

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 16 November 2011

Present:

Councillor S Clarke (Chair)

Councillors W Clements C Povall
J Crabtree T Smith
D Dodd W Smith
P Hayes P Williams
B Mooney

Co-opted:

Mrs N Smith

Mrs J Owens

Apologies

Mr A Scott

29 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 the items, 'Ofsted Children's Services Assessment' and, '2011/12 Second Quarter Performance and Financial Review' by virtue of her employment (see minutes 33 and 36 post).

Councillor J Crabtree declared a personal interest in the item, 'Fostering Service Report on Inspection' by virtue of him being a foster carer (see minute 34 post).

Councillor S Clarke declared a personal interest in the item, 'Fostering Service Report on Inspection' by virtue of her membership of the Fostering Panel (see minute 34 post).

30 MINUTES

Members were requested to receive the minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 20 September, 2011.

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting of 20 September, 2011 be approved as a correct record.

31 ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT

The Acting 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 2010 to 31 March 2011.

Dawn Stanley-Smith, Complaints Investigations Officer, introduced the report and stated that over the twelve month reporting period 2010/11, the following complaints had been registered:

Stage 1 - 66 complaints (compared with 78 complaints in 2009/10)

Stage 2 - 5 complaints (compared with 5 complaints in 2009/10)

Stage 3 - 1 complaint (compared with 1 in 2009/10)

The report also gave statistics on compliments received and also on a review of effectiveness.

Responding to comments from Members Dawn Stanley-Smith outlined the process for complaints made by children and the work being carried out in collaboration with the Children in Care Council, including a re-designed welcome pack.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

32 EARLY INTERVENTION GRANT - LESSONS LEARNT

The Acting Director of Children's Services submitted a report on the lessons learnt following an evaluation of the process used to commission services funded by the Early Intervention Grant (EIG). The commissioning process was complex and a report to identify lessons learnt was requested as a means of identifying improvements in any future commissioning activities.

Maureen McDaid, Principal Manager (Commissioning / Participation) introduced the report. She apologised for the absence of Tony Gallagher, Her Majesty's Inspector, who was due to be present for this item but who had been unavoidably delayed.

She outlined the main aim of the EIG activities which was to effectively intervene to help children, young people and families to move down the continuum of need from high levels which required high cost interventions to a lower level of need and eventually moving to a stage using universal lower cost open access services.

The approach was in line with the corporate priority of providing early intervention and support for vulnerable children and families. Although too early to be specific about the impact of the commissioned services, providers were clear about the expectations of their services and also about the way in which they would be monitored to ensure a focus on outcomes. If the required outcomes were achieved, and the level of need was reduced, it was to be expected that future costs would also be reduced for the Council and its partners.

Responding to comments from Members, Maureen McDaid outlined the tendering process and the reasons why the contracts were for one year only, it was likely that

permission would be sought to extend the contracts as the commissioning time took 6 – 9 months. She gave details of the evaluating panel members and explained that there was a system for decommissioning if providers had underperformed.

The Acting Director commented that there was a system of quarterly monitoring but there was currently only information on one quarter's performance. He would be happy to bring a report back linked into an evaluation of all programmes and which mapped out the parenting programme into units.

Resolved – That the report be noted and the thanks of the Committee be accorded to the panel members and the team involved in the EIG programme.

33 **OFSTED CHILDREN'S SERVICES ASSESSMENT**

The Acting Director of Children's Services reported upon the Ofsted Children's Services Annual Assessment which was published on 8 November, 2011. Wirral Children's Services had been assessed as 'performs excellently' a maximum score of four on a four point scale. The report gave details of the 2011 assessment findings and the actions put in place to address the two areas identified by Ofsted for further improvement.

Responding to comments from Members, the Acting Director referred to the two areas for improvement. In respect of childminders and day care this was a large part of Sure Start's work and a quality improvement process had been developed for childminders. It was also reported that parents were provided with reports from Ofsted. With regard to 'Narrowing the gap at age 19', he acknowledged that this was a challenge. There was now a need for a much broader curriculum because of a broader range of children now staying on into the 6th form.

The Chair expressed the Committee's thanks for all the work in achieving this excellent result.

Resolved –

(1) That the report be noted and the Committee's congratulations be accorded to the department's staff.

(2) That the issue of childminding services in the private sector be added to the work programme.

34 **FOSTERING SERVICE REPORT ON INSPECTION**

The Acting Director of Children's Services reported upon the outcome of the announced inspection of the Wirral Fostering Service by Ofsted and an update on the work of the Fostering Service since the last report in January 2010 (minute 51 refers). This was the first report and inspection since the publication of new Fostering National Minimum Standards and since updated guidance and regulations had come into force on 1 April 2011.

The overall quality rating by Ofsted for the fostering service was 'good' for the quality of care with some 'outstanding' outcomes for children and young people who were fostered. Appended to the report was an action plan which had been developed by

the Fostering Service to address the areas for improvement which would be monitored through a Fostering Task Force which had membership of senior managers, staff from the Fostering Service, foster carers, training and development, and other professionals supporting children in care.

According to the new statutory guidance for family and friends care, the allowance paid to connected carers had to be calculated in the same way as mainstream foster carers, with any variation relating to the child's needs, the skills of the carer or some other relevant factor that was used as a criterion for all of the service's foster carers. Currently connected carers received the fostering allowance without any skills based fee unless they in addition fostered children that were not known to them. The additional cost for all connected carers to be paid an additional skills fee for each child in their care was estimated to be in the region £450,000. It was intended that the budget implications to address a required amendment in the foster carers' payments policy would be reported to Cabinet as part of the budget process.

Responding to comments from Members, Simon Garner, Strategic Service Manager and the Acting Director commented that the fostering network had led on the drive to professionalise foster care. There was a need to use professional organisations where it was in the best interests of the child especially those with specialist needs. With regard to the pupil premium, the Acting Director had written to all schools requesting details of what this money had been spent on.

With regard to the drive to professionalise foster care, the Chair commented upon the need not to lose sight of the loving and nurturing standards which were required of all foster carers.

Julia Hassall, Acting Deputy Director, commented upon the recent publication of the Adoption League Table and that Wirral, in the three years up to the end of March, 2010 had placed 69% of children up for adoption within 12 months. This placed Wirral 105th out of 152 local authorities nationally.

Resolved –

(1) That this Committee, having considered the information in the report, is satisfied that the service is being managed effectively and that there are good outcomes for the children and young people that are fostered.

(2) That the financial implications arising from the payments to connected carers are reported to Cabinet and this Committee expects these payments to be made.

35 CHILD POVERTY STRATEGY - ACTION PLAN / IMPLEMENTATION

The Chief Executive submitted a report which set out the work that had been undertaken to date, in accordance with the report to the Cabinet on 14 April 2011 (minute 386 refers), to develop a Wirral Child Poverty Strategy and action plan in partnership with local organisations and agencies, including the voluntary, community and faith sector. This included the contribution of the Wirral Child and Family Poverty Working Group, which had been established to make recommendations to the Council and its partners about a local Child Poverty Strategy and action plan.

The report also provided a progress report on the £10,000 policy option agreed by the Cabinet and Council in February 2010 to invest in targeted engagement with Wirral organisations and local communities and set out the proposed next steps in relation to the further development of the action plan.

The report also detailed the links between Wirral's local approach and the development of a strategy for the Liverpool City Region, which had been shaped by the City Region Commission on Poverty and Life Chances, chaired by Frank Field MP.

At its meeting of 13th October 2011, Cabinet:

“(a) Noted the progress that has been made to date in relation to the development of a child and family poverty strategy for Wirral, including the excellent contribution of the Wirral Child and Family Poverty Working Group, and approves the draft strategy and initial action plan at Appendix 1;

(b) Authorised the Chief Executive to undertake further consultation on the draft strategy and prepare a final version for approval and adoption by the Council and partners;

(c) Authorises the Chief Executive (and any other officer nominated by him) to undertake any other steps and action incidental and conducive to finalising the strategy and progressing the action plan, including working with relevant partners and stakeholders as considered necessary and appropriate;

(d) Agreed that the Wirral Child and Family Poverty Working Group should continue to meet to oversee the further development of the strategy.”

Cabinet further resolved to make tackling child poverty a key priority for 2012/13 and to make sure that all Council strategies and plans were properly amended to include this as a major priority for the Council, with subsequent referral to Council as appropriate.

Jane Morgan, Corporate Policy Manager in the Department of Regeneration, Housing and Planning, responded to comments from Members and informed the meeting that a more detailed 3 year action plan would be brought back to meetings of the Cabinet and this Committee in the new year, once more work had been undertaken.

The Acting Director, responding to comments from Members, stated that discussions were being held with the Finance Department regarding the realignment of the free school meals allocation process which was currently slow to respond to changes in circumstances along with being more generous than the current national framework.

With the permission of the Chair, the Leader of the Conservative Group addressed the meeting and welcomed the report. He expressed the hope that work would continue with voluntary, community and faith based organisations as there were many people whose expertise and time could be tapped into to help in tackling the issue of child poverty. There was also the need to break the inter-generational nature of child poverty.

Resolved –

(1) That this Committee notes the progress made to date on the draft child poverty strategy.

(2) Committee receives regular updates on progress on the implementation of the recommendations as agreed by Cabinet on 13 October 2011.

36 2011/12 SECOND QUARTER PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL REVIEW

The Acting Director of Children's Services reported upon the performance of the Council's Corporate Plan 2011-2014 for July to September 2011 in relation to children and young people. He provided an overview of performance, resource and risk monitoring and highlighted what was working well, future challenges and risks.

In respect of the projected overspend for 2011/12, he reported that the best estimate for the year end was £1.6m.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

37 SCRUTINY REVIEW OF LITERACY LEVELS AT KEY STAGE 2 - PROGRESS REPORT

The Acting Director of Children's Services submitted a progress report which provided an overview of the progress made since the publication of the original scrutiny report into literacy levels at Key Stage 2 (minute 54 (21/1/10) refers). The initial brief for the Scrutiny Review was to review literacy levels at Key Stage 2, however, this had subsequently been extended to include an investigation of issues from babyhood to Early Years to Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 and finally to Key Stage 2.

The scrutiny report contained a total of 24 recommendations and an appendix to the Acting Director's report outlined the actions that had been taken since the scrutiny report was written, the impact so far and proposals for further action. Moving forward, Wirral Children's Trust partnership and the Council's Children and Young People's Department (CYPD) would address the ongoing recommendations through actions in the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) and would ensure that they were embedded in the refresh of the CYPP for 2011-12. They would also be addressed through the delivery of the Council's Strategic Objectives through the Corporate and CYPD Department Plan.

Mark Parkinson, Acting Deputy Director, responding to comments from Members, stated that the gap in literacy levels was narrowing and that he would be happy to bring a report back to a future meeting.

Resolved – That the report be noted and Committee receive a report in 12 months time on the action still to be taken.

38 SECONDARY SCHOOL PLACES - DEMOGRAPHIC UPDATE

Further to minute 7 (1/6/11) the Acting Director of Children's Services submitted a report which provided updated information on current and projected changes in the

roll of Wirral's secondary schools. The report also gave details of the potential implications of the falling roll, with particular reference to budgetary and staffing implications in the current year.

An appendix to the report gave an outline of the current situation with regard to academy conversion, 13 of the 22 secondary schools had or were in the process of becoming academies.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

39 SCHOOL ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REVIEW - POST 16 STANDARDS

Further to minute 23 (20/9/11) Vivian Stafford, Strategic Service Manager (Post -16), gave a presentation on the headline figures for post-16 results (Key stage 5).

Resolved – That the presentation be noted.

40 WORK PROGRAMME

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

The Chair suggested the addition of childminding services and the private sector to be added to the work programme (see minute 33 ante). She also suggested the need for a training session to which all Councillors could be invited, on the issue of serious case reviews and the relationship with the Safeguarding Board.

Resolved – That the Work Programme be agreed with the above additions.

41 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.

42 ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS ACCEPTED BY THE CHAIR - CO-OPTED MEMBER REQUEST

Further to minute 25 (20/9/11), the Chair referred to the current position regarding the request from Ms Louise Reece Jones for a co-opted position on the Committee. As she was not currently a parent governor she could not apply to become a parent governor co-optee.

The Chair suggested that she be thanked for her interest and as the Council was currently looking at its own corporate governance arrangements, now would not be the time to extend the numbers of co-opted members on the Committee.

Resolved – That the suggestion of the Chair be agreed.

43 **THANKS**

The Acting Director commented that this would be the last meeting of the Committee prior to the retirement of the former Director of Children's Services, Howard Cooper, now Interim Director of Adult Social Services, and he thanked the committee for all their support both to Howard and himself.

The Chair expressed her and the Committee's thanks to Howard for all his work in the Department and with the Committee.