

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 25 September 2018

Present:

Councillor	T Usher (Chair)	
Councillors	D Burgess-Joyce	C Meaden
	K Cannon	C Povall
	C Carubia	J Stapleton
	W Clements	KJ Williams
	A Gardner	G Wood
	EA Grey	J McManus (In
	P Hayes	place of M
		McLaughlin)

8 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Moira McLaughlin; Councillor Julie McManus attended as deputy. The Committee also received apologies for absence from Councillor Anita Leech and from Co-opted Members Julie Johnson and Chris Penn.

9 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 Wendy Clements made a declaration of personal interest in respect of Item 6 on the agenda – Summary of Standards – Provisional Outcomes for Early Years, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 August 2018 – by virtue of her work as an Early Years Educator and Administrator at Moreton Baptist Preschool.

10 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 3 July 2018 be confirmed as a correct record.

11 2018/19 QUARTER 1 WIRRAL PLAN PERFORMANCE

A report by the Head of Intelligence introduced the 2018/19 Quarter 1 (April – June 2018) performance against the Wirral Plan pledges under the remit of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Appendix 1 to the report provided an overview of the progress made in Quarter 1 and available data in relation to a range of outcome indicators and supporting measures.

Quarter One Wirral Plan Performance was summarised as follows:

- The percentage of women booked to access professional maternity services on or before twelve and six week gestation was 89.5%. This was a significant improvement compared to the previous quarter (76%), which was above the regional average and was just below the 90% target
- The Percentage of early years childcare providers rated 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted was 93%. This was a 15% improvement since the start of the Wirral Plan and an increase of 2% since December 2017. Wirral was slightly below the regional and national figure of 94%.
- The percentage of schools rated 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted was at 86%, below the very aspirational target of 100%. This was a 2% improvement since the start of the Wirral Plan, but a 3% decrease on the previous quarter. Wirral's figure was the same as the national figure, and slightly below the regional figure of 88%.
- The achievement gap between pupils eligible for free school meals and their peers achieving the 'expected standard' at the end of key stage 2 for the academic year 2017/18 was provisionally 23.5%, 1.5% below the previous year's figure.
- There had been a slight improvement at the beginning of the year on the number of children looked after. It was anticipated that it would take a considerable amount of time to reduce the overall numbers due to the high proportion of children aged 10+.

- Numbers of children in need overall currently remained in line with/slightly below statistical neighbours. Given the factors that led to children in need it was not anticipated that these numbers would decrease significantly over the next 12 months.
- The number of children subject to child protection plans had increased compared to previous year and was now at a rate (per 10,000 of 0-17 population) of 52 compared to 39.3. There were concerns within the service that children were being managed as children in need or children looked after when they would have most benefited from a period of time subject to a child protection plan. The new number of children subject to a plan was comparative with statistical neighbours and, therefore, seen as more appropriate.
- In Quarter 1, 23 more disabled people were in receipt of personal budgets; including 215 children (compared to 203 in the last Quarter). Being in receipt of personal budgets allowed people more choice and control over their lives and the support they received.
- The percentage of children and Young People single assessments authorised with Domestic Violence (DV) related factors was 36.2%, a slight improvement when compared to the same period last year (35.5%). The number of MARAC cases including children and young people was 334 which showed a 6% decrease from the same period last year (355).

The Chair informed that he had invited the Lead Commissioner Community Safety & Resilience and the Assistant Director: Early Help & Prevention to the meeting to answer any questions Members may have on the performance during Quarter 1.

Members asked the Officers present a number of questions which were answered accordingly. Matters highlighted as requiring more clarification included the following:

- What needed to be done to close the achievement gap between pupils eligible for free school meals and their peers achieving the 'expected standard' in English, reading, English writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2?

The tide was turning on the achievement gap. It was narrowing and Officers were very conscious that this started at 4-5 years old and got wider and wider. There was a big focus on this. Work was continuing on the progress tracker to ensure that as many providers as possible were using it to identify those children who needed additional support to improve their school readiness.

- The percentage of children aged 4-5 classified as over-weight or obese seemed to be getting worse. Was this connected to a lack of funding and Slimming World not being available at all locations? It was noted that this was not a local issue but a national trend caused by a bad diet, a lack of activity and a relatively sedentary lifestyle. Schools were being encouraged to combine physical activity with fun to counteract this.
- The percentage of referrals to Children's Social Care that were within 12 months of one or more previous referrals. There had been a number of significant changes around the front door processes in the last 3 to 6 months. Data suggested that this in itself had not led to the increase in re-referrals. Further work was underway to look at the reasons for the change. The current change made current performance slightly above statistical neighbours. Second referrals were being reviewed to see whether this was because previous intervention did not address the problem. It was noted that there were also some system issues that were known about with referrals. Re-referrals were above the national average.
- There was a significant increase in woman accessing maternity services. What had led to this?

Women were now able to book appointments at Children's Centres. There had also been a change to the pathway. Women were encouraged to book their scans as soon as possible. The whole package was available via the Children's Centres.

- There had been a total of 720 domestic abuse cases that had been dealt with at MARAC in the 12 months prior to June 2018. This equated to 52.5 cases per 10,000 female population. There had been an increased volume of referrals into FSU, this was most notable in the last week of June and this had impacted upon MARAC figure and was likely to result in excess of 50 cases heard at MARAC in the following week. There was no obvious trigger for the increase in referrals but domestic abuse was predicted to increase during the World Cup however this is not evident as a trigger within referrals.

There were concerns that not all domestic abuse incidents were reported. Accurate figures were important but there was only so much that the Council could do to get people to step forward. How the Council was trying to combat under reporting and what made a good Domestic Abuse Service was outlined.

One success was that the Council has a zero tolerance to domestic violence was one of the Wirral Plan's 20 Pledges. This gave victims the confidence to report incidents of domestic abuse in confidence and expect an appropriate level of service. There was a well operated and

integrated front door. There was a partnership where the partners met to discuss and measure risks. Statutory and voluntary services were embedded. Trend analysis had been removed and only the figures were reported. The Council carried out high risk assessments and victim's needs were suitably addressed. There were staffing issues which were outlined and consequently the service had been flagged as a red risk.

The staff were currently 50% down on the full establishment but were coping and extra resources were being put in place to try to support them. Members raised concerns about this serious drop in staffing levels. They were informed that it had been flagged as a red risk with the Leader of the Council and Officers were maintaining regular daily contact with the staff concerned. It was noted that one to one contact with victims did take up a lot of time and to provide assistance a Peer's Mentoring Programme had been launched through Tomorrow's Woman.

A number of initiatives were running around the concept of building a Safer Wirral Hub. The Council was working with volunteers and PCSOs on lower and medium risks. A lot of victims turned up at Hospital Accident and Emergency (A and E) Departments with injuries. The Council had people working in A and E to help these victims.

It had been identified that there were spikes of domestic abuse and consequently the Council ran campaigns e.g. Christmas, New Year and when the Football World Cup was on. It was noted that the Council was working with Tranmere Rovers and some of their supporters who showed aggression, providing holding pens so that they did not go straight home after the match.

There was a whole host of issues around the perpetrators and there was a £10m Programme being run with the Police and Probation Service to manage high risk individuals out on license etc. A whole range of activities were being provided. The Council was also working with Tomorrow's Woman in Birkenhead designing a programme for the victims of domestic abuse.

- Repeat incident of domestic abuse (Wirral MARAC cases) were lower than the same period last year. However, it was expected that this would increase in the coming months due to a national change in repeat criteria. This was a worry. The Police were struggling to deal with the levels of crime. This had been discussed in workshops and it was thought that this could double the incident rate. The threshold and measurement of how the incidents were being assessed was under scrutiny.

- There was support for men who were the victims of domestic abuse. There were a number of organisations that sign posted men. Males made up just 1% of domestic abuse victims. There were male victim support packages available. This was a challenge and lent itself to an initiative that could be run across the Liverpool City Region.

RESOLVED:

That the content of the report be noted.

12 IMPROVEMENT JOURNEY UPDATE AND DATA TRACKER

The Corporate Director for Children's Services made a presentation entitled 'Only the best for our children' which was about his Department's improvement journey to the Committee. The Corporate Director provided information on:

- OFSTED's Visit on 4/5 September 2018 and subsequent feedback
- What was driving improvement
- Performance summary
- What needed to improve
- Recruitment and workforce stability

In summary OFSTED would visit again early in the New Year and Children's Services would be in a better position to pass the test that would be applied. In the meantime, officers would continue to address those things that required attention.

Following his presentation the Corporate Director was questioned on its content by Members and responded as appropriate. Issues raised included the following:

- Performance Appraisal, professional personal development and making sure staff were valued.
- Good support provided by the HR Department.
- Reasons why the Child Protection rate had increased.
- Research carried out nationally that found that there were higher levels of cost and demand for services in areas of high social deprivation.
- Partnership arrangements being put in place to avoid the need to refer families into social care. This was about efficiencies and best use of resources.
- Newly qualified social workers and their team structures.
- Standards Framework applied to teams to ensure good practice.

- Communications and new working relationships between social workers and the police.

RESOLVED:

That the Corporate Director for Children's Services be thanked for his informative presentation.

13 SUMMARY OF STANDARDS – PROVISIONAL OUTCOMES FOR EARLY YEARS, KEY STAGE 1 AND KEY STAGE 2 AUGUST 2018

The Assistant Director for Education introduced a report and appendices that included a summary and a detailed analysis for the pupil outcomes at the age of 5 (Good level of development), the age of 7 (Key Stage 1 SATs) and at the age of 11 (Key Stage 2 SATs). There was a separate report that outlined the attainment and progress for pupils with SEND.

Comparisons had been made with the results nationally wherever possible. However, many of the national results had not yet been published. When the statistical first releases were published in October 2018 the report would be amended.

The Committee noted the following:

Early Years	The percentage of children attaining a good level of development had increased by 1.1% to 70.5%.
Year 1	Attainment in phonics had increased by 4.4% though attainment was below the national average.
Year 2	More children at the age of 7 had attained the standard this year in reading, writing and mathematics (RWM). This was an improvement of 2.2% to 62.6%. Writing had increased by 1.8% and mathematics had increased by 1.4%. However, attainment in reading had decreased by -0.6%.
Year 6	More children at the age of 11 had attained the standard this year in reading, writing and mathematics (RWM). There had been an increase of 2.6% but attainment remained below the national average by 4%. Reading outcomes had improved by 3.2%. Writing outcomes had improved by 1.5%. Outcomes in mathematics had decreased by 0.4%.

The Committee also noted a detailed analysis of pupil outcomes that was appended to the report which could be used to measure the impact of work undertaken in the following pledges:

- Children are ready for school.
- Young People are ready for work and adulthood.
- Vulnerable children reach their full potential.

The report provided detailed analysis of outcomes for all pupil groups at the end of each key stage in the primary phase of education. The analysis of outcomes had also been provided by locality (Birkenhead, South Wirral, Wallasey and West Wirral).

In respect of Key Stage 1 Members noted that this year a greater proportion of children with English as an additional language (EAL) met the standard. There had been an increase of 8.2% to 66.7%. EAL pupils had attained better than pupils with English as their first language. In all localities EAL pupils had outperform pupils who had English as their first language. Attainment of EAL pupils had increased in three of the localities: Wallasey by 16.4%; in West Wirral by 11.8% and in Birkenhead by 9.5%. Attainment of EAL pupils in South Wirral had decreased by 16.8%.

In respect of Key Stage 2 Members noted that the attainment of both the boys and girls had increased. The increase in boys' attainment by 3.4% was almost double the girls so had narrowed the gender gap. As a consequence of an increase by boys (4.8%) in meeting the standard the Birkenhead locality had closed the gender gap completely. West Wirral had narrowed the gender gap by 1.9% to 9.1% but this locality still had the widest gender gap.

Also, although the attainment of both SEN and non-SEN pupils had improved the gap had widened by -0.8% to 52.7%. The progress for SEN pupils had improved year on year and was currently -1.2. The gap had widened in all four localities, despite the proportion of SEN pupils who had achieved RWM in Birkenhead, West Wirral and South Wirral improving by 3.5%, 8.4% and 5.3% respectively.

RESOLVED:

That the report and the appended Standards 2018 reports be approved.

14 ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION

The Assistant Director for Education introduced a report about children being Electively Home Educated and provided information around the reasons why parents choose to educate their children at home. The Committee noted that the Education Act 1996 stated it was the responsibility of parents to ensure that their children had a suitable full time education. Where a parent decided to electively home educate their child the parent must inform the Headteacher of the school that the child attended.

The Education Social Welfare Service maintained a register of these children. A visit took place within two weeks of the parent's decision to electively home educate, followed by a visit to determine the educational progress the child was making.

Members noted that the numbers of children registered as Electively Home Educated continued to rise, both locally and nationally. There was a 28% increase in the number of children registered as Electively Home Educated in Wirral in comparison with the previous year.

Over the last ten academic years, the number of children electively home educated had increased. At the end of the academic year 2017/18 there were 207 children home educated (108 secondary and 99 primary). The main reasons given by parents for educating their children at home were philosophical/religious reasons (68) followed by health reasons (31).

The report included a summary of the issues around children electively home educated in Wirral which could be used to measure the impact of work undertaken in the following Wirral Plan pledges:

- Children are ready for school
- Young people are ready for work and adulthood
- Vulnerable children reach their full potential

Members asked a number of questions which were answered accordingly. Matters highlighted included the following:

- Department of Education Guidance specifically advised that schools should not suggest Elective Home Education as an alternative to permanent exclusion but this did happen at times. In such cases officers would check out parents understanding of their choices and if appropriate would challenge the school to accept the student back. In some cases this had meant escalating the discussion so that the Director of Children's Services wrote to the Chair of Governors. Such challenges had generally been successful in resolving matters. The Director wrote to all schools regarding this issue earlier this year.
- A new Elective Home Education Notification Form introduced earlier this year facilitated initial communication between schools and the Education Social Welfare Service when a child became home educated.
- There were more applicants than places available at the Hospital School.
- Officers challenged back at schools asking what they could do to support children suffering from anxiety. Figures to be provided.

- Keeping track of children to ensure they received an education. Quarterly visits to monitor the quality of the education being provided. If the standard was not adequate parents were told and a second visit was booked to ascertain if there had been any improvement.
- The report had been requested by Members seeking assurance that the spike in Elective Home Education was not as a result of something schools were not offering.
- Was there enough support in place for those involved in Elective Home Education?
- It would be interesting to see how those being Electively Home Educated did in terms of their results and what results they had been predicted to achieve whilst in main stream education. Comparisons were requested for Members consideration.
- Was there a mechanism to put something else in place if Elective Home Education failed? Parents could be advised it was not working and that main stream school should be considered or that they use the Home Education Service.
- There were examples of Elective Home Education being carried out very well.
- Children being Electively Home Educated were scattered randomly across the Borough.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the report be noted and shared with schools.

15 FINANCIAL UPDATE

The Senior Manager Corporate Finance introduced a report that set out the projected revenue and capital monitoring positions for 2018/19 as at the close of quarter 1 (30 June 2018). The report also provided details of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2019/20 - 2022/23 and preparation of the budget for 2019/20.

Appended to the report were the Revenue Monitoring 2018/19 Quarter 1 Report (Appendix 1) and the Capital Monitoring 2018/19 Quarter 1 Report (Appendix 2).

The Senior Manager Corporate Finance also provided the Committee with a presentation on the Children and Young People's Department the 2017-18 Outturn in relation to Capital and Schools. and the 1st Quarter Revenue Forecast 2018/19.

The Committee noted that capital had been used for the following:

- Meadowside Special School – hydrotherapy
- Town Lane Infants expand/modernisation
- Elleray Park Special School – new classrooms
- Heygarth Primary School – new classrooms
- Woodchurch Primary – new roof

In respect of the 1st Quarter Revenue Forecast 2018/19 the Committee noted that

- The Budget Forecast was balanced
- The cost of Looked After Children continued to be a pressure. Numbers and complex cases
- New investment helping to embed new practices and enabling reactive expenditure to be diverted to prevention

The Senior Manager Corporate Finance informed that the role of the Committee was to focus on the 2019/20 Budget gap of £45m and review and challenge Budget proposals proposed by the Cabinet. The Committee could also recommend budget proposals. They could be wide ranging from income generation and reviewing services to identify efficiencies.

It was noted that the key dates were as follows:

- 26 November 2018 – The Cabinet will agree its budget proposals
- December 2018 – Overview & Scrutiny Committees review the budget proposals
- 18 February 2019 – The Cabinet will approval its budget and updated MTFS
- 4 March 2019 – The Full Council will consider the budget and the Council Tax

Following his presentation the Senior Manager Corporate Finance was questioned on its content by Members and responded as appropriate.

One particular concern raised by Members was the provision of a hydrotherapy pool at Meadowside Special School when just around the corner the Lyndale Special School was scheduled for demolition.

It was proposed that in future the Committee should receive the detail of actual monthly expenditure and the Senior Manager Corporate Finance agreed to provide this information for consideration at meetings going forward.

RESOLVED:

That the content of the report and its appendices be noted.

16 **CHESHIRE LINES REALITY CHECK VISIT - FEEDBACK REPORT**

The Committee was aware that key to the success of scrutiny was the ability of Members to check evidence from a variety of sources. Whilst Members routinely received reports from senior management and had access to performance monitoring reports, it had been proposed that greater access to frontline staff and service users would enable scrutiny Members to triangulate evidence with other sources and would give Members greater confidence in the outcomes of their scrutiny work. It had, therefore, been agreed at the Committee's meeting held in July 2017 to establish a programme of Reality Check Visits through which scrutiny Members could engage independently and directly with frontline staff.

The Chair introduced a report that detailed a visit by a small group of Members to the Cheshire Lines building on 30 July 2018 to enable direct engagement with frontline staff. Attached to the report as Appendix 1 was the full report for this Reality Check Visit. It was reported that Members had found the visit to Cheshire Lines useful and informative. The benefits and effects of co-location and agile working were in evidence during the visit, as well as the challenges faced.

Moving forward, the following recommendations had been proposed:

- SLT to make enquiries to ensure that teams who have experienced a lack of communication now feel informed and continue to have information cascaded to them; and
- Standardised Pathways and processes have been requested by staff for all online forms, to ensure standard practice within the borough.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the content of the report and its appendices be noted; and**
- (2) the following recommendations be agreed:**

- **SLT to make enquiries to ensure that teams who have experienced a lack of communication now feel informed and continue to have information cascaded to them; and**
- **standardised Pathways and processes be put in place in respect of all online forms, to ensure standard practice across the Council.**

17 CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

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 Committee noted that it was envisaged that the Work Programme would be drawn up from a combination of scrutiny reviews, standing items and requested officer reports. The report provided Members with an opportunity to plan and regularly review its work across the Municipal Year. Some initial ideas for a Work Programme were appended to the report, based on issues which were of interest to Members of the Committee in the Municipal Year 2018/19.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the content of the report be noted; and**
- (2) the proposed Children and Families Overview & Scrutiny Committee Work Programme for 2018/19 be approved.**