

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 16 November 2010

<u>Present:</u>	Councillor	C Meaden (Chair)	
	Councillors	W Clements T Harney P Hayes K Hayes	C Povall T Smith W Smith Mrs P M Williams
<u>In attendance:</u>	Councillor	S Clarke	
<u>Apologies</u>		Mr M Clarke	
<u>Deputy:</u>	Councillor	P Glasman (for A McArdle)	
<u>Co-opted Members:</u>		Mrs J Kearney Mrs J Owens	Mr R Neale

26 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST / PARTY WHIP

Members were asked to consider whether they had a personal or prejudicial interest in connection with any item on the agenda and, if so, to declare it and to state the nature of such interest.

Members were reminded that they should also declare, pursuant to paragraph 18 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, whether they were subject to a party whip in connection with the item to be considered and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of the whipping arrangement.

Councillor C Meaden declared a personal general interest because of her daughter's employment within the Children and Young People's Department.

27 MINUTES

Members were requested to receive the minutes of the meetings of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 14 September and 4 October, 2010.

Resolved – That the minutes of the meetings held on 14 September and 4 October, 2010, be approved as a correct record.

28 PRESENTATION ON SECOND QUARTER PERFORMANCE 2010/11

Nancy Clarkson, Head of Planning and Performance, gave a presentation on the second quarter performance report and upon key activities which were relevant to the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

She gave details of what was working well and also of key performance issues which had not met their targets and key risks including:

- The implementation of potential Council budget savings and the proposed early voluntary retirement and severance schemes and changes in human resources procedures would require careful review and implementation across the Department's responsibilities.
- Birkenhead University Academy project which was subject to national review. The need to review and re-state the relevant PFI contractual documentation in respect of the Birkenhead University Academy occupying the current Park High School was also a risk in respect of the turnaround required and the planned opening date.
- The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) transfer of duties to the LA was successfully completed but new government guidance had been received. Funding for the Sixth Form College and Wirral Metropolitan College would now be managed by the national Young Persons Learning Organisation which had implications on the recent staffing transition.

In respect of the financial position, the current forecast was for £1.6m overspend, an increase on the previously reported figure. The Interim Director reported upon three factors which had increased pressure on the budget:

- (i) 3 more Young People placed into higher cost residential care.
- (ii) Higher than anticipated spending on adoption due to an increase in adoption placements.
- (iii) Falling rolls in secondary schools leading to an increase in redundancy payments.

A Member suggested that the Committee could look at some anonymised case studies for high cost residential care placements post the decision making process which would better inform Members as to what was behind these figures. A training session could be run to which all Members were invited.

Although the target to close the gap between those children with Special Educational Needs and those non-SEN children's achievements at GCSE level, had not been met, a Member suggested the need to make a distinction between the bald figures and what the factors were behind those figures.

Resolved – That the presentation be noted.

29 YOUTH SERVICE CURRENT WORK AND ITS RELIANCE ON GRANT

At the request of the Committee, the Interim Director of Children's Services submitted a report on the current work of the Youth Service in the light of recent positive

developments. An appendix to the report also detailed the impact on a variety of projects of any potential reduction in funding from specific grants. The Council's deployment of General Fund was currently the subject of widespread public consultation.

Peter Edmondson, Head of Participation and Inclusion and the Interim Director responded to comments from Members and agreed to provide data for the Committee on attendance figures at the Youth Hubs, which did fluctuate with the seasons. Information was not yet available on the size of the new Early Intervention Grant. The settlement figure for the Council was due from the Government in December and also information on what ringfencing of grants might be removed and further reports on this would be brought back to future meetings.

Responding to further comments, Peter Edmondson and the Interim Director also elaborated on the success and use of the Teen Wirral website and the Rampworx Skatepark in Birkenhead. The success of the Youth Hub at Wallasey Fire Station had led to the possibility of a similar development at Birkenhead Fire Station.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

30 **CHILD PROTECTION ACTIVITY**

At the request of the Committee, the Interim Director of Children's Services submitted a report which outlined the statutory framework and the current level of child protection activity in Wirral.

Julia Hassall, Head of Children's Social Care, responded to comments from Members and informed the Committee that a Joint Protocol was in development between Children's Services and Adult Social Services around the issue of child protection and mental health. She would also be happy to arrange a training session for all Members of the Council and the Chair suggested that this could be organised in the New Year with a series of events planned in advance.

With the North West area having some of the highest numbers of children in care than any other region, Julia Hassall informed the Committee that she would be happy to research some of the best models nationally in respect of child protection activity. She stated that there was a drive nationally for Children's Centres to focus on hard to reach families.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

31 **LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN ACTIVITY**

At the request of the Committee, the Interim Director of Children's Services submitted a report which outlined the statutory framework and the current level of Looked after Children activity in Wirral.

Simon Garner, Strategic Service Manager, Children's Resources, introduced the report and along with Julia Hassall, responded to Members' comments and elaborated on the financial challenges of the Looked after Children budget and the recruitment strategy for foster carers.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

32 ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT

The Interim Director of Children's Services submitted a report which presented an annual analysis of complaints registered under the Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 during the period 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010.

Dawn Stanley-Smith, Complaints Investigations Officer, introduced the report and stated that over the twelve month reporting period 2009/10, the following complaints had been registered:

Stage 1 - 78 complaints (compared with 90 complaints in 2008/09)

Stage 2 - 5 complaints (compared with 10 complaints in 2008/09)

Stage 3 - 1 complaint (compared with 0 in 2008/09)

The report also gave statistics on compliments received and 'access to records' and 'freedom of information' requests.

Resolved – That the report be noted and the Department be congratulated on the reduced number of complaints.

33 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received an update on its work programme including the reports to be scheduled for the January meeting.

The Chair referred to the "Narrowing the gap" – Impact of deprivation funding' scrutiny review, she commented that this would be re-scoped with herself, Councillors P Hayes and Harney and Mrs J Kearney on the Review Panel and a progress report would be submitted to the next meeting.

Resolved – That the Work Programme be agreed and the Committee note the re-scoping of the "Narrowing the gap" – Impact of deprivation funding' review.

34 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee had been invited to review the Forward Plan prior to the meeting in order for it to consider, having regard to the Committee's work programme, whether scrutiny should take place of any items contained within the Plan and, if so, how it could be done within relevant timescales and resources.

Resolved – That the forward plan be noted.

35 ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS ACCEPTED BY THE CHAIR

The Chair informed the Committee of a number of items she and members wished to raise, including:

- (1) Prenton High School was reportedly applying for fast tracking to Academy status – the Interim Director commented that he hoped that if it became an Academy the

school would share their ideas for its future development with the Department. It was suggested that a report on the impact on the Authority of schools taking up academy status could be brought to future meetings.

- (2) An update on developments at Barnstondale outdoor centre – the Interim Director reported that a third log cabin was to be provided and 70% of its beds would be for the exclusive use of Wirral children aged 0-19 years with disabilities. This third timber cabin would match those already on site, which had been inspected by the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service. A user group would be meeting for the first time in January, 2011.
- (3) A DVD had been produced which showed activities ‘looked after children’ were involved in – the Interim Director commented that he would look into the possibility of sharing this with the Committee.

Resolved – That the issues raised be noted and reports on the impact of schools taking up academy status on the rest of the Authority’s schools be brought to future meetings of this Committee.