

WIRRAL BOROUGH COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 21st JANUARY 2013

REPORT OF THE LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN SCRUTINY PANEL MEMBERS

'OUTCOMES OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN' SCRUTINY REVIEW - PROGRESS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an update on progress with the 'Outcomes of Looked After Children' Scrutiny Review.

1. Background

- 1.1 At the meeting of the Children & Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 7th November 2012, Members discussed the possibility of commencing an in-depth Scrutiny Review regarding the outcomes for Looked After Children.
- 1.2 An in-depth Scrutiny Review has been previously undertaken regarding the Outcomes for Children in Foster Care. A report of the work done by a Members' working group was produced in April 2008. Subsequent reports have been provided to this Committee on 11th November 2008 and 21st January 2010 giving an officer response on the progress towards implementing the recommendations from the Members' report.
- 1.3 It is now considered appropriate to undertake a follow-up review on this related issue. It is intended that the new review will investigate the steps which the Council and other partners are already taking and consider further actions that may be feasible in order to improve the outcomes for Looked After Children.

2. Scope of the Review

- 2.1 The three Party Spokespersons have met to discuss the scope of the review. A draft Scope Document, agreed by the Spokespersons, is attached as Appendix 1 to this report. Committee members are requested to consider this draft document for approval.
- 2.2 It is proposed that the review will focus on the outcomes for Looked After Children using the following criteria:
 - Educational attainment
 - Employment and training (as opposed to NEET)
 - Home / accommodation circumstances
 - Social / emotional development
 - Rate of entry to the Justice System
 - Problems relating to drugs and alcohol
 - Incidence of teenage pregnancy
 - Transition for children with disabilities

- 2.3 It is also suggested that the three Party Spokespersons undertake the review. Therefore, the membership of the proposed Task & Finish Group will be:
- Councillor Wendy Clements (Chair)
 - Councillor Walter Smith
 - Councillor Pat Williams

3. Evidence Gathering and the Report

- 3.1 The Panel members propose to use a number of methods to gather evidence, including:
- Meetings / focus groups with current and former Looked After Children and with foster carers.
 - Meetings with key officers
 - A possible survey of members regarding their role as Corporate Parents
 - A possible questionnaire of potential and former care leavers
 - Comparative information gathered from national data and from other Local Authorities
- 3.2 It is intended to start the review by meeting with some of those people most directly affected. Plans have been put in place to meet with a small group of Looked After Children in mid-January followed by a meeting with a group of foster parents at the end of January. It is also planned that meetings with key officers will commence during this period.
- 3.3 A progress report will be produced for this Committee's final meeting of the municipal year on 18th March 2013. However, it should be noted that the work of the Group will not be complete by that stage. It is hoped that the Task & Finish Group will be able to continue its investigations and complete its work during the early part of the 2013/14 municipal year.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) The Committee agrees that an in-depth scrutiny review regarding the outcomes for Looked after Children should be undertaken.
- (2) A Task & Finish Group will be formed to undertake the review. The membership of the Group will be:
 - Councillor Wendy Clements (Chair)
 - Councillor Walter Smith
 - Councillor Pat Williams
- (3) The Scope for the Looked After Children Scrutiny Review, as detailed in Appendix 1, be approved and the progress to date be noted.

Report of the Looked After Children Scrutiny Panel Members:
Cllr Wendy Clements (Chair)
Cllr Walter Smith
Cllr Pat Williams

Appendix 1: Scope Document for the Looked After Children Scrutiny Review

Date: 6th December 2012 (Draft 4)

Review Title: Outcomes for Looked After Children

Scrutiny Panel Chair: Cllr Wendy Clements	Contact details:
Panel members: Cllr Walter Smith Cllr Pat Williams	
Scrutiny Officer: Alan Veitch	Contact details: 0151 691 8564
Departmental Link Officer: Simon Garner	Contact details:
Other Key Officer contacts:	
<p>1. Which of our strategic corporate objectives does this topic address?</p> <p>The Council's Corporate Plan 2012/13 includes the following statements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will continue to work with our partners to protect children and young people from harm and improve the lives of the children and young people already in our care. • We will ensure that children in care and care leavers have appropriate support which best suits their needs, including fostering and adoption. <p>Specific targets quoted in the Corporate Plan include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the numbers of looked after children achieving Level 4 at Key Stage 2 to 50% in English and to 50% in Maths) and those achieving 5+ GCSE A*-C (including English and Maths) to 20% • Increase the numbers of care leavers in education, employment and training to 65% 	
<p>2. What are the main issues?</p> <p>How well are Looked After Children prepared for adult living, with particular reference to outcomes including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational attainment • Employment and training (as opposed to NEET) • Home / accommodation circumstances • Social / emotional development • Rate of entry to the Justice System (Note: Children, under the age of 18, in custody or on remand are deemed to be Looked After Children) • Problems relating to drugs and alcohol • Incidence of teenage pregnancy • Transition for children with disabilities <p>Note: Reference will be made during the review to the impact of welfare reforms on care leavers.</p>	

3. The Committee's overall aim/objective in doing this work is:

The Council has a responsibility, as corporate parents, for the Borough's Looked After Children. Data consistently shows that outcomes for Looked After Children are poorer than the national average. As an example, the percentage of Looked after Children achieving 5 A*-C GCSEs (or equivalent) at Key Stage 4 (including English and Maths) in 2012 is 12%. This equates to 4 out of 33 children in the cohort. This review will investigate the steps which the Council and other partners are already taking and consider further actions that may be feasible in order to improve the outcomes for Looked After Children.

4. The possible outputs/outcomes are:

- 4.1 Understand the current issues for both Looked After Children and the service providers.
- 4.2 Identify ways in which outcomes for Looked After Children, as listed in section 2 of this document, can be improved.

5. What specific value can scrutiny add to this topic?

Scrutiny will give members the opportunity to assure themselves that the Council and partners are taking all possible steps to ensure that the outcomes for Looked After Children are improved. Scrutiny will enable the experience of those directly impacted by the reforms to help identify any recommendations for changes. These recommendations will be referred to Cabinet.

6. Who will the Committee be trying to influence as part of its work?

- 6.1 Appropriate Cabinet members and Directors, Wirral Borough Council.
- 6.2 Partners of the Council, for example, Housing partners, schools and NHS Wirral.

7. Duration of enquiry?

- The Scope document will be reported to the meeting of the Children & Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be held on 21st January 2013.
- Evidence-gathering will take place between November 2012 and February 2013.
- A progress report will be presented to the meeting of the Children & Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be held on 18th March 2013.

8. What category does the review fall into?

- | | | | | |
|------------------------------|---|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Policy Review | X | <input type="checkbox"/> | Policy Development | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| External Partnership | | <input type="checkbox"/> | Performance Management | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Holding Executive to Account | | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |

9. Extra resources needed? Would the investigation benefit from the co-operation of an expert witness?

The review will be conducted by councillors with the support of existing officers. However, the panel are looking for advice from people with expertise on this topic.

10. What information do we need?	
<p>10.1 Secondary information (background information, existing reports, legislation, central government documents, etc).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant Government Departmental reports • Relevant national documents • Previous Cabinet / Scrutiny Committee reports • Scrutiny Reports from other Councils into similar topics, for example, Haringey, Hartlepool, Cheshire East • Care Leavers Data Pack, published by Department of Education, October 2012 • Educational Achievement Performance Data for Wirral and statistical neighbours • Evaluation of the Staying Put: 18 Plus Family Placement Programme -Final report (Department of Education) 	<p>10.2 Primary/new evidence/information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews with key officers • Interviews with current and former Looked After Children as well as foster providers • Examples of best practice from other Local Authorities • Information relating to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to leaving care grants • Access to bursaries for those staying in education and higher education • Pathway Plan
<p>10.3 Who can provide us with further relevant evidence? (Cabinet portfolio holder, officer, service user, general public, expert witness, etc).</p> <p>Potential witnesses include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Julia Hassall, Acting Director of Children’s Services, Wirral Borough Council • Simon Garner, Acting Head of Children’s Social Care Branch, Wirral Borough Council (and Chair of the North West After Care Forum) • Fiona O’Shaughnessy / Dave Walker / Jeanette Geary, Children’s Inclusion Service, Wirral Borough Council • Brian Ronson, Leaving Care Service– Pathway Team Manager • Simon Fisher, Transition Team, Wirral Borough Council • Anne Patterson, Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), Wirral Borough Council re. What are children saying about the leaving care process? 	<p>10.4 What specific areas do we want them to cover when they give evidence?</p> <p>How well are Looked After children prepared for adult living, in particular with reference to the outcomes listed in section 2 earlier?</p> <p>Do care leavers have access to information about their care leaver entitlements?</p> <p>How does the Council work with the FromCare2Work programme run by the National Care Advisory Service?</p>

- Vivian Stafford, Strategic Service Manager: Post 16 Commissioning and Economic Generation, Wirral Borough Council (Also to cover the Apprenticeship scheme)
- Phil Sheridan, Consultant Headteacher (Secondary) and Virtual Headteacher, Wirral Borough Council. To also include the Looked After Children's Education Service (LACES) team, Wirral Borough Council
- Anne Tattersall, NHS Wirral and Head of Being Healthy Outcome Group (regarding health and teenage pregnancy issues plus funding arrangements and commissioning arrangements with CCGs)
- Housing Team, Wirral Borough Council – Sheila Jacobs, Supported Housing Manager plus Catherine Green, Rehousing Services Manager
- Pat Rice, Response, Wirral Borough Council (Lead for 16-17 Protocol Group)
- Patricia Jones, Youth Offending Service
- Sue Brown, Assistant Chief Officer, Merseyside Probation Trust (or nominee)
- Members of the Children in Care Council (Contact: Fiona O'Shaughnessy)
- Former Looked After Children (Contact: Brian Ronson)
- Foster carers (Contact: Sue Leedham)
- Private Foster Carer (if possible)
- Teachers / staff from schools, for example, Observatory School, Woodchurch High School, Wirral Alternative School Programme (WASP) (Role of Designated Teacher re. LAC in schools)
- Job Centre Plus re. guidance for supporting care leavers
- Residential Providers Forum

11. What processes can we use to feed into the review? (site visits/observations, face-to-face questioning, telephone survey, written questionnaire, etc).

11.1 Meetings with officers listed in 10.3 above

11.2 Meetings / Focus groups with current and former Looked After Children and with foster carers

11.3 Desk-top research / analysis

11.4 Possible survey of members regarding their role as Corporate Parents, including training opportunities

11.5 Possible questionnaire of potential and former care leavers

12. In what ways can we involve the public and at what stages? (consider whole range of consultative mechanisms, local committees and local ward mechanisms).

Meetings / Focus groups with current and former Looked After Children and with foster carers (as described in section 11.2 above). This will include the Children in Care Council