

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 3 July 2018

Present:

Councillor T Usher (Chair)

Councillors	M McLaughlin	P Hayes
	D Burgess-Joyce	A Leech
	K Cannon	C Meaden
	C Carubia	J Stapleton
	W Clements	KJ Williams
	A Gardner	G Wood
	L Grey	I Lewis (deputy for C Povall)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Cherry Povall; Councillor Ian Lewis attended as deputy. The Committee also received an apology for absence from Ms V McGee, Chief Operating Officer, Wirral Community NHS Foundation Trust.

2 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - 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 the nature of the interest.

Members were reminded that they should also declare whether they were subject to a party whip in connection with any item(s) to be considered and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of the whipping arrangement.

The following declarations were made in respect of business on the agenda:-

Councillor Chris Meaden made a declaration of personal interest in respect of the agenda generally by virtue of her daughter's employment in the Children and Young People's Department.

Councillor Tom Usher made a declaration of personal interest in respect of the agenda generally by virtue of his mother's employment in an early years setting.

Councillor Wendy Clements made a declaration of personal interest in respect of agenda items 3 "2017/18 Quarter 4 and Year End Wirral Plan Performance"

and 4 “Wirral Improvement Board Databook” by virtue of her employment in an early years setting.

Councillor Anita Leech made a declaration of personal interest in respect of the agenda generally by virtue of holding a position of School Governor.

3 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 22 March 2018 be approved as a correct record.

4 **2017/18 QUARTER 4 AND YEAR END WIRRAL PLAN PERFORMANCE**

The Committee received a report presenting the 2017/18 Quarter 4 (January – March 2018) performance report for the Wirral Plan Pledges under the remit of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The performance report, included as an Appendix to the submitted report, provided a description of progress in Quarter 4 and available data in relation to a range of outcome indicators and supporting measures. Further appended to the report was the 2017/18 year end close down report providing a summary of performance improvement against measures and Wirral Plan delivery of Pledge strategy actions at year end.

The appended performance reports contained details of the progress made, and with regard to the quarterly report overviews of that progress from the Lead Cabinet Member, in respect of individual measures being pursued with regard to the following Wirral Plan Pledges pertinent to the Committee -

- Children are Ready for School;
- Children are Ready for Work and Adulthood;
- Vulnerable Children Reach their Full Potential;
- Reducing Child and Family Poverty (Improving Life Chances);
- People with Disabilities Live Independent Lives; and
- Zero Tolerance to Domestic Violence.

The year-end report highlighted both key achievements and areas for improvement, considered outcomes for residents measured against both the previous year and since the start of the Wirral Plan, and presented the next steps for action.

Paul Boyce, Corporate Director for Children, presented the performance and year end reports and invited comment from Members on the content contained therein –

With regard to the ‘Children are Ready for School’ pledge, Councillor Moira McLaughlin noted the improved performance of the supporting measure ‘percentage of infants who received a 6-8 week Development Check by the

time they were 8 weeks'. However, while the trends for this and the measure for receipt of a 2-2½ year Health Visitor review were improving they remained below target, and with the access to midwifery services measure worsening, Councillor McLaughlin stressed the importance of all indicators needing improvement in order to improve life chances for children. With regard to midwifery services, the Chair indicated that a response to the position would be obtained from the health service.

In response to a query from Councillor Wendy Clements as to the contribution of the Council to the improved percentage of early years providers rated 'good' or 'outstanding', the Corporate Director noted that good partnership working in the sector had developed effective early years services. Further to a query in respect of the decline in performance relating to the percentage of Foundation Stage looked after children achieving a good level of development, Simone White, Deputy Director for Children, advised that this was a difficult measure as the point at which children came into the service varied meaning there was sometimes limited time to work towards the target or even to check attendance.

Members noted the worsening trend with regard to obesity. Councillor David Burgess-Joyce queried the five year rolling average used as the basis for the measure given issues of early onset diabetes related to obesity. The Corporate Director undertook to seek clarification from the NHS on this matter. Further to the obesity statistics, Councillor Gillian Wood queried whether there was any breakdown by area, noting recent reports linking planning approvals for fast food outlets in deprived areas. The Corporate Director noted that the data was summarised and that a postcode breakdown should be possible. Councillor McLaughlin noted a previous scrutiny study on this issue, suggesting it may be worthwhile to revisit the study report.

With regard to the 'Young People are Ready for Work and Adulthood' Pledge and the Advice Line case study referenced in the Lead Cabinet Member's overview, Councillor Liz Grey queried how the fact that no further contact had been received meant that the case could be judged a success, given that the family might have given up or sought other means of resolution. The Corporate Director undertook to have a response forwarded.

In respect of the 'People With Disabilities Live Independent Lives' Pledge, Councillor Paul Hayes queried how 'health related quality of life for people with long term conditions' was measured and what it represented. The Corporate Director undertook to have clarification on the Indicator provided.

Relating to the 'Zero Tolerance to Domestic Violence' Pledge, Councillor McLaughlin advised of clarifications she had sought elsewhere as to why the increased number of reported domestic abuse cases was seen as a positive and what assurance was there that this was due to increased awareness rather than an actual increase in abuse. The correlation of the provided data

and measures relating to the Family Support Unit and the number of children being assessed through domestic abuse reasons, had also been queried. The Corporate Director undertook to have a written response provided.

Members noted a frustration with the provision of information sourced from many providers meaning Council Officers were unable to respond to queries. Comment was made that if the Committee was to scrutinise the provided information they needed representatives from those other bodies in attendance to answer questions.

RESOLVED: That -

- (1) the report and the performance data contained in the Quarter 4 and the 2017/18 annual reports be noted;**
- (2) an item related to childhood obesity, to include a breakdown of the statistics provided in the submitted report and a consideration of the previous scrutiny study report into this issue, be included on the Committee Work Programme.**

5 IMPROVEMENT JOURNEY - UPDATE

Paul Boyce, the Corporate Director for Children, introduced a presentation relating to the Council's Improvement Plan. The presentation took the form of a stocktake, considering the position of the Council two years on from the OFSTED inspection of July 2016 and 12 months since Operation Corzola, through six subsequent Ofsted monitoring visits and looking ahead to the forthcoming 12 months and the Ofsted re-inspection.

Work to date had focussed on getting the basics right, and extensive work had been completed or was underway to ensure clear processes and systems were in place to embed good practice across all areas of the service. Staff issues had been addressed with 'back to basics' training for all staff, improvements made to the frequency and quality of supervision, and working towards manageable caseloads. Attention had also been focussed on quality assurance and improving the data available to inform decision making. Impacts of the work undertaken could be identified both through positive messages in OFSTED monitoring reports that practice and processes were demonstrating clarity and being embedded, and through the numbers of children in the system better reflecting what might be expected for an authority of Wirral's size.

Organisationally, a permanent senior leadership team was now in place, and an integrated children's services structure was out for consultation. The partnership arrangement entered into with Knowsley Council was having a notable impact, and the staff move to Cheshire Lines and the introduction of

agile working was positively affecting organisational culture and changing people's attitudes.

In summary, the approach to getting the basics right was having a positive impact confirmed by monitoring visits. Practice was improving, but much remained to be done. Staff recruitment and retention remained a risk in certain areas, particularly in social work, but most people were now on board and on message with the direction of travel for the service. Looking ahead, there was the need to ensure that the pace of development was sustained, to continue to strengthen partnerships both operationally and strategically, to learn from the lessons of the past and embed the learning gained, and to design new safeguarding arrangements.

Councillor David Burgess-Joyce, commenting generally on performance data presented elsewhere on the agenda, queried at what point overall on the curve to success was the Council considered to be at and the implication of the comment that most staff were now on board. The Corporate Director advised that matters were being progressed and that a point would be reached, with appropriate staffing, of momentum driving improvement. With regard to a query from Councillor Ian Lewis concerning staff mandatory training, the Corporate Director advised that while courses were re-run, a requirement due to staff turnover, issues related to non-attendance were being considered and that mechanisms, including written warnings, were options.

Councillor Lewis, noting the OFSTED report had stated Wirral's social work caseloads were not particularly high but noted that cases were passed around social workers, that there were issues with case notes etc., queried whether the Corporate Director was satisfied that clients were now being supported by the minimum number of social workers. The Corporate Director commented that the previous structure had, in effect, encouraged the pass round of cases, but the new service arrangements were designed to avoid hand-offs unless a child came permanently into care. The pass round of cases did still occur due to sickness, the use of agency staffing etc., though not to the same extent and the situation remained under review. While the last OFSTED report received by the authority had indicated that social workers spoken to knew their families well, the Committee was advised there were still a significant number of social work vacancies to recruit to.

Councillor Chris Carubia sought the views of the Corporate Director as to the position of the Council on a scale from 'broken' to 'stable'. The Corporate Director advised that the Council had moved on, with a clear strategic plan developed around the needs of families and the Council's own need to reduce demand. Other services or issues addressed or to be progressed included an integrated youth service, care leavers, added capacity to deal with missing children and protection from CSE. The Council had a plan to work

systematically while also responding to 'crisis' issues as they arose, without such issues being allowed to become the 'day job'.

With regard to social worker recruitment, Councillor Anita Leech referred to a previous City Region discussion that all social workers in the region be paid the same rate. The Corporate Director acknowledged the previous discussions, but noted that the response of many authorities to difficulties was to pay enhanced agency rates or offer increased pay, both of which would be contrary to such a region-wide agreement and neither of which, it was considered, were effective medium / long term solutions. The Corporate Director further noted previous experience of a lower paying authority that had no issue with recruitment and retention due to organisational reputation and ways of working, pointing to the importance of establishing a certain culture and ways of working into the authority.

In response to a query from Councillor Leech concerning early intervention services, the Corporate Director noted that some particular features of a good early intervention service included the ability to get the right information to assist families to help themselves, clarity over who stepped in when help was needed, and the employment of skilled early intervention staff who could develop insights into families. Work had been done in this area and a report could be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED –

That the Corporate Director for Children be thanked for his presentation to the Committee.

6 WIRRAL IMPROVEMENT BOARD DATABOOK

Simone White, Deputy Director for Children, introduced the Wirral Improvement Board Data Tracker for May 2018. The Data Tracker, which set out performance for a set of key performance measures related to the child's journey, plus measures related to staffing in Children's Social Care, is produced monthly for the Improvement Board and shared with the Wirral Safeguarding Children Board. Submission to this Committee had arisen following a Reality Check Visit undertaken in February 2018 and reported at the meeting of this Committee held in March 2018.

In introducing the report, the Deputy Director advised on the construction of the Data Tracker. Of the data provided, some was demand led, some processed efficiency data, some outcome data, or was data required to do the job. The outcome data, while the most important produced, was the most difficult to measure and assess. As an example of the difficulty, an increase in the number of children in care might be a 'good' result if this was right for the children involved, or a 'bad' result if it was wrong for the children involved. Other outcome data such as educational achievement, or care leavers in

education / employment or in good accommodation, were likewise all capable of being read in other ways or of needing supporting detail.

Demand led data was presented by benchmark or trend, and as presented followed a child's journey through the service. If figures showed a variance with the benchmarks or trends, this was investigated to see what had changed. An example in the submitted report was where the number of recorded contacts appeared to have risen significantly; this was as a result of all contacts now being recorded in one system which gave a better analysis and clear oversight of practice, ensuring all information on cases was recorded to help improve practice. Process efficiency data considered timelines such as assessments, conferences etc. which were important, but a parallel consideration was quality and there was the issue of how to measure the quality of, for example, assessments and apply this against other considerations.

Particular issues highlighted arising from the monthly Data Tracker included –

- the number of assessments completed within timescales in April was better than the year end figure, but remained too low. Action was being taken to ensure the timely opening of cases on the system, which should not be done until such time as they are to be completed;
- there had been no major changes in child protection numbers or plans, or in the overall numbers of children looked after. While there was a need to safely reduce the numbers of children looked after, the number had now remained steady for five months, rather than continuing to increase;
- there was little significant change to report in staffing. It was, however, an identified area for improvement to reduce the current social care vacancy rate and sickness rates in the service as part of the wider approach to create a stable, high quality workforce.

Councillor David Burgess-Joyce commented on the reported high level of vacancies and sickness which would have implications of reduced capacity and a lack of staff in attendance. The Deputy Director further advised that management were working hard on the issues identified, and that advanced practitioners were currently holding casework which was not intended to be the case. With regard to sickness, the overall rate was reducing and issues of long term sickness were being progressed.

With reference to the benchmarking referenced in the Data Tracker, Councillor Andrew Hodson queried the comparator authorities and who identified them. The Deputy Director advised that they were set nationally and a range of factors were considered to determine the benchmark groups. The groups might not always contain authorities of a similar size which was why figures were presented on a per 10,000 population basis.

RESOLVED –

That the report and the performance data set out in the Data Tracker be noted.

7 CHILDRENS AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE REPORT

The Chair introduced his report advising that this Committee, in co-operation with the other three Overview and Scrutiny Committees, was responsible for proposing and delivering an annual scrutiny work programme. The work programme should align with the corporate priorities of the Council, in particular the delivery of the Wirral Plan pledges which were within the remit of the Committee.

The Chair's report provided an update regarding progress made since the Committee meeting held on 22 March 2018 and, arising from a progress meeting held on 21 June 2018, a proposed work programme for 2018/19 made up of items carried over from 2017/18 and comprising a combination of scrutiny reviews, workshops, standing items and requested Officer reports was appended. The addition of an item related to childhood obesity (Minute 4 above refers) was noted.

RESOLVED -

That the submitted Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme 2018/19, with the addition of an item related to childhood obesity, be approved.