

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 16 October 2024

Present: Councillor S Bennett (Chair)

Councillors P Basnett I Lewis
P Jobson C Baldwin
G Cooper A Onwuemene
L Luxon-Kewley J Grier
V Wilson A Brame (for C
Carubia)

50 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting as well as those watching the webcast and reminded them that a copy of the webcast would be retained on the Council's website for two years.

51 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Chris Carubia. Councillor Allan Brame attended as substitute.

52 MEMBERS CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Members were asked to consider whether they had any disclosable pecuniary interests and/or any other relevant interest in connection with any items on this agenda and, if so, to declare them and state the nature of the interest.

Councillor Paula Basnett declared a personal interest as she was a foster carer.

Councillor Amanda Onwuemene declared a personal interest as a close family member was a foster carer.

53 MINUTES

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 23 September 2024 be approved as a correct record.

54 PUBLIC AND MEMBERS QUESTIONS

No questions, statements or petitions from the public or Councillors had been received.

55 YOUTH JUSTICE ANNUAL PLAN

The Service Manager, Youth Offending presented the report of the Director of Children, Families and Education. The report provided the Committee with an introduction to the Wirral Youth Justice Service (YJS) Strategic Plan 2024-2025.

The Youth Justice Board (YJB) was a non-departmental public body for overseeing the youth justice system in England and Wales. The preparation and submission of an 'Annual Plan' was linked to the terms and conditions of the Youth Justice Board grant award. This award contributed to the funding of youth offending teams and services across England and Wales.

The report noted that the Wirral Youth Justice Service (YJS) was a statutory partnership between Police, Probation, the Council and Health partners in accordance with the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.

The Youth Justice Service was overseen by the Wirral Youth Justice Management Board (YJMB). The management board was formed to provide strategic direction with the aim of preventing offending by children and young people.

As a statutory partner under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, the Council had a key role to play in delivering Youth Justice. Endorsement by the Council would support the delivery of this Strategic Plan and therefore the linked aspects of the Wirral Plan.

Members discussed the service feedback via various channels including online surveys, anonymous case studies and word of mouth and queried how many users of the service have given feedback.

The Service Manager, Youth Offending responded that data was available via the online surveys and would feed this back to Members.

Members noted that the Youth Justice team targeted people at risk and asked whether any work was done with young people before they were considered to be at risk.

The Service Manager, Youth Offending stated that their team visited most schools in Wirral and speak to young people about children at risk of exploitation, drug use and the dangers of violence and knife crime.

Members asked how membership was determined for the YJB and were informed that it was composed of a statutory membership from different areas such as public health, the police, probation and children's services.

Members noted that the report referenced that the Youth Justice Annual Plan had been reviewed by the YJB and queried whether any weaknesses had been identified.

The Assistant Director for Early Help, Prevention and Effectiveness noted that in past years the YJB had given feedback on a couple of areas they felt could be improved and officers had incorporated those suggestions into the annual plan this year. The YJB were happy with how this was presented and didn't offer any further suggestions for improvement this year.

Members asked how the service was planning on doing more work to target harmful sexual behaviour.

The Service Manager, Youth Offending responded that there were plans to upskill current staff in relation to the specialist assessments that were required. Further development of staff within specific areas of children's services was planned to allow them to better address, assess and identify the interventions needed. He also noted that there was a specialist victims worker that works with all victims of harmful sexual behaviour, as well as other crimes such as violence or criminal damage.

Members sought clarity on the age that the Youth Justice Service engaged with schools and if it was across all schools within the borough. They were informed that visits were carried out at secondary schools only, in year 9 as the content of the discussions were deemed to be unsuitable for younger children. Only 2 schools within Wirral had yet to sign up to the service.

Members queried the term Binary Reoffending Rate and were informed that it was national scale of reoffending that was looked at over a 2 year period.

Members discussed the disproportionate number of young people with neurodiversities that end up in the Youth Justice system and asked what work was being done to address this.

The Service Manager, Youth Offending responded that a lot of work was done to ensure the correct intervention level with the use of enhanced case management, the trauma recovery model, as well as through upskilling staff.

The Assistant Director for Early Help, Prevention and Effectiveness added that while the Youth Justice Service took the lead on early intervention and prevention, there was a real systems approach to try and ensure young people with additional susceptibilities and vulnerabilities were identified before they reached the Youth Justice Service.

Resolved – That the Wirral Youth Justice Service's Strategic Plan 2024-25 be recommended to Council for approval.

COUNCIL PLAN PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 1 2024-25 THEME: EARLY HELP FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

The Director of Children, Families and Education presented their report which provided a quarterly performance report in relation to the Council Plan: Wirral Working Together 2023-27 for the Theme early help for children and families.

Following the approval of the Council Plan a performance management framework was developed through working group activity with members from all Policy Committees and Planning and Resources Committee between February and April 2024. A reporting approach was approved providing quarterly reporting on the measures identified in the framework. Each Policy Committee would receive a report related to their key theme, for Children, Young People and Education Committee this was the 'Early help for children and families' theme. In the reporting cycle once individual Policy Committees had reviewed their key theme reports they would then be referred up to Policy and Resources Committee to provide that committee with one complete performance report for all themes of the Council Plan. The reporting provided the most recent performance for the measures and included performance context and mitigations in place where underperformance was identified.

Members asked for further detail on the service's performance relating to children and young people achieving their potential and being prepared for adulthood.

The Director of Children, Families and Education responded that this was an area that required more information and suggested bringing a more detailed report to committee in future.

At the suggestion of Members, the Director of Children, Families and Education also suggested bringing a further report to committee on Child Protection Plans.

Members stated that they would like to see more information on Wirral's performance in comparison to other local authorities.

Members raised concerns over the increased number of home-schooled children in Wirral and how the Council was ensuring that those children were receiving a good quality education.

The Assistant Director for Education responded that the current legislation allowed parents to decide whether to home school their children, he noted that the Council had invested in additional officers to support elective home education visits to make sure that the education being offered was within the legislation but that the expectations around the curriculum offered within the home were quite minimal. He noted that the Council did support families when

they wanted their child to return to school and would process those requests as quickly as possible to ensure that the child got back into the school system.

Members noted that the report gave figures for the domestic abuse rate for 16-17 year olds and asked if there was similar information for under 16s.

The Head of Service, Quality and Safeguarding responded that there were 396 children on Child Protection Plans, and approximately 55% of those children were impacted by domestic abuse.

The Director of Children, Families and Education added that since 2022 the Domestic Abuse Act changed how the Council recorded and reported victims of domestic abuse, the service had undertaken a lot of training and had an Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) who undertook a lot of outreach work. She reflected that the reported increase in cases was, in part, due to the additional referrals generated by this outreach work.

Resolved – That the report be noted and referred to the Policy and Resources Committee.

57

CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Assistant Director of Early Help, Prevention and Effectiveness presented the report of the Director of Children, Families and Education. The report provided the latest performance information for the Children's, Families and Education Directorate. The design and content of the report was developed following discussions with the Chair of the Committee and party spokes at a Performance Monitoring workshop back in March 2021.

The report offered Members the opportunity to monitor, review and challenge performance of the Council's Children's, Families and Education Directorate.

The Chair noted that the Children Looked After rate per 10,000 was significantly higher than the national average and asked why this was.

The Assistant Director of Early Help, Prevention and Effectiveness noted that the figure for Wirral was comparable, if still slightly higher, to its statistical neighbours with similar demographics. He stated that Wirral was reducing this rate and was forecast to come more into line with those statistical neighbours towards the end of quarter two.

Members asked about the figures in the report relating to the percentage of domestic abuse referrals to children's social care, noting that the figure had decreased from 31.1% in April 2024 to 21.6% in June 2024.

The Assistant Director of Early Help, Prevention and Effectiveness stated that opportunities were being identified for earlier intervention, which meant that not all incidents needed a higher intervention.

The Head of Service, Quality and Safeguarding added that a similar reduction had been seen across Merseyside and officers needed to look closer into the causes of this.

Members queried what was meant in the report by the “Child Protection Plans ceased Rate per 10,000 YTD”.

The Head of Service, Quality and Safeguarding responded that it described the number of child protection plans that had stopped, and would receive support under other channels instead. She noted that the figures were not a particular indicator of performance.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

58 SEND IMPROVEMENT

The Director of Children, Families and Education addressed the industrial action of the Wirral SEND team reported in press. She noted that for too long children with SEND had suffered poor performance. Only 1 in 5 children were getting their EHCPs in time. Complaints were high, with missed deadlines and poor communication from the SEND team. She stated that this was to change, with a commitment to put children and families first. The Improvement notice had been a wake-up. Over the previous 6 months there had been an accelerated pace of improvement work. There was an upcoming re-structure of the SEND team. She agreed that the SEND team’s case-load had been too high, the full review was moving forward to address this. She note that the Policy and Resources Committee had agreed to an investment of £1.1m in 2024 and £2.8m the following year to improve SEND services. She hoped representation of SEND service had been one of staff that want to do their best for children and families and were working to make sure that disruption is minimised.

The Assistant Director of Education presented the report of the Director of Children, Families and Education. The report provided members of the Children, Young People and Education Committee with an update on the improvement programme for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) for the Local Area in Wirral.

In addition to an update on the September 2024 Local Area SEND Partnership Board progress and reporting, this report provided members with clarity on how Wirral Council’s additional £1.1m investment was being used to support Wirral’s improvement journey.

The report noted that it had been agreed with the Department for Education and NHS England through the revised Terms of Reference for the Local Area SEND Partnership Board that the Health and Wellbeing Board was the appropriate forum to provide oversight of SEND improvement activity in Wirral, ensuring that the Written Statement of Action (WSOA) was fully delivered by October 2025. This report was presented to the committee to provide assurance of improvement and enabled alignment with the business of the committee.

The Chair thanked officers for the report and noted that it was good that the SEND service was being invested in, with additional staff coming, which would improve the speed of EHCPs being delivered.

He also raised that speech and language therapy services (SALT) had been raised by the SEND Partnership Board as the data referring to a 31 week wait appeared to include medical interventions, which effect the overall timescale. He noted that this had been queried with the NHS and he was waiting on clarification.

The Assistant Director for Education agreed that SALT had been noted at SEND Partnership Board and that Children's Services were working closely with health colleagues around the data that was being shared.

The Chair also raised that neurodevelopmental pathways were mentioned in the report, but that no information was given on this. The Assistant Director for Education stated that additional funding had been requested from the Integrated Care Board to support neurodevelopmental pathways, but it had not been forthcoming. Work was ongoing with health and education colleagues to see what could be done and a further report on this would be brought to committee in future with more detail.

Members queried whether the five milestones reported as delayed, but not at risk would be affected by the delay in additional staffing caused by the industrial action started by the SEND team.

The Assistant Director for Education responded that while there would be an additional delay in recruitment and subsequent training of new staff, it would not have an adverse effect on the overall EHCP recovery plan.

Members queried the number of "stuck" cases where EHCPs were stuck at the "draft due" stage, mostly due to a lack of positive consultation responses.

The Assistant Director for Education noted that the Assistant Director for SEND Inclusion and the manager of the SEND Referral Assessment Team were overseeing all of those stuck draft plans to see what could be done quickly to move them forward.

Members queried how the budgeting for EHCPs worked and whether the costs were covered by the local authority or the schools.

The Assistant Director for Education explained that the local authority paid the costs for the operational delivery of an EHCP, and the school's would fund the delivery of that plan.

Members raised that it was reported that the target for Children's Services staff being trained in Co-production had not been met due to a delay in launching a FLO training module. Performance of 16.5% was achieved against a target of 20%. Following a Board meeting, the Organisational Development Team prioritised the training, which has now reached 22% of employees. They asked if there was an estimate for when the number of staff that had completed this training might reach 50% or more.

The Director of Children, Families and Education as of the end of September 2024, the completion rate had reached 35.5% and was expecting to reach at least 50% before Christmas 2024.

Members queried the support and communication for parents of SEND children, particularly while waiting to find out what kind of support might be offered.

The Director of Children, Families and Education noted that during the previous months, a large amount of work had been done by the family hubs to develop a parent-like SEND offer. They had worked closely with parents to co-design various sessions to support parents through the family hubs.

Members noted that there were, at the time of the report, 71 SEND children being homeschooled and queried why there were so many and how the parents of those children were being communicated with to encourage them to bring their children back to mainstream schooling.

The Assistant Director for Education responded that additional officers had been employed to make home visits and they made it clear to those parents where there was additional support and what provisions were available.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

59 **INDEPENDENT REVIEWING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT**

The Head of Service Quality and Safeguarding presented the report of the Director of Children, Families and Education which provided an overview to the Children Young People and Education Committee for scrutiny and comment.

It noted that since March 2010 there was a requirement that the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) service within each local authority produced an Annual Report of activity, with regards to children looked after (CLA).

The purpose of the IRO Annual Report, which was attached at appendix 1 was to evaluate the extent to which Wirral Council had fulfilled its responsibilities to its Children Looked After for the period 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024.

The role and function of the Safeguarding Unit and the Independent Reviewing Officers was governed by law and statutory guidance. Each Local Authority had a legal requirement to provide an Independent Reviewing Officer for every child or young person looked after, fundamentally to ensure their Human Rights were respected.

Members noted that there were a reported 111 failed engagement visits from Independent Reviewing Officers to children and questioned whether they were followed up.

The Head of Service Quality and Safeguarding responded that they were followed up with an alternative visit, phone call or message.

Members queried whether any of the reported 766 children looked after in Wirral were placed outside of the borough.

The Head of Service Quality and Safeguarding replied that the majority were placed within the borough, but a proportion would be placed outside of Wirral but they remained the responsibility of Wirral Council.

Members asked whether facilities were still available for care leavers to live semi-independently as they were aware of some that had closed.

The Head of Service Quality and Safeguarding responded that those facilities did still exist and that there were a number of projects to build more within the borough.

Resolved – That

- 1. The information contained in the IRO Annual Report attached at appendix 1 be noted.**
- 2. The publication of the Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report be approved.**

EARLY YEARS WRAP AROUND CHILDCARE PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Early Years Operations Manager presented the report of the Director of Children, Families and Education which covered key updates on the childcare wrap around programme. The government had announced approval of Wirral's delivery plan and budget spend for financial year 2024 to 2025. The government had yet to announce a decision on the budget allocation for financial year 2025 to 2026.

Funding allocation notifications had been sent to schools with partial provision and work was ongoing with schools that didn't have an offer. Currently two schools had accepted the offer provided to them.

The report highlighted key updates to the committee to raise awareness of the ongoing work within the early years and childcare.

The Chair gave an example of a single parent struggling to condense their working hours to allow them to spend more time with their children as they couldn't receive wraparound care. He stated that for children at special schools, it was much harder to get wraparound care.

The Early Years Operations Manager noted that the situation was difficult as the service only had funding for 2024-25 which meant that they did not want to add extra provisions for families that might not be sustainable. Once the upcoming spending review had taken place, it would allow the service to move forward with additional provision at pace.

Members queried what happened when a school had declined additional funding for wraparound care because the majority of parents said they didn't need it, but a small minority of parents did want it.

The Early Years Operations Manager responded that they could provide a brokerage service to those parents to help them find support local to them. They would also work with the school to see if it might be viable to them to accept the funding.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

YOUTH SERVICE STATUTORY DUTY DEVELOPMENT

The Operation Manager – Targeted Youth presented the report of the Director of Children, Families and Education which noted that During the Children, Young People and Education Committee on the 18th October 2023 it was resolved that :-

1. The youth services provided for children and young people be reviewed and scrutinised.

2. The receipt of a further report on how the Youth Offer met the requirements of the statutory guidance issued by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport under Section 507B of the Education Act 1996, issued September 2023 be agreed.

The report set out headline changes since October 2023 and identified continuous improvement themes identified when assessing the offer against Section 507b of the Education Act 1996 Statutory Duty. A further report would be brought back to Committee in Quarter 4 24/25, setting out impact and outcomes for Wirral's youth offer.

Section 507B required local authorities to, so far as reasonably practicable, secure access for all qualifying young people to a sufficient quantity of 'youth services', namely:

- a sufficient quantity of educational leisure-time activities which were for the improvement of their well-being and sufficient facilities for such activities; and
- a sufficient quantity of recreational leisure-time activities which were for the improvement of their well-being, and sufficient facilities for such activities.

Members asked why the Youth Spaces continuous improvement had started with West Kirby rather than a more disadvantaged area of the borough.

The Operation Manager – Targeted Youth responded that the site at West Kirby was used due to available staffing and resource as they were the only user group of the site.

Members queried what work would be coming to Birkenhead and Tranmere.

The Operation Manager – Targeted Youth noted that the Hive was the main provision already in Birkenhead and that there were other sites within Birkenhead that offered counselling, the response drug and alcohol team and the detached youth work team.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

62 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Head of Legal Service presented the report on behalf of the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee. The report reminded members that the Children, Young People and Education Committee was responsible for proposing and delivering an annual committee work programme. This work programme was to align with the corporate priorities of

the Council, in particular the delivery of the key decisions which were the remit of the Committee.

The Chair requested that the two reports that the Director of Children, Families and Education had offered to bring to committee in future be added to the work programme, namely “Children and Young People Achieving Their Potential and Preparation for Adulthood” and “Child Protection Plans”.

Resolved – That the work programme be noted.