

COUNCIL

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CABINET PORTFOLIO SUMMARY REPORT

REPORT OF	COUNCILLOR TONY SMITH
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is an update from the Cabinet Portfolio Holder to Members of the Council on matters relevant to his/her portfolio.

1. Children's Services Financial Position

- In 2012-13 Children's Services had significant structural difficulties within its £73m budget.
- Underfunded budgets were identified totalling £7.2m (10% of Children's Services total budget).
- Budget pressures were highlighted in a number of critical areas such as: residential care, fostering and adoption – totalling £3.6m; transport - totalling £1.2m and staffing - totalling £1.3m.
- Overall, these underfunded budgets contributed to the Council's financial shortfall of £17m.
- In the current year, 2013 -14 underfunded budgets have been managed and the budget position is more stable and controlled.
- Whilst there continues to be pressure on budgets, particularly those that respond to children's needs, Children's Services overall position will achieve most of the £6.3m budget savings that were agreed this year, together with a budget under spend of £1.7m. This under spend will start to repay in advance some of the £4.9m loan.

2. Targeted Services

- Partnership working is at the heart of the new targeted service, designed to prevent children's needs from becoming more acute and which focuses on the needs of the whole family.
- The service continues to develop at a pace and operates on a locality footprint, with close working with Constituency Managers.
- A multi-agency stakeholder event is being held in April 2014, to secure strategic sign up and commitment to deliver a Wirral wide partnership approach; the event will confirm membership of the steering group to take this service forward.
- The service will be governed through the Children's Trust and quality assured through Wirral's Safeguarding Children's Board.

- Locality events will follow in May to engage the wider children and families workforce in constituencies;
- There are new and innovative ways of working already being implemented through partnership working in communities, such as the two school hubs in Leasowe and Woodchurch which are piloting new approaches to tackling child poverty; also fifteen young people across Wirral are working with others to develop proposals to market and brand the new Wirral Youth Zone.
- The Gateway has been operational since September 2013. This single point of access for children, young people and families who need additional support has received over 700 referrals in the first quarter of operation.

3. Specialist Services

- A key focus within Specialist Services has been to raise the profile of Social Work in the Council with an emphasis on practice improvement across teams.
- A Social Work conference took place in February for Social Workers across the Families and Wellbeing Directorate; and staff learned about current developments and national perspectives on Social Work with keynote speeches from the College of Social Work and Chief Social Workers for both children and adults.
- The emphasis on practice improvement continues with the Service commissioning training from Morning Lane Associates. Morning Lane originated in Hackney with its 'Reclaiming Social Work' model, an approach that enabled cultural and practice changes via a systemic approach to Social Work.
- The training on offer links in with work already underway to redesign operational teams; it could build on current strengths and help implement positive changes, for example improved consistency and swifter decision-making closer to the child.
- An independent voluntary organisation is working with the Service to improve practice and performance regarding adoption.
- Using government adoption grant money, The Centre for Excellence and Outcomes (C4EO) has been commissioned to work alongside teams, addressing practice and systems issues.
- Following an adoption diagnostic last year, it is encouraging that performance is improving in this area; the Service is keen to build on this and develop ways of working that ensure the issue of adoption maintains a high profile across all teams.
- A key component to practice improvement is an IT system that enables Social Workers to function effectively. The plan to implement the Liquidlogic system is well underway in the Families and Wellbeing Directorate, with an initiation date of September 2014, if not sooner. Following demonstrations and detailed planning workshops involving staff at all levels, the Service is looking forward to the new system being implemented and believe it will undoubtedly improve practice for Social Worker and Managers.