

## **Wirral Improvement Board**

### **30 March 2012**

### **Progress report**

Wirral Improvement Board has to date met twice, on 3 February and 2 March 2012. At its first meeting on 3 February the Board agreed its role, composition and meeting frequency:

Wirral Improvement Board is a partnership between Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council and the Local Government Association. It will provide oversight, support and challenge to Wirral's improvement and transformation journey.

The Improvement Board's role is to:

- Provide support, guidance and challenge
- Identify and signpost appropriate good practice
- Ensure there is a single, integrated and holistic improvement plan that can be clearly understood and communicated internally and externally
- Ensure the contributions from different external agencies/bodies to Wirral's improvement journey are coordinated

### **Board Members**

*Wirral Council* – Council Leader and Deputy Leader, Leader of the Labour Group, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, Chief Executive, Director of Finance, Director of Law and the Assistant Director of Finance (in his role as facilitator of the improvement programme).

*Local Government Association* – Principal Advisor North West, Associate Support Officer, Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat Member Peers.  
*Independent Chief Executive*- CE of Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council.  
*District Auditor*.

*Advisors* – AKA Associates and the Chief Executive of North West Employers

### **Chair of the Improvement Board**

The Chair will be an independent person and will not be party political. Currently the Chair is Dr Gill Taylor, Local Government Association Principal Advisor, North West.

### **Frequency of Meetings**

The Improvement Board will meet monthly for the first six months and then review. Every third meeting of the Board will be held in public to report on progress and receive any questions from the public.

### **Notes of the meeting**

The Board will issue a short note after each meeting which can be circulated to Wirral Elected Members, staff, public and partner organisations.

## **What we covered at our meeting on February 3<sup>rd</sup>**

We had a constructive first meeting of the Improvement Board. We agreed the Terms of Reference of the Board and agreed to invite the council's District Auditor, Mike Thomas, to join as Board Member. We agreed to hold meetings on a monthly basis for the first six months of the Board and then review frequency after that. We agreed to hold every third meeting in public to report on progress and take any questions.

We received a report on the authority's response to date regarding the reports it had commissioned from Anna Klonowski Associates on corporate governance and adult services. We noted that it had responded positively to these reports and had taken a number of actions to address the findings. We asked for some further information on certain points.

We agreed that the authority needs a single, integrated and overarching improvement plan to focus and drive the improvement of both its corporate governance and key services over the next couple of years. The three party Group Leaders will meet before the next Board meeting and decide on a small number of key priorities on which they want this overall improvement plan to focus. This will take into account the LGA's experience from other councils of what they had to tackle to secure significant improvement in corporate governance and services.

We agreed that the Improvement Board would be the vehicle to drive the next stage improvement plan moving on from the work carried out by the Corporate Governance Committee. This Committee will therefore be disbanded to avoid overlap of roles.

It was agreed that the next meeting would focus on gaining a common understanding of the views of the regulatory bodies of Wirral's current performance (Ofsted, CQC and District Audit) and reviewing the key priorities for the Improvement Board. It will consider priorities for the improvement plan and look at the internal capacity needed to drive this work forward.

## **Meeting of the Improvement Board, 2 March 2012**

At its second meeting on 2 March 2012 considered as follows:

The Improvement Board agreed to invite Joyce Redfearn to act as Independent Chair, to take effect from April. Joyce has served for 17 years as a Chief Executive in Wigan, Gloucestershire and Monmouthshire and will retire from Wigan council at the end of March. She has played a very active part in Improvement and Efficiency in the North West and at a National level. She has served on 2 previous improvement boards for Blaenau Gwent and for Liverpool. Her role as Chair of the Board will be to providing advice, support and challenge to Wirral and Board Members welcomed her expertise and experience.

A very useful overview from some of the main council regulators allowed the Board to gain a collective understanding of both strengths and areas for improvement for the Council.

The District Auditor presented a letter setting out the terms of his involvement with the Board. He then gave an overview of recurrent themes from his most recent Annual Audit Letter and Annual Governance report. Key themes included the need to strengthen corporate governance arrangements in respect of performance management, procurement, whistleblowing arrangements, internal audit and some specific aspects of the Council's arrangements for achieving value for money most notably asset accounting and management. There was a high level of consistency with the corporate governance messages from the AKA reports.

The Local Government Association (LGA) advisor on Adult Social Care provided feedback on behalf of the National Towards Excellence in Adult Social Care improvement programme, which includes the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and a number of other agencies and supports improvement in care services. Wirral has been one of only seven local authorities nationally to have received an 'Adequate' classification under the former CQC inspection regime and as such has attracted support and funding to improve. The key message was that the Council had taken responsibility for improving Adult Social Care services and was on a positive improvement trajectory whilst still accepting that there was much more to do. Ofsted's position was as set out in its letter of April 2011, which rated Children's Services as 'Excellent'.

The Board agreed that the council should strengthen the role of the Council's Audit and Risk Committee, include further training for Committee Members and greater consistency of membership to deepen their expertise.

The Board acknowledges how important councillor training is and requested a copy of the new Member Training Programme at the next meeting.

The Board received a report on the council's key priorities for the overarching Improvement Plan, which had cross party support. These were (expanded in Appendix 1):

- Corporate plan development
- Focus on critical service areas such as safeguarding and the local economy
- Budget and financial stability
- Corporate governance and decision-making
- Leadership, both political and managerial.

The Board felt these were a very good basis on which to move forward with the next stage of improvement planning. At the next meeting Wirral will report back on how it intends to deliver the agreed priorities for improvement and what resources it will need to put into this. The Board welcomed the additional sum agreed as part of the budget and wanted the Council to identify sufficient corporate capacity to drive forward the overall improvement programme with momentum.

The Board asked for a progress report to the next meeting about the completion of the existing Corporate Governance Improvement Plan.

## WIRRAL IMPROVEMENT PRIORITIES

1. Corporate Plan	To put in place an agreed Corporate Plan that sets clear priorities reflecting a good understanding of citizens and customers views through consultation, participation and localism. Underpinned by rigorous performance management and performance appraisal arrangements.
2. Focus on critical service areas, safeguarding and developing the local economy	Ensure that there is a clear organisational focus on critical service areas such as safeguarding (children and adults) and developing the local economy and ensuring that we improve the skills of local residents and stimulate the private sector to grow and create jobs.
3. Budget and financial stability	Clear longer term financial plan, linked to the Corporate Plan, setting out how the Authority will respond to reducing levels of resources including the development and enhancement of the Strategic Change Programme and the development of a clear commissioning strategy for the Authority.
4. Corporate governance and decision making	Risk, whistleblowing, audit are strong. Agreed protocol on sharing information with Members. Clear Scheme of Delegation. Culture of openness rather than secrecy.
5. Leadership – political and managerial	Trust/respect between politicians and senior management. Strong strategic leadership and oversight of delivery. Development needs for Members and management identified and addressed. Strong corporate culture and cohesiveness.