

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 26 January 2012

Present: Councillor S Clarke (Chair)

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

Deputy: Councillor C Jones (in place of T Smith)

Co-opted: Mrs N Smith Mrs J Owens

Apologies Mr A Scott

44 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 Povall declared a personal interest in the item, 'Transition of Pupils from the Sanderling Unit to the Resource Base, University Academy, Birkenhead' by virtue of her daughter's employment (see minute 48 post).

45 MINUTES

Members were requested to receive the minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 16 November, 2011.

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting of 16 November, 2011 be approved as a correct record.

46 YOUTH PARLIAMENT PLANNING ARRANGEMENTS FOR 2012

The Acting Director of Children's Services submitted a report which outlined proposed arrangements, together with a timeline, for planning the next Youth Voice Conference and Youth Parliament. Both events were held on the Tuesday of Local Democracy Week, last year this was the 11th October. This year the date had not been confirmed but the 9th and 16th October were possible dates. The aim of both

events was to provide young people with an opportunity to influence council decisions by presenting the views of young people.

Responding to comments from Members, Maureen McDaid, Principal Manager (Commissioning / Participation) informed the Committee that youngsters taking part this year would be better prepared. There would be a paper outlining roles and responsibilities for all parties involved and a progress report would be brought to the Committee meeting in June.

Resolved – That a progress report be brought to the June meeting of this Committee.

47 **EARLY INTERVENTION GRANT SECOND QUARTER MONITORING REPORT**

The Chair introduced Tony Gallagher, Her Majesty's Inspector, and national adviser for Ofsted on youth support, who addressed the Committee on the Early Intervention Grant and commissioning of services. He suggested that getting the technical aspects of the commissioning process right was less important than getting the relationships right with service providers. There was a need to have a proper and real plan to involve and develop relationships with the community, voluntary and faith sector. Although it might be easy to associate commissioning with saving money but done well there was a need to think about achieving high standards.

Responding to comments from Members Tony Gallagher stated that he didn't see any difficulty in officers of the Council chairing commissioning groups as long as it was done well and in an inclusive manner. In respect of monitoring this had to be intelligent and informed and not about catching people out.

Maureen McDaid, Principal Manager (Commissioning / Participation), then introduced the Acting Director of Children's Services' report on the second quarter's performance of Early Intervention Grant commissioned services. After contracts were awarded, performance measures to underpin service delivery were agreed with each of the service providers. The Priority areas for which services were commissioned were:

- PA1 – Parenting/Compromised Parenting
- PA1 – Short Breaks for Disabled Children
- PA3 – Risk taking Behaviour in Children and Young People

Delivery against the performance measures had been RAG rated, Red, Amber or Green. A Red rating denoted underperformance; Amber reflected work in progress broadly in line with expectations and Green was meeting or exceeding expectations. Red and Amber ratings were followed up by commissioners in one to one discussions at which corrective actions were identified to improve performance.

Maureen McDaid and the Acting Director, responding to comments from Members, informed the Committee that commissioned providers could sub-contract services but they did inform the department of their intention to do this. The work was targeted with measured outcomes and these outcomes would be reported back to the Committee to see which services the Department would go forward with. Costs for each service area could be brought back to the Committee and the Chair suggested that this could be heard as an exempt item when the figures were evaluated.

In those cases where a contract had failed to deliver, the contract would be reduced accordingly and other options would be explored for delivery.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

48 **TRANSITION OF PUPILS FROM THE SANDERLING UNIT TO THE RESOURCE BASE, UNIVERSITY ACADEMY, BIRKENHEAD**

The Acting Director of Children's Services submitted a report on the progress of pupils who previously attended the Sanderling Unit at Rock Ferry High School and, upon the closure of Rock Ferry High, had transferred to a newly commissioned resource base at the University Academy of Birkenhead.

Not all the students who were attending the Sanderling Unit had transferred to the Academy and the reasons for this were detailed in the report. However, the majority of students who transferred to the new provision had done so successfully with only two requiring additional support from the Educational Psychology Service. The students had responded well to the new challenges they had faced and the new opportunities they were afforded and they and their families were to be applauded on how well they had responded to what was potentially a very difficult change process.

Lindsay Weeks from the University Academy of Birkenhead gave a presentation to the Committee on the resource base and along with Graham Mount, Strategic Development Manager, in the Children's and Young People's Department, responded to questions from the Committee. There were currently 35 pupils at the Resource Base, and a mechanism was in place to recoup funding or make adjustments for under provision of the 40 places which had been purchased. Funding of place would be reviewed annually. A number of methods were being tried for engaging with parents.

Resolved – That the report be noted and this Committee extends its congratulations to the children and young people and families involved in the change and the teachers and other staff in the academy who have supported them through the process.

49 **CORPORATE PLAN**

In accordance with Council minutes 77 and 78 (12 December, 2011), the Committee considered those parts of the Corporate Plan within its remit. The Committee had also had sight of a motion which had been referred to all Overview and Scrutiny Committees by the Council at its meeting on 12 December, 2011 (minute 76 refers) and which was considered in connection with the Corporate Plan.

The Draft Corporate Plan and report of the Chief Executive which had been considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 8 December were considered by the Committee and the Chair invited comments from the Committee.

Responding to comments from Members the Acting Director stated that a full draft of the Children and Young People's Departmental Plan and the Children and Young People's Plan for the Children's Trust Board was also being developed and the Corporate Plan was to a template which had been issued across the Council from the

Corporate Policy team. Referring to the section, 'Provide early intervention and support for vulnerable children and families', he said he had requested that the sentence, 'Ensuring every child is school ready', should read, 'Working towards ensuring....'

The Chair suggested that there needed to be a section after 'goals' showing measurable targets. One of the strengths of the Corporate Plan was that Child Poverty had its own section to highlight the importance of addressing this issue.

Members made the following comments on the Corporate Plan:

- There needed to be references to foster care and adoption.
- There was no reference to deprivation.
- There was a need to know how things would be measured.
- No reference to further education or higher education.
- There was a vague reference to Sure Start but no mention of enhancement as there had been in the previous year.

It was then moved by Councillor Hayes, seconded by Councillor Povall that –

"This Committee believes that the draft Corporate Plan contains many well meaning sentiments but few tangible targets by which the people of Wirral can scrutinise the progress of their council."

It was then moved as an amendment by Councillor Dodd, seconded by Councillor W Smith that –

"Cabinet be asked to provide and identify some measurable targets within the Corporate Plan."

Councillor Hayes agreed to accept this as a friendly amendment and it was –

Resolved (unanimously) – This Committee believes that the draft Corporate Plan contains many well meaning sentiments but few tangible targets by which the people of Wirral can scrutinise the progress of their council. Cabinet be asked to provide and identify some measurable targets within the Corporate Plan.

50 REFERRAL FROM COUNCIL - EARLY INTERVENTION GRANT

The Committee considered a referral from Council, which on 12 December, 2011, had considered the following objection to the Cabinet minute 216 (8 December, 2011) – Budget Projections 2012-15,

'(1) That the decision to cut £1m from the Early Intervention Grant be referred to the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee.'

The Acting Director of Children's Services informed the Committee that he, along with his other Chief Officer colleagues, was reminded on a daily basis that he had a statutory duty to balance the budget. Good progress was being made on this year's budget to bring the projected overspend down. He assured the Committee that the services provided under the Early Intervention Grant budget of £17.9m could be

provided for £16.9m and going forward into 2012/13 the same services could be provided for this amount.

The Chair suggested that the £1m could be used to increase the staffing in the Children's Centres and that to cut it was depriving the Centres of the opportunity to grow. By restoring the £1m and investing it in services for young people would help in tackling child poverty.

Other Members referred to the position of the Council, which along with every other Council in the country had seen its grant cut by central government. There was a need to be responsible to the residents of Wirral and realistic in the budget setting process.

Responding to the Committee, the Acting Director stated that vacancies were filled across Children's Centres as they arose and there were no restrictions on the filling of these vacancies nor were there for Children's Social Workers and family workers. There were no proposals to alter service delivery as the same service could be provided with these resources.

It was moved by Councillor Hayes and seconded by Councillor Mrs P M Williams, that –

“This Committee endorses the widely held view that early intervention works and praises the work of our Sure Start Children's Centres and the many other projects which are funded by the Early Intervention Grant and do so much for Wirral's families and young people.

Therefore this committee records its concern at the proposal to remove £1 million from the Early Intervention Grant. We are unconvinced that the removal of £1 million from this grant will not have a detrimental impact on those families who are reliant on the services which this grant funds and on the life chances of the children who benefit from these services. We ask Cabinet to think again.”

It was moved as an amendment by Councillor Dodd and seconded by Councillor W Smith, that –

“This Committee endorses the widely held view that early intervention works and praises the work of our Sure Start Children's Centres and the many other projects which are funded by the Early Intervention Grant and do so much for Wirral's families and young people.

Therefore Committee notes and appreciates the Acting Director of Children's Services assurances and assures him that he will be held to account over the coming year.”

The amendment was put and not carried (5:5).

The motion was put and carried (6:5) (on the Chair's casting vote).

Resolved (6:5) (on the Chair's casting vote) –

This Committee endorses the widely held view that early intervention works and praises the work of our Sure Start Children's Centres and the many other projects which are funded by the Early Intervention Grant and do so much for Wirral's families and young people.

Therefore, this Committee records its concern at the proposal to remove £1 million from the Early Intervention Grant. We are unconvinced that the removal of £1 million from this grant will not have a detrimental impact on those families who are reliant on the services which this grant funds and on the life chances of the children who benefit from these services. We ask Cabinet to think again.

It was further moved by Councillor Hayes and seconded by Councillor Povall and –

Resolved – That this Committee continues to scrutinise the Acting Director of Children's Services over the coming year.

51 WIRRAL LIFELONG AND FAMILY LEARNING SERVICE

The Acting Director of Children's Services submitted a report which provided an update on the work of Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service.

The service provided adult and family learning activity for learners age 19+, in line with the requirements of the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), who provided the grant which fully funded this work. The Lifelong and Family Learning Service supported the Council's Corporate priorities by providing opportunities for adults to learn and develop their skills. The report highlighted the success of the service and potential government changes to the funding and planning of adult community learning.

Responding to comments from Members, the Acting Director informed the Committee that the department was working with Irish Community Care in respect of the travelling community to try and engage with them. Some case studies could be made available to Members.

Resolved - That Committee notes the work of the Lifelong and Family Learning Service and the Strategic Development Plan and ask for an update of any future changes following Department for Business, Innovation and Skills' announcements.

52 OAKLANDS

The Acting Director of Children's Services submitted a report which provided an update on the work of The Oaklands Centre. The Centre provided outdoor education for children, young people and adults. The Oaklands Centre supported the Council's Corporate priorities by providing opportunities for children, young people and adults to learn and develop their skills. The report highlighted the success of the centre and future planned developments for the service.

Resolved – That Committee notes the work of the Oaklands Centre and planned future developments and accords its thanks to the staff at the centre.

53 **THE '100 CLUB' PROJECT**

The Acting Director of Children's Services submitted a report which provided information on the running and outcomes of Wirral's '100 Club' project, the aim of which was to narrow the attainment gap at key stage 4 between pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) and pupils not eligible for free school meals (non-FSM). A further aim was to determine the most effective strategies for this purpose.

The project, if successful, would support Wirral's corporate priorities in that it would support schools to improve educational provision for pupils eligible for free school meals, thereby ensuring that more were in a position to take fuller advantage of post-16 opportunities.

In response to comments from Members the Acting Director commented that decisions on funding were made on a pupil by pupil basis rather than a school basis and pupils in academies would be part funded as part of the project.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

54 **SICKNESS ABSENCE TRENDS IN CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S DEPARTMENT**

The Acting Director of Children's Services submitted a report which provided an analysis of the levels of staff absence in the Children and Young People's Department (CYPD) over a 12 month period and identified trends in levels and type of sickness absence in comparison to the Council average.

The Chair commented that she would have liked to have seen some more in depth analysis of the figures as particular concern had been expressed at the Foster Panel with regard to sickness levels in social care. The Acting Director acknowledged that there were pockets of exceptional sickness absence and the nature of the job in Children's Social care could be very stressful.

Resolved – That the Committee receives a report to a future meeting specifically on sickness absence in the Children's Social Care section.

55 **APPROVED SCHEME OF DELEGATION - CONTRACTS EXCEEDING £50,000**

The Acting 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
- Children's Residential Care Placements

Resolved – That the report be noted.

56 **WORK PROGRAMME**

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

The Chair referred to Notice of Motion, 'Adoption – Being the Best Corporate Parents' which had been approved by Council at its meeting on 12 December, 2012 (minute 79 refers) and which had requested the Acting Director to bring a report to the Committee on a number of related issues.

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

57 **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.

58 **0-19 STANDARDS SUB-COMMITTEE MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the 0-19 Standards Sub-Committee, held on 7 December, 2011, were submitted. The Sub-Committee had considered a number of issues, in particular the Ofsted reports relating to the following establishments:

Early Years and Children's Centres

Satisfactory

Cloughton Children's Centre
New Brighton Children's Centre

Good

Ganneys Meadow Children's Centre

Primary Schools

Satisfactory

Fender Primary School

Good

Mount Primary School
West Kirby Primary School
St Peter's Catholic Primary School
Riverside Primary School
Manor Primary School

Outstanding

Liscard Primary School
St George's Primary School

Gayton Primary School

Secondary Schools

Satisfactory

Hilbre High School
Wallasey School

Special School

Good

Wirral Hospitals School and Home Education Service Community Base

Resolved – That the minutes be noted.