

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 26 January 2011

<u>Present:</u>	Councillor	C Meaden (Chair)	
	Councillors	W Clements T Harney P Hayes	C Povall W Smith
<u>Deputies:</u>	Councillors	D Dodd (for A McArdle) P Glasman (for T Smith) J Keeley (for K Hayes) D Mitchell (for P Williams)	
<u>Co-opted Members:</u>		Mrs J Kearney Mrs J Owens	Mr R Neale Mr A Scott

36 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 W Clements declared a personal interest in minute 39 (Wirral Sure Start Service Provision) by virtue of her employment with a voluntary provider.

Councillor C Povall declared a personal interest in minute 41 (Academies and Free Schools) by virtue of her daughter's employment.

Councillor P Glasman declared a personal interest in minute 39 (Wirral Sure Start Service Provision) by virtue of her being on the advisory group for New Brighton Sure Start.

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

All the Committee members declared a personal interest in minute 42 (Governor Support Service) by virtue of them being governors at various schools.

37 MINUTES

Members were requested to receive the minutes of the meetings of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 16 November, 2010.

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 November, 2010, be approved as a correct record.

38 ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Chair agreed to vary the order of business and take items 4 (Wirral Sure Start Service Provision) and 6 (Adoption Service Update) as the first two items of business.

39 WIRRAL SURE START SERVICE PROVISION

At the request of the Committee, the Interim Director of Children's Services submitted a report which outlined the development in Wirral's Sure Start provision for children and their families. The report informed members of the statutory duties within the Early Year developments and set out the key priorities and challenges.

With 16 Sure Start Children's Centres it was important that Wirral ensured they sustained a fully operational position, delivering their 'full core offer' within two years of designation. The full core offer included support for:

- Childcare
- Family support
- Health services
- Employment advice from Job Centre Plus
- Access to the local authority's information, advice and assistance service.

The key priorities and challenges included:

- Continuing to fill the gaps between demand and supply identified in the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment to secure, as far as reasonably practicable, sufficient childcare for working parents of children up to the age of 14 (18 for disabled children) supported by the delivery of a high quality information service for local families, parents and carers.
- Promote the take up of formal childcare (including both the free early education entitlement and paid - for childcare supported through tax credits), in particular amongst lower income families.
- Focus sharply on continuing to raise the standard of early learning and care provision by excellent delivery of the Early Years Foundation Stage, to secure a strong foundation for children's learning and development throughout other key stages.
- Deliver a reduction in the achievement gap between the lowest achieving children and the rest, in the context of securing better results for all 5 year olds.
- Continue to professionalise the early year's workforce by encouraging investment in, and equal access to, staff qualifications, particularly in the PVI sector and for childminders.

Responding to comments from Members, both the Interim Director and Mark Parkinson, Head of Learning & Achievement, informed the Committee that a number of separate grants would, in the coming financial year, be rolled into one single Early Intervention Grant. There would be a reduction in the size of the grant and it would be necessary to look at prioritising needs, though the Department would continue to deliver the key priorities, including those identified above. The grant would be £15.1m for the coming year of which about £10m would be spent on Sure Start, although it was acknowledged that the grant would no longer be ring-fenced.

They went on to outline some of the work being done to engage with hard to reach families and suggested that a further report could be brought back on multi-agency working.

Resolved – That Committee notes the scope of the Sure Start service delivery across Wirral for children and families.

40 **ADOPTION SERVICE UPDATE**

The Interim Director of Children's Services submitted a report which updated the Committee on the work of the Adoption Service in accordance with the requirements of the National Adoption Standards, as set out in the Adoption and Children Act 2002. In addition, the report also outlined performance information to date in relation to both Adoption and Permanence during 2010/2011.

Simon Garner, Strategic Service Manager, Childcare, introduced the report and also gave details of 'Adoption 22'. This was a consortium of 22 Adoption agencies within the Northwest including both local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies. One of the aims of Adoption 22 was for agencies to share prospective adopters within the region. As a result, Wirral Council sought to ensure that children who could not be placed with Wirral Council adoptive families were placed with adoptive families from Adoption 22. He agreed to bring an update report back to the Committee on the success of the Adoption 22 service.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

41 **ACADEMIES AND FREE SCHOOLS**

At the request of the Committee, the Interim Director of Children's Services submitted a report on the 'new style' free schools and academies. With limited information available on free schools, the report concentrated on academies.

On 26 May 2010 the Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, announced legislation which would allow the Secretary of State to approve schools to become academies through a simplified streamlined process. The Academies Act received Royal Assent on 27 July 2010.

The legislation opened up the academies programme allowing primary, secondary, and special schools to apply to become academies. The legislation was a key change in Academies Policy which previously mainly focused on underperforming secondary schools. The legislation meant that all schools could become Academies.

The report went on to describe the position nationally and locally. In Wirral the situation was:

- Birkenhead High School Academy (for Girls), previously a private independent school, became an Academy from 1 September 2009.
- The University Academy of Birkenhead, created following the closure of Park High School and Rock Ferry High School, opened as a new Academy from 1 January 2011.
- Prenton High School for Girls had indicated an intention to convert to Academy status.
- A number of Wirral secondary schools registered interest with the DfE in the new Academy status and some were continuing to actively explore this for a conversion at a future date.

The Interim Director also outlined in the report the grants paid to academies.

Responding to comments from Members, both the Interim Director and Mark Parkinson, Head of Learning & Achievement, informed the Committee that another 7 secondary schools had expressed an interest, some looking to convert to academy status on 1 April and some on 1 September, 2011. Formal approval had been given by the Secretary of State for Wirral Grammar for Girls to proceed. There was an expectation that Academies would comply with the admission code, although the Council would have no control over schools which did become academies. Schools converting did so on the basis of their current age range

There were also issues still to be resolved around those schools, subject of a PFI, which became academies and the Interim Director outlined the complexities involved in such cases.

The Interim Director also referred to the possibility of the establishment of vocational schools for 14-17 year olds and that the University of Chester was considering opening one, possibly in Wirral, which would specialise in the 'built environment'. He was also aware of an expression of interest for a 'free school' in Heswall, the opening of which would require approval by the Secretary of State following the submission of a business case.

With regard to the Music Service, referred to in the appendix to the report, Mark Parkinson informed the Committee that a national review paper was due to be published soon and Wirral was currently committed to providing a high quality music service.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

42 GOVERNOR SUPPORT SERVICES

At the request of the Committee, the Interim Director of Children's Services submitted a report on support provided to Wirral school governors by the Council.

Currently Wirral Council maintained 124 schools, all of which had to have a single Governing Body and they had a wide range of statutory duties under law. There were currently over 2000 governors supporting Wirral schools, making it one of the biggest volunteer forces on the Wirral. All governors in maintained schools were members of

the Wirral Governors' Forum which coordinated representation for Wirral Governors on a range of bodies locally, regionally and nationally, including the Wirral Schools' Forum and the Wirral Children's Trust Board. The Chair and Vice-Chair of Wirral Governors' Forum also liaised with senior colleagues in Wirral Council on the strategic development of support for Governors and also with the Governor Support Service.

To support these volunteers, Wirral Council ran its Governor Support Service which was mainly served by three full-time Council employees with a manager and two admin supports. It was overseen by a Strategic Service Manager, with many other staff and colleagues providing support directly and indirectly.

Members of the Committee, in particular, Jane Owens, Chair of the Governors' Forum and Richard Neale, Vice Chair of the Forum, expressed their support for the service, regarded as one of the best in the area.

Responding to comments from Members, the Interim Director assured the Committee of the continuation of the service which, following the early voluntary retirement of the manager of the service, Margaret Dunfey, at the end of March, would be restructured. Representatives of Wirral Governors' Forum would be consulted as to the future strategic direction of Governor Support Services. The potential for shared service possibilities was also being explored with the Council's partners in the Learn Together Partnership for governor support services.

Resolved –

(1) That the report be noted.

(2) That this Committee expresses its appreciation of the Governor Support Service and that the thanks of this Committee be accorded to Margaret Dunfey for all her work with the service.

43 ANNUAL CHILDREN'S SERVICES ASSESSMENT 2010

The Interim Director of Children's Services submitted a report on the annual children's services assessment regarding its ability to deliver the five outcomes for children and young people outlined in Every Child Matters. The assessment was carried out annually by Ofsted in accordance with section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. The report informed Members of the 2010 assessment findings and detailed the actions put in place to address areas identified by Ofsted for further development.

These key areas were:

- Improve early years and childcare settings so that more are good or better.
- Improve further the achievement of 16-year-olds from low-income families.
- Improve the local arrangements for adoption.

The Interim Director also referred to the fact that his department was currently undergoing an unannounced Ofsted inspection for which initial feed back was expected at the end of the coming week.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

44 APPROVED SCHEME OF DELEGATION - CONTRACTS EXCEEDING £50,000

The Interim Director of Children's services reported, in accordance with the Contracts Procedure Rules, on those instances where he had exercised his delegated authority to accept tenders and to appoint contractors. The contracts were in respect of a range of services, including:

- Capital contracts
- Out-of-authority placements
- Residential care placements

Resolved – That the report be noted.

45 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received an update on its work programme.

The Chair referred to the "Narrowing the gap" – Impact of deprivation funding' scrutiny review, and that dates would be arranged for the Review Panel to meet.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

46 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.

47 ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS ACCEPTED BY THE CHAIR

The Chair informed the Committee of two items of urgent business Members wished to raise, which needed consideration prior to the next meeting of the Committee.

1. Celebrating RE.

Richard Neale circulated a paper which drew Members' attention to a number of events being organised under the umbrella of the Religious Education Council of England and Wales by the Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education during March 2011, entitled Celebrating RE. He suggested that Members, in their role as governors, could encourage schools to participate in these events. He also paid tribute to Deidre Smith, Principal Manager for Humanities, in the Children and Young People's Department, for all her work on this.

2. Oaklands

Councillor Harney circulated two papers on the current challenges facing Oaklands which provided high quality outdoor education. He suggested the need for a scrutiny review to be undertaken to help understand the issues at Oaklands,

including the isolationism that might be felt by staff and how the centre was run and managed.

The Interim Director stated that the Centre did need to cover its costs.

The Chair suggested that the Committee could visit Oaklands and it was –

Resolved – That a sub-group be established with representatives from each of the three groups plus Richard Neale to carry out a scrutiny review and a report be brought to the March meeting of this Committee.