

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 13 November 2018

<u>Present:</u>	Councillor	T Usher (Chair)	
	Councillors	D Burgess-Joyce W Clements A Gardner P Hayes C Povall K Cannon EA Grey	C Meaden J Stapleton J Walsh KJ Williams G Wood AER Jones A Brame (In place of C Carubia)

18 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor C Carubia. The Committee also received apologies for absence from Co-opted Members Julie Johnson and Chris Penn.

19 COUNCILLOR MOIRA McLAUGHLIN

The Chair reported that Councillor Moira McLaughlin was no longer a Member of the Committee. He paid tribute to her informing he was aware that Councillor McLaughlin had given the Committee a lot of her time, was very knowledgeable about its work and remit and was a fantastic mentor and a great credit to Wirral Council.

20 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.

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.

21 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 25 September 2018 be confirmed as a correct record.

22 2018/19 QUARTER 2 WIRRAL PLAN PERFORMANCE

A report by the Head of Intelligence introduced the 2018/19 Quarter 2 (July – September 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 2 and available data in relation to a range of outcome indicators and supporting measures.

Quarter Two Wirral Plan Performance was summarised as follows:

- Provisional data for the Early Years Foundation Stage had showed good progress for children being ready for school. The headline outcome indicated that Good Levels of Development (GLD) had increased by 1.2%, taking performance above 70% for the first time since the launch of the Wirral Plan.
- It was very encouraging that GLD had also improved in priority groups with the achievement gap for children eligible for free school meals and their peers closed by 4%, which was a significant achievement; and there was an encouraging increase in children looked after achievement.
- Infants and children receiving development checks were below the targets set, work was underway to share good practice with GPs to improve infant checks and a centralised appointment system had been developed for children's checks to support children being seen on time.
- The achievement gap (provisional data) 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 had widened overall by 1.5% to 23.5%. Within this figure the attainment of both cohorts had increased however non-FSM pupils had increased by 2.9% more than double the FSM pupils (1.4%).
- Provisional Progress 8 Score (2017-18 Academic Year) had improved from the previous year to 0.03. The National average Progress 8 score was 0 and Wirral was slightly above the average and better than the North West and Statistical Neighbours.

- Officers working collaboratively with head teachers of secondary schools had reduced the amount of permanent exclusions by a third. They were focusing on secondary and specialist schools to continue to reduce permanent exclusions by providing appropriate challenge as well as timely interventions.
- Wirral was ranked in the lowest quintile for both primary and secondary absence and persistent absence levels had increased compared with a decrease nationally. Reducing persistent absence and improving attendance for all pupils with a specific focus on the most vulnerable was a key priority. Work was underway to examine and implement the recommendations of the independent review of the Education Social Welfare Service seeking to develop a consistent partnership approach to reducing attendance. Improving the process of issuing fixed penalty notices as result of a new Education Social Welfare Service was underway.
- The children looked after rate had seen a reduction since 2017-18 year end; however, this was still double the national average figure and 35% higher than Wirral's nearest statistical neighbours.
- The number of children in need had increased on the previous quarter but remained over 20 percent above the national average. However, the Quarter 2 figure represented a 5.3% improvement since start of the Wirral Plan.
- The rate of children who became the subject of a child protection plan at Quarter 2 was 65.6 per 10,000; a 26% increase since the last quarter. This was 51% above the national average, 21% higher than the North West and 22% higher than Wirral's nearest statistical neighbours.
- The employment rate for people aged 16-64 who were Equality Act core of work limiting disabled had improved again to 48.8% and was at its highest since the Wirral Plan had been launched.
- The proportion of people who were feeling supported to manage their condition was 60.1% for the period January 2018 - March 2018. This had reduced from 67.2% the previous year which reflected a reduction nationally (national average 59.6%, down from 64% last year).
- A total of 813 cases had been dealt with at MARAC in the 12 months prior to September 2018. This equated to 59.3 cases per 10,000 female population. A high level of absenteeism in the Family Safety Unit had meant a reduction in contact attempts. A reduced level of contact could impact on the number of cases taken to MARAC. Emergency measures had been put in place to ensure that all gold level victims received

appropriate support and work was underway to build resilience into this service.

Members asked the Officers present, including the Corporate Director for Children Services and Lead Commissioner Community Services & Resilience a number of questions which were answered accordingly. Matters highlighted included the following:

- The attainment gap between boys and girls in KS1 was continuing to widen and there were various interventions that needed to be put in place to address this. This was not just a specific local issue. It was a national issue. The curriculum was being reviewed and consideration was being given to whether it would be possible to change how certain subjects were taught so boys could be better engaged. They did not do well in examinations but fared better with continuous assessment.
- Wirral was ranked in the lowest quintile for both primary and secondary absence and persistent absence levels had increased compared with a decrease nationally. Officers were involved in ongoing dialogue with schools regarding the causes of absence and the Service was being redesigned to ensure an improvement in provision. It was important to communicate to parents the importance of not keeping their children off school. The responsibility to ensure children went to school rested with their parents and schools undertook enforcement action. Schools should contact parents to let them know that their children were not in school. There needed to be a campaign approach to promote the benefits of children going to school and Children's Services would work with the schools to promote it.
- Staffing issues that had had an effect on the figures within the report – Zero Tolerance to Domestic Violence. There had been a high degree of absence which had now been addressed by employing temporary staff. During the period there had been an unexpected and unique rise in domestic abuse. It was expected that there would now be a reduction in the number of victims of domestic abuse. The reporting mechanism was better but there were concerns that there may be a spike at Christmas. The Service was in the position to know who had been flagged as high risk and there needed to be resources available to manage an extreme level of high risk. This was a high risk process and the Council was working with its third sector partners on this e.g. Tomorrow's Women Wirral.

RESOLVED:

That the content of the report be noted.

23 **IMPROVEMENT JOURNEY, DATA TRACKER AND ALL-AGE DISABILITY SERVICE TRANSFORMATION - UPDATE**

The Corporate Director for Children Services made a presentation to the Committee on the Children and Young People's Services' Improvement Journey. He provided:

- A summary of the progress made to date;
- Performance Headlines; and
- Details in respect of the All Age Disability Service's transformation.

The Committee was reminded that there would be another OFSTED Inspection in a matter of months. In this calendar year there had been three OFSTED monitoring visits and the progress made had been noted. Social Work practice was making a difference, thresholds were embedded and there was increased resilience. A two day appraisal by the Department for Education, at the beginning of October 2018, had led to a letter being sent to the Minister for Children on the progress made. Unfortunately, it was not a letter that would be put in the public domain. It was a conversation between the Department for Education Adviser and a Minister but the Corporate Director had been informed that it mirrored exactly what he had reported on the progress that had been made so far.

The Corporate Director reported on what was still to be done to bring about improvement in Children's Services. He informed that there were challenges around the recruitment of permanent and experienced social workers and there were still too many children in care.

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

- Issues identified with staff recruitment had been addressed and there had been massive improvement. The Council was an organisation that understood the purpose of social work and provided an appropriate environment for social workers to operate within. The Council was considered an attractive employer to work for and as a result more candidates were applying for jobs.
- Issues raised at the Youth Parliament held on 6 November 2018 about young people's services, young people of Wirral's concerns about homelessness and the Aspiration Project – the aspirations and feelings of Looked After Children.
- Level of sickness in respect of social workers and the problems caused when a child's social worker did not turn up at Foster Carer's first

review. The Corporate Director agreed to investigate the situation and report back to Members.

- Absence Management Strategy – the average was 14 days of sick per annum and the most common cause was stress. The number of days was reducing. There was a clear process to follow and was in the process of being embedded. Patterns of consistent non attendance was being investigated with the help of HR officers. As a consequence some employees were being performance managed and some had left the organisation because of their sickness patterns through dismissal.
- Arrangements over the Christmas period when some families may struggle. The Service was retained and well prepared and would be responsive.
- A significant document had been published and would be debated at the National Conference. It identified factors that caused significant pressure in the system.
- Relationships between the Police and the Health Service and what was being done to ensure they were working together in a more positive way. Multi-agency working had been discussed extensively with partners and the response had been extremely positive. The problem would be resolved by the time of the next OFSTED visit. There had been a number of meetings to ensure issues were identified and were dealt with appropriately. There had been a lack of willingness to challenge each other's organisations. This had been worked through and an additional command lead had been put in.
- If the Council did not get the results it wanted from OFSTED it may impact on social worker recruitment and it currently did not have all that it needed. Children's Services had suffered significant reputational damage by being rated as inadequate twice. One way to ensure this did not happen again was to recruit experienced staff. Twenty social workers were required and 10 had already been selected for interview so progress was being made. Children's Services were doing all it could to avoid the risk of failure. There was 100 days to go. There was still a lot to do and there had been some good appointments made in respect of senior roles during the last few months.
- Apprenticeships created and gifts for Wirral's Care Leavers.
- Christmas arrangements and gifts for Wirral's Looked After Children.

RESOLVED:

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

24 SAFEGUARDING ANNUAL REPORT

The Independent Chair of the Wirral Safeguarding Children Board, Professor Maggie Atkinson, introduced the Board's Annual Report 2017-18 which had been circulated with the agenda. The purpose of the Annual Report was to provide a transparent assessment on the effectiveness of arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people who lived in Wirral. It provided a clear sense of the multi-agency activity which had taken place to ensure children were safe and show how effective that work had been.

Professor Atkinson also made a presentation to the Committee which included details on the following:

- the Statutory Objectives and Functions of the Board;
- the Structure and Sub-Committees of the Board;
- local background and Safeguarding Context for 2017-18;
- progress against Five Priorities:
 - Children who are in need of help and protection are identified and responded to at the earliest opportunity by services effectively working together;
 - Children are protected from sexual exploitation by a skilled workforce and the wider community is equipped to understand and respond to concerns;
 - Children and Young People who are Looked After, including those placed in Wirral by other Local Authorities are supported by agencies who effectively work together to keep them safe;
 - through its effective governance and relationships with influential forums and groups the Wirral Safeguarding Children Board ensures all partner agencies meet the needs of Children and Young People;
 - the Wirral Safeguarding Children Board discharges all of its statutory duties and ensures the effectiveness of arrangements

to safeguard and promote the welfare of Children and Young People;

- the Board's key activities during 2017-18; and
- the Board's Business Plan.

Following the presentation Members asked Professor Atkinson a number of questions which she answered as appropriate. The ensuing discussions centred on:

- The latest Section 11 and 175 audits.
- The number of allegations made against school staff on Wirral and the number that were substantiated.
- Wirral Safeguarding Children Board stood outside any partnership arrangements that schools had. This would need to be picked up in the new arrangements going forward so that the partners could question each other's practices.
- The current levels of central Government funding. Wirral had done a sterling job in attracting funding but it was not known if it could be sustained.
- The main area requiring improvement was in relation to all schools/education settings staff understanding the thresholds of need. Only 52% had said that all of their staff understood this.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the content of the Wirral Safeguarding Children Board's Annual Report be noted; and**
- (2) Professor Maggie Atkinson be thanked for her informative presentation.**

25 FUTURE SAFEGUARDING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chair informed that the Local Children's Safeguarding Board was standing down and the Council had to agree new multi- agency safeguarding arrangements. Consequently, he invited Chief Superintendent Ian Hassall to make a presentation to the Committee on the Development of new Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA). Members noted that the Children and Social Work Act 2017 replaced Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) with new local safeguarding arrangements, led by the three statutory safeguarding partners:

- Wirral Council
- Merseyside Police
- Wirral Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)

It also placed a duty on child death review partners (LA and CCG) to review the deaths of children normally resident in the local area (previously an LSCB function).

Chief Superintendent Hassall informed that the three safeguarding partners must set out how they would work together and with any relevant agencies to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. The Committee was informed that the partners must also set out how their arrangements would receive independent scrutiny. Once agreed, the safeguarding partners must publish the arrangements. All schools must be included in the arrangements. The partners must also set out how their arrangements would receive independent scrutiny. Once agreed, the safeguarding partners must publish the arrangements.

The Committee noted that the purpose of the new local arrangements which were still under development was to support and enable local agencies to work together in a system where:

- excellent practice is the norm;
- partner agencies hold one another to account effectively;
- there was early identification of 'new' safeguarding issues;
- learning was promoted and embedded;
- information was shared effectively; and
- the public could feel confident that children are protected from harm.

Chief Superintendent Hassall also informed that there were three parts to the Model:

- Governance – arrangements developed last to ensure they reflected how the Model would to work.
- Services – strong partnership arrangements were crucial to the success of the Model. This included how services were arranged to ensure positive outcomes for children.

- Practice – developing excellent practice was the basis of the Model. Supporting Families Enhancing Futures (SFEF) approach would sit at the centre of the approach and include shared values and behaviours.

Members noted that the Model would include an ‘intelligence function’ to support an evaluation of the effectiveness of safeguarding. This would include data analysis, auditing, reviews and peer reviews, feedback from children and families, views of frontline professionals, regular learning events, inspection results and ‘what works’ from research.

The local MASA Model would include approaches to:

- arrangements to ensure children received the right help at the right time – including publication of thresholds;
- a Model and methodology for undertaking local reviews;
- continued development and evaluation of SFEF;
- arrangements for monitoring, scrutiny and challenge;
- arrangements for embedding and testing of learning;
- arrangements for multi-agency training; and
- local governance arrangements including relationships with other bodies and the mechanisms for independent scrutiny and annual reporting.

Opportunities for local and regional collaboration would be pursued where it was beneficial.

Chief Superintendent Hassall provided the Committee with an overview of the draft Model, detailed its key features and set out the next steps along with a timeline. It was expected that the Model would be in place in shadow form by April 2019 and fully in place by September 2019. The Committee noted the opportunity to have a say on the design of the Council’s safeguarding arrangements so that it could be held to account.

Members then asked a number of questions that were answered as appropriate by the Chief Superintendent and the Corporate Director for Children’s Services. Issues explored included the following:

- C100 forms - Applying for a court order to make arrangements for a child or resolve a dispute about their upbringing and the procedure if it was broken.

- How to avoid grooming issues. There had been some recently on the Wirral. Would the new arrangements ensure there was no further grooming within certain communities?
- The closeness of the working arrangements between the partners who worked together on cases and across county lines. The joint investigations that could help mitigate risks.
- Multi-agency training.
- Local strategies would reflect best practice from outside Wirral. The dynamics that existed on Wirral did not exist in the rest of the Liverpool City Region.
- If all of the partners who scrutinise each other were part of the Children's Safeguarding Board, how would the independent element be guaranteed?
- The external audit processes in place.
- Future arrangements could be to retain the current independent Chair of the Children's Safeguarding Board, reciprocal arrangements with another Council or electing a different Chair each year. A preference would need to be formulated for Members to consider at some stage.

RESOLVED:

- (1) Chief Superintendent Ian Hassall be thanked for his informative presentation; and**
- (2) a Workshop/Spot Light Session be held for Members of this Committee on the progress being made with the development of the new multi- agency safeguarding arrangements, early in the new year.**

26 REALITY CHECK UPDATE REPORTS

A report by the Corporate Director of Children's Services reminded the Committee that it had previously agreed that small groups of Members would undertake a series of 'Reality Check' visits to enable direct engagement with frontline staff.

The reports from these visits were then presented to the Committee for consideration along with any recommendations. The following visits had been made:

- MASH 17 September 2018. The Reality Check Visit report was appended to the report as Appendix 1

- Leaving Care Team 18 October 2017. The Reality Check Visit report was appended to the report as Appendix 2.
- Early Childhood Service 7 December 2017. The Reality Check Visit report was appended to the report as Appendix 3.
- Performance Dashboard 19 February 2018. The Reality Check Visit report was appended to the report as Appendix 4.
- Cheshire Lines 30 July 2018.

Members had requested that update reports, for each visit, be presented to the Committee once a year so that Members could receive a progress report on any recommendations previously made. It was noted that as the visit to Cheshire Lines had been recent, it had been agreed that this would not be included in this series of update reports.

The Assistant Director, Early Help and Prevention presented reports in respect of Reality Check Visits to the Integrated Front Door (previously MASH) and the Early Childhood Service and answered Members questions as appropriate.

The Deputy Director for Children presented reports in respect of Reality Check Visits to the Leaving Care Team and the Performance Dashboard and answered Members questions as appropriate.

RESOLVED:

That the reports be noted.

27 FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT

The Senior Manager Corporate Finance presented a report that set out financial monitoring information for Children and Families. The report provided Members with the detail to scrutinise budget performance for this area of activity.

The report included the following:

- performance against the Revenue Budget (including savings, income and debt); and
- performance against the Capital Budget.

The Senior Manager Corporate Finance also made a short presentation to the Committee which included details on the 2018/19 Revenue, the Children's Budget Changes, the 2018-19 Forecast and the 2018/19 Capital Programme.

Members expressed concerns that the cost of placements for Looked After Children were increasing. The Corporate Director for Children's Services reported that some children were placed outside of the borough and some were placed inside but not in places provided by the Council. Some places were bought and paid for by the Council and it had agreed to reset weekly fees higher than inflation so it could do this. The Corporate Director also reported that his Department was in the process of delivering an efficiency strategy and was looking at what it needed to do locally to meet children's needs. It was considering whether to enter into any partnership arrangements.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the balanced revenue position year end forecast be noted; and**
- (2) the performance of the capital projects be noted.**

28 CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW & 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.

Appended to the report at Appendix 1 was a report on a Mental Health Workshop Members had attended on 11 October 2018. Appended to the report at Appendix 2 was the Committee's Work Programme as at 4 October 2018.

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.**