Strategy. The Committee was informed of the three aspects system of leadership that underpinned the Strategy, namely:

- Teaching Schools (Specialist Leaders in Education SLEs)
- National Leaders in Education (NLEs) and Local Leaders in Education (LLEs)
- National Leaders of Governance (NLGs)

The Lead Commissioner: Schools informed that Teaching Schools had an important role to play in a school-led system and in school improvement, and that Teaching Schools will become centres of excellence, taking on a more focused role that prioritised the co-ordination and delivery of high quality school-based initial teacher training (ITT). In addition Teaching Schools were to provide high quality school-to-school support to share best practice, particularly to schools that need it most, and provide evidence-based professional and leadership development for teachers and leaders across their network.

The Committee was apprised that NLEs were outstanding head teachers who, together with the staff in their national support school (NSS), used their skills and experience to support schools in challenging circumstances. In addition to leading their own schools, NLEs worked to increase the leadership capacity of other schools helped raise standards.

The Lead Commissioner: Schools explained that NLEs could be deployed in a number of ways and each deployment could be tailored to suit the needs of the school receiving support. NLEs were expected to support schools in the

most challenging circumstances such as those in an Ofsted category, facing closure or amalgamation or falling below the floor standards.

The Lead Commissioner: Schools further explained that a NLE met with the head teacher(s) and senior staff to discuss the challenges faced and what help was needed and that their work was tailored in partnership with the school.

The Committee was further updated on the local context, in summary:

- Currently there were 3 Teaching Schools (St. John Plessington, Weatherhead High School and Our Lady of Pity Catholic Primary School).
- One more primary school had submitted an application.
- Three primary schools were working on a collaborative bid within twelve months.
- Wirral contained Six National Leaders in Education.
- The school improvement work of the teaching schools was strategically led by the School to School Partnership Board.
- The LA Lead School Commissioner commissioned school improvement work from the Teaching Schools and NLEs.
- Four Locality Boards would be operational from September 2017.

Members questioned the Lead Commissioner: Schools on a variety of topics arising from her presentation that included teacher training, funding for improvements, special schools, private schools and retention of teachers.

A Member also requested additional feedback on the matter of the statistical information provided re Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). The Lead Commissioner Schools confirmed that the relevant statistics would be provided to Members following the meeting.

The Committee noted that the Schools Strategy provided the following information, in summary:

- An over-arching strategic view of the education offer / provision;
- Pupil Places - offering parental preference;
- A coordinated approach for system leadership and school to school support;
- The changing relationship with schools as school improvement statutory duties move from the Local Authority to the Regional School Commissioner's office; and
- The development of Multi Academy Trusts.

The Lead Commissioner: Schools presentation also summarised information regarding:

Wirral's Priorities are to:

- Ensure all Wirral's children and young people attend schools judged as 'good' or better by Ofsted.
- Raise the aspiration of all 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 that all Wirral's children and young people were educated in schools that were right for them and which best met their needs.

Members noted the risks i.e. the removal of the Education Services Grants (ESG) that meant, that from April 2018, funding available to offset salary costs for a number of Council employees who were responsible for facilitating the delivery of the strategy and ensured the Council was able to meet its current statutory duties will be reduced by a further £940,000. This meant that unless these posts were funded from core budget the posts will be at risk which could result in reduced LA strategic overview and knowledge of Wirral schools. Many of the LA's statutory duties could be compromised.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

8 **2016/17 QUARTER 4 AND YEAR END WIRRAL PLAN PERFORMANCE - PEOPLE THEME**

The Director of Children's Services introduced the report of the Executive Director for Strategy that provided the 2016/17 Quarter 4 (January – March 2017) performance report for Wirral Plan pledges under the People theme. The Quarter 4 report was included as Appendix 1 to the report, and provided a description of the progress in Quarter 4 that included available data in relation to a range of outcome indicators and supporting measures.

The Year End closedown report was included as Appendix 2 and provided a summary analysis of improvement of performance against measures and delivery of Pledge strategy actions at year end.

The Director of Children's Services informed that following restructure of the Council's Scrutiny function, future reports would be broken down to align with the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee Terms of Reference.

Members commented on a number of Wirral Plan Indicators of concern, namely those relating to domestic abuse, family intervention, self-harm and child poverty, seeking reassurance that these matters would remain high priorities for the Council and its partners. The Director of Children's Services confirmed that these subjects formed part of a cross-cutting area of work that included a number of preventative actions across services.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

9 FINANCIAL MONITORING - 2016/17 Q4

Andrew Roberts, Senior Manager, Financial Management introduced the report of the Assistant Director: Finance (Section 151 Officer) that set out the Council's revenue and capital monitoring position for 2016/17 year-end (31 March 2017).

The Senior Manager, Financial Management informed that the 2016/17 out-turn position was an overall underspend of £2.9 million (£0.4 million underspend was forecast at quarter 3) and that People (former Families and Wellbeing areas) had a significant forecast overspend that had been offset by largely one-off savings within Business Services Treasury Management.

The year-end capital report updated the capital programme and reflected significant re-profiling of schemes between years to reduce the 2016/17 capital programme to £30.7 million. The actual capital out-turn at year end was £25.3 million.

Members attention was directed to Table 4 within the report (reproduced below) that identified the main pressures to the budget out-turn (£5.6 million for Children's Services):

Major Variations Budget to Out-turn 2016/17	£m	£m
People:		
Children's Services - Looked After Children placements	+2.3	
Children's Services - Agency spend on social workers	+3.3	
Adult Social Care- Increased Community Care costs net of reductions in staffing and non-commissioned spend	+3.9	
Environment		
Contract efficiencies – Supporting People		-0.7
Income – Waste and Litter Charges		-0.6
Business:		
Treasury Management - one off MRP adjustment		-6.9
Treasury management – one-off interest savings		-2.5
Revenue Budget Contingency – unallocated		-0.7
Contract and various corporate savings		-1.0

Members noted that overall a net underspend of £2.9 million at the year-end has been transferred to General Fund Balances.

Members questioned Mr Roberts on a number of points namely Capital Investment in Schools, the cost of interim posts arising from long term staff absence in Social Services and debt write-offs.

The Senior Manager, Financial Management provided a further update on the Council's overall position regarding collection of sundry debts and provisions for bad debt.

The Director of Children's Services informed that lost days due to sickness in the Service was high, but figures were skewed by a number of long term absences (78% of the total figure) that affected the remaining figures amounting to 3.9 days absence due to sickness – that was lower than the Council average.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

10 **CHILDREN & FAMILIES OSC - WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE REPORT**

The Chair introduced his report that set out the process of developing and managing the scrutiny work programme for the Municipal Year. The report informed Children and Families Overview & Scrutiny Committee, in cooperation with the other three Overview and Scrutiny Committees, was responsible for proposing and delivering an annual scrutiny work programme. He informed that the work programme should align with the corporate priorities of the Council, in particular the delivery of the Wirral Plan pledges that were within the remit of the Committee.

The Committee noted that it was envisaged that the work programme will be formed from a combination of scrutiny reviews, standing items and requested officer reports. The report provided the Committee with an opportunity to plan and regularly review its work across the municipal year. Some initial ideas for a work programme, based on issues which were of interest to members of the former People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, were attached as an appendix to the report.

The Chair highlighted a number of key points pertinent to his report, namely:

- Further work was required to define a full work programme for the year. The Chair and Spokespersons will consider how best to do that prior to the next Committee meeting in September;
- Nominations were required for the Statutory Care Plan Task and Finish Group;
- Reality Check visits – the proposed process and propose an initial visit to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH);
- Members had previously requested that a workshop be held to determine an appropriate relationship between scrutiny and the Local Safeguarding Children Board. It was proposed to hold a workshop during the summer; and
- A joint workshop with members of the Adult Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny was proposed to scrutinise emerging proposals for the All-age disability and mental health services. It was proposed to hold a workshop during the summer.

Recommended – That

- (1) the proposed Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme for 2017/18 be approved;**
- (2) nominations for the Chair and membership of the Task and Finish Group for the Statutory Care Plan scrutiny review be provided to Committee Services and/or Scrutiny Support;**
- (3) the establishment of a programme of Reality Check Visits to form part of the Committee's annual work programme be agreed, commencing with a visit to the MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub);**
- (4) the proposal to establish a Members' workshop to determine a more effective working relationship with the Local Safeguarding Children Board be noted;**
- (5) delegated authority be given to the Chair, Vice Chair and Spokespersons to give further detailed consideration to the Committee's work programme prior to the next scheduled Committee meeting in September; and**
- (6) delegated authority be given to the Chair, Vice Chair and Spokespersons of both the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Adult Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee to:**
 - (i) make arrangements to hold an appropriate workshop to scrutinise proposals for the all-age disability and mental health service; and**
 - (ii) if necessary, to approve and refer any report arising from the workshop directly to Cabinet.**