

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 6 June 2012

Present: Councillor W Clements (Chair)

Councillors D Dodd C Povall
P Doughty W Smith
P Hayes P Williams
B Mooney

Deputy: Councillor C Jones (in place of J Crabtree)

Co-opted: Mrs J Owens

Apologies: Mr A Scott

1 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST / PARTY WHIP

Members were asked to consider whether they had a personal or prejudicial interest in connection with any item on the agenda and, if so, to declare it and to state the nature of such interest.

Members were reminded that they should also declare, pursuant to paragraph 18 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, whether they were subject to a party whip in connection with the item to be considered and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of the whipping arrangement.

Councillor C Jones declared a personal interest in the items, '2011/12 Year End Performance and Financial Review' and 'Fostering Service Report', by virtue of her employment with the Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (see minutes 6 and 9 post).

2 MINUTES

Members were requested to receive the minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 21 March, 2012.

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting of 21 March, 2012 be approved as a correct record.

3 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

The Committee was asked to consider if it wanted to appoint a Vice-Chair.

On a motion by Councillor Clements, seconded by Councillor Povall, it was –

Resolved - That Councillor P Hayes be appointed Vice-Chair of this Committee.

4 **ANNUAL UNANNOUNCED INSPECTION OF CONTACT, REFERRAL AND ASSESSMENT ARRANGEMENTS WITHIN WIRRAL COUNCIL'S CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

The Acting Director of Children's Services submitted a report on the second unannounced inspection of Contact, Referral and Assessment arrangements within local authority children's services in Wirral Council which was conducted by OFSTED on 1 and 2 February 2012. The letter setting out the findings of the inspection was attached to the report.

The inspectors had identified two areas of strength; it was acknowledged by inspectors that this was fewer than in the previous inspection, but that this reflected a markedly higher standard that had been set following the first round of inspections. The inspection had also found thirteen areas of satisfactory practice and five areas for development. The inspection was positive and reflected the hard work by staff and managers to improve services for children and families. This was a challenging area of working requiring constant vigilance and attention, which would be sustained through a constant focus on maintaining and improving services still further, for some of the most vulnerable children in Wirral.

An action plan had been developed to address the areas for development and also some of the more general areas for improvement and was appended to the report. The provision of excellent contact, referral and assessment services for children in need, at risk of significant harm or who had experienced significant harm was an area of work demanding constant attention, monitoring and oversight. The inspection had confirmed that good systems were in place to do this; however, there could never be any room for complacency. It was an area of considerable risk.

Responding to comments from Members, both Tracy Coffey, Strategic Service Manager and the Acting Director expanded on the work being done to improve the timescales of initial and core assessments whilst dealing with a significant increase in the referrals of children at risk; 348 children now had a Child Protection Plan. They referred to the constant challenge of staff retention with 56% of Social Workers having 2 years or less experience and the need to have a better skill mix with the retention of experienced staff. A report on this issue had been considered by the Employment and Appointments Committee at its meeting on 23 April, 2012 (minute 90 refers). For newly qualified Social Workers there was a very intensive training programme and support from a dedicated officer.

They also reported that a number of systems were now in place to address the issue of embedding equality and diversity issues in assessments, plans and reviews. A report would be going to Cabinet on a new caseload management system for both the Children and Young People's Department and the Department of Adult Social Services, although this could not be an overnight change. The idea of using some of the expertise of recently retired Social Worker staff was something that could be explored.

Resolved – That the outcome of the February 2012 OFSTED Unannounced Inspection of Contact, Referral and Assessment arrangements, be noted.

5 EARLY INTERVENTION GRANT QUARTER THREE MONITORING REPORT

The Acting Director of Children's Services submitted the third quarter monitoring report on the performance of Early Intervention Grant (EIG) commissioned services totalling £2.8million. In Wirral, the EIG had been used to drive service delivery which was prompt, appropriate, effective and planned around the family and the child.

The report gave details of the performance of providers within the three priority areas:

1. Parenting/Compromised Parenting
2. Short Breaks for Disabled Children
3. Risk taking Behaviour in Children and Young People

and in particular those services which were not delivering the expected outcomes. Financial information on the contracts was included in an exempt appendix.

Maureen McDaid, Principal Manager (Commissioning / Participation), and the Acting Director, responding to comments from Members, informed the meeting of the work being done to raise awareness amongst young people of the issue of domestic violence. In respect of the contract carer scheme the targets had been ambitious but the commissioning would be scaled back. The after school club at Barnstondale would continue to be monitored as the activities were changed in response to requests from families. Any savings made through contract variations could be reinvested in extra programmes as the first priority was to deliver the services which the Council had set out to provide.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

6 2011/12 YEAR END PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL REVIEW

The Acting Director of Children's Services reported upon the performance of the Council's Corporate Plan 2011-14 and Departmental Plan 2011-12 for April 2011 - March 2012, in relation to children and young people. He provided an overview of performance, resources and risk monitoring.

For the year end of 2011/12 there were 55 departmental indicators that could be reported, of these 70.9% were achieving or exceeding target. The report gave details of the corrective action being taken for those indicators missing their target.

The Acting Director further reported upon the anticipated 2011/12 budget forecast overspend which was £1 million, a reduction from £1.6 million in the quarter. This was largely due to the use of one-off funding from balances and the Schools Forum agreeing in January to fund planned preventative maintenance expenditure in schools.

Responding to comments from Members, Nancy Clarkson, Head of Planning and Performance, stated that in respect of NI 62 and the stability of placements of looked after children, Wirral compared very well with the Council's statistical neighbours being in the second quartile.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

7 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PLAN 2012-13 AND ANNUAL REPORT 2011-12

The Acting Director of Children's Services reported upon the production of the new Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) for 2012-13 and the annual review of the 2011-12 CYPP. The CYPP was an overarching strategic plan developed by Wirral Children's Trust for all organisations providing services for the children and young people of Wirral and it was reviewed annually. The plan and associated documents were published on the Wirral Children's Trust Website (hosted by Wirral Council) and where appropriate the teenWirral website.

Quarterly performance reports were presented to Wirral Children's Trust Board along with an annual report from each strategy group.

The Acting Director, referring to the Board, commented that it was well worth keeping in its current form; supported at a high level it brought together a range of stakeholders.

Resolved – That the Children and Young People's Plan 2012-13 and the Annual Report 2011-12 be noted.

8 ADOPTION SERVICE PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Acting Director of Children's Services submitted a report which outlined performance information on the Adoption Service during 2011/12, in accordance with the requirements of the National Adoption Standards as set out in the Adoption and Children Act 2002.

The report also gave details of new national initiatives, including, Adoption Action Plan Score Cards and concurrent planning. Financial implications were spelt out both in terms of the previous year and the current year, including the reasons for higher projected expenditure than the allocated budget.

Responding to comments from Members Julia Hassall, Head of Social Care, and the Acting Director explained the payment of adoption allowances. They also reported that, along with the other Merseyside and Cheshire authorities, Wirral had played the lead role in developing a pre-proceedings protocol with the courts, which should help to reduce delay in family proceedings.

Resolved –

- (1) That this Committee agrees that the adoption service is being managed effectively and that there are good outcomes for the children and young people being adopted and their adopters.**
- (2) That recently published national score cards for local authorities performances regarding adoption, be the subject of a further report.**

9 FOSTERING SERVICE REPORT

The Acting Director of Children's Services submitted a report which provided an overview of developments and performance in Wirral's fostering service in accordance with the requirements of the Fostering Regulations and Guidance 2011 National Minimum Fostering Standards. The fostering service provided quality foster care for children who needed to be looked after in public care; this was at a much lower cost than other regulated children's placements.

Local Authorities had to ensure that they were able to provide sufficient foster care placements for those children who needed family based care in accordance with the relevant Regulations and Standards governing such services.

The report also gave details of the financial implications, both in terms of the previous year and the current year, including the reasons for higher projected expenditure than the allocated budget. In 2012/13 the budget was increased to reflect the payment of the National Minimum Fostering Allowance and the payment of fees to connected carers. The overall budget was £7,984,600 and the projected spend was £9,353,254 (based on 486 children receiving foster care allowances and 163 children receiving special guardianship and residence order allowances). The budget was sufficient for 500 children, however, the number of children in foster care, receiving special guardianship or residence allowances exceeded this by 150.

Responding to comments from Members Julia Hassall, Head of Social Care, and the Acting Director informed the Committee that there were a whole raft of initiatives to support children and to try and reduce the numbers in care. Fostering, adoption and residential care for children were three of the biggest challenges that the department, and therefore the Council faced.

Resolved –

- (1) That this Committee agrees that the fostering service is being managed effectively and that there are good outcomes for the children and young people that are fostered.**
- (2) That the financial implications arising from the payments to connected carers be reported to Cabinet.**

10 APPROVED SCHEME OF DELEGATION - CONTRACTS EXCEEDING £50,000

The Acting Director of Children's Services reported, in accordance with the Contracts Procedure Rules, on those instances where he had exercised his delegated authority to accept tenders and to appoint contractors. The contracts were in respect of a range of services, including:

- Capital contracts
- Children's Residential Care Placements

Resolved – That the report be noted.

11 **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENTS - REFERRAL FROM SCRUTINY PROGRAMME BOARD**

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Law, HR and Asset Management on Equality and Impact Assessments, which had been referred by the Scrutiny Programme Board at its meeting on 28 February, 2012 (minute 33 refers) to all five themed Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

The Acting Director informed the Committee that all reports from his department for either Cabinet or this Committee were compliant with the EIA requirements.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

12 **CO-OPTED MEMBER REQUEST**

The Committee was invited to consider a request from the Co-Chair of the Wirral Family Forum, Louise Reecejones, for a co-opted position on the Children and Young People O&S Committee for a member of their Forum to represent parent / carers of children with disabilities or additional needs.

As with co-optees on the Health and Well Being Overview and Scrutiny Committee, including one for carers, the co-option, if agreed, would be one with non-voting rights and would need to be a recommendation to Council.

The Chair suggested that as with the previous request, considered by the Committee on 16 November, 2011 (minute 42 refers), the Council was currently looking at its own corporate governance arrangements, now would not be the time to extend the numbers of co-opted members on the Committee.

A Member remarked upon the position of Mrs J Owens, co-opted member for the voluntary and community sector, who unlike co-opted parent governors and diocesan representatives did not have any voting rights. It was agreed that the Chair and Director of Law, HR and Asset Management's representative would look into this matter.

Resolved – That, in respect of the request to extend the co-opted membership of the Committee, it be agreed that as the Council was currently looking at its own corporate governance arrangements now would not be the time to extend the co-opted membership of the Committee.

13 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee was requested to consider what issues should form the basis of its work programme for the ensuing municipal year.

The Acting Director informed the Committee that future items for the work programme included:

- Children with Child Protection Plan numbers
- Adoption – National Score Card Review
- Fostering – Current Service Provision and Demand
- Planning for Youth Parliament

- Sickness Absence – Children’s Social Care
- Early Years KS1 to KS4 Standards Report
- Post 16 Standards Report
- Raising Participation Age
- Performance and Financial Monitoring
- Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service –Update
- Family and Friends Policy

Resolved – That the work programme be agreed.

14 **FORWARD PLAN**

The Committee had been invited to review the Forward Plan prior to the meeting in order for it to consider, having regard to the Committee’s work programme, whether scrutiny should take place of any items contained within the Plan and, if so, how it could be done within relevant timescales and resources.

A Member suggested that a report be brought to a future meeting on the item, ‘Special Schools Surplus Place Funding’.

Resolved – That the forward plan and suggestion be noted.

15 **0-19 STANDARDS SUB-COMMITTEE**

The minutes of the meeting of the 0-19 Standards Sub-Committee, held on 13 March, 2012, were submitted. The Sub-Committee had considered a number of issues, in particular the Ofsted reports relating to the following establishments:

Early Years and Children’s Centres

Good

Bidston and St James’ Children’s Centre
 Eastham Children’s Centre
 Leasowe Early Years and Adult Learning Centre

Outstanding

Bidston and St James’ Children’s Centre – Miriam Place Nursery

Primary Schools

Satisfactory

Kingsway Primary School
 Castleway Primary School
 Sandbrook Primary School

Good

Devonshire Park Primary School

Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School
Millfields Church of England (Controlled) Primary School

Outstanding

Thornton Hough Primary School

Secondary School

Satisfactory

The Mosslands School

Special School

Good

Kilgarth School

The Committee was also requested to appoint the 0-19 Standards Sub-Committee for 2012/13.

Resolved –

- (1) That the minutes be noted.
- (2) That the 0-19 Standards Sub-Committee for 2012/13 comprise the following members, Councillors Wendy Clements (Chair), Walter Smith and Pat Williams, together with the diocesan and parent governor representatives and the remaining Committee members serving as deputies.

16 **EXEMPT INFORMATION - EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

Resolved - That, under section 100 (A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A (as amended) to that Act. The public interest test has been applied and favours exclusion.

17 **EXEMPT APPENDIX**

Further to minute 5 ante, the Committee noted the exempt appendix to the Acting Director of Children's Services' report.

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

The Chair informed the Committee that this would be Mark Parkinson's, Head of Learning and Achievement, last Committee as he would be leaving the Council in 5 weeks to take up a position with Cheshire West and Chester Council.

Resolved – That the thanks of this Committee be accorded to Mark Parkinson for all his work with the Council and that he be wished well for the future in his new role with Cheshire West and Chester Council.