

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 21 March 2012

Present: Councillor AR McLachlan (Chair)

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

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

Co-opted: Mrs J Owens

Apologies: Mrs N Smith

59 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 Clements declared a personal interest in the item, 'Childminder Provision on Wirral', by virtue of her employment (see minute 68 post).

60 MINUTES

Members were requested to receive the minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 26 January, 2012.

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting of 26 January, 2012 be approved as a correct record.

61 ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Chair agreed to vary the order of business and take items 11 (Work Programme) and 8 (Wirral Support for the Liverpool City Region (LCR) Apprenticeship Strategy) as the first two items of business.

62 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee received an update on its work programme.

The Acting Director informed the Committee that all of the items in report 1 of the work programme had been completed. Training had been organised for Members for 29 March on serious case reviews and safeguarding, and it was agreed that whatever issues might arise out of this session could be added to the future work programme for the forthcoming municipal year.

A Member also suggested that with the Government's recommendations on Special Educational Needs due out shortly, an update could be provided to the Committee at a future meeting.

Resolved – That the suggestions for the work programme be agreed.

63 **WIRRAL SUPPORT FOR THE LIVERPOOL CITY REGION (LCR) APPRENTICESHIP STRATEGY**

The Acting Director of Children's Services submitted a report which provided an update on Wirral Council support for the key priorities identified in the Liverpool City Region Apprenticeship Strategy, specifically in relation to the 16-18 year old cohort.

The report detailed work currently being undertaken by the Council Apprenticeship Strategy Working Group (SWG) to support the Liverpool City Region Apprenticeship Strategy. Specific reference was made to approaches taken by the Council, through the Wirral Apprenticeship Programme and the Council's internal Apprenticeship programme.

Cabinet had adopted the Liverpool City Region (LCR) Apprenticeship Strategy on 23 June 2011 and authorised officers to work with LCR colleagues, on behalf of Wirral Council, in the development of a local Apprenticeship Strategy Action Plan.

The LCR Apprenticeship Strategy detailed four key strategic priorities which included:

- (i) To stimulate increased employer adoption of Apprenticeships.
- (ii) To ensure that Apprenticeships meet the needs of the Liverpool City Region economy, including in the Transformational Sectors.
- (iii) To promote Apprenticeships as a quality route to young people and to support the participation of young people in Apprenticeships.
- (iv) To ensure that Apprenticeships delivered in the Liverpool City Region are of the highest possible quality.

The report also gave details of how Council Officers were supporting the corporate priority to improve access to employment and skills and tackle barriers to work.

Vivian Stafford, Strategic Service Manager in the Children and Young People's Department responded to comments from Members and informed the Committee that the three cohorts so far on the Wirral Apprenticeship Programme (WAP) had been a cross section from across Wirral. Most opportunities had gone to those young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) and she would bring a fuller report back on the WAP including a breakdown by ward. She also outlined the

relationship with colleges in respect of applied and vocational learning and technical certificates.

The Chair thanked everyone involved and welcomed the news that to date 313 young people and unemployed adults had been supported to start an apprenticeship and gain employment.

Resolved – That this Committee notes that the Council Apprenticeship Strategy Working Group (SWG) draws officer expertise from Children & Young People, Economic Development, Business Support, Human Resources and Procurement. The SWG continues to take forward a holistic view of Apprenticeship engagement and participation in the borough. The SWG also continues to develop a local action plan to support the LCR Apprenticeship Strategy.

64 **ORGANISATIONAL HEALTH CHECK PRESENTATION**

Tracey Coffey, Strategic Service Manager, Children and Families, Children and Young People's Department, gave a presentation on the organisational health check.

In her presentation she outlined the background, the process and who was involved. She went on to give details of the findings of the health check, including in terms of effective workload management, proactive workflow management and having the right tools to do the job. The departmental response to the findings was also outlined in the presentation.

Responding to comments from Members, both Tracey Coffey and the Acting Director stated that they would bring a full report to the Committee on departmental absence management, including the stress management policy. ICT issues were also being looked into and discussions with the Department of Adult Social Services were being held over a possible replacement of the ICS system. The Acting Director assured the Committee of the security of data with Social Worker staff working on laptops and mobile devices. They were also assured of the priority attached to ensuring children's safety and of the proactive stance taken when additional capacity was required within a district team due to sickness or increased caseloads.

Resolved – That the presentation and comments be noted.

65 **CHILD POVERTY STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN - PROGRESS REPORT**

The Chief Executive submitted a progress report on the work that had been undertaken to develop a Wirral child poverty strategy and action plan in partnership with local organisations and agencies, including the voluntary, community and faith sector. As previously reported, the local authority had established a local advisory group to review the evidence and make recommendations to the Council and its partners about local action to tackle child poverty. Representation on this group (the Wirral Child and Family Poverty Working Group) was drawn from the voluntary, community and faith, housing, health, and education, employment and skills sectors. It was chaired by a representative from the voluntary, community and faith sector and had Elected Member representatives from all parties.

Jane Morgan introduced the report and informed the Committee that the final version of the strategy and action plan was being overseen by the Wirral Child and Family Poverty Working Group and would subsequently be referred to Cabinet for further consideration. The Working Group had agreed to continue meeting to oversee the implementation of the strategy and action plan once this was finalised; and a revised terms of reference was being produced to reflect this ongoing role with additional membership as appropriate. She also reported that the Council, in its Budget for 2012/13, agreed on 1 March, had made provision for a policy option of £400,000 for the Group to allocate to local communities in accordance with the priorities for action identified in the strategy and action plan.

Resolved – That this Committee notes the progress made to date and looks forward to further reports to future meetings.

66 **SAFEGUARDING AND LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN INSPECTION UPDATE REPORT**

The Acting Director of Children's Services submitted a report which outlined progress made, up to 29 February 2012, in relation to implementing the areas for development identified in the Safeguarding and Looked After Children inspection which was undertaken by OFSTED between 24 January and 4 February 2011.

OFSTED had inspected two areas of service delivery in the January/ February 2011 Inspection; Safeguarding Services and Services for Looked after Children. The inspection report provided grades and areas for development for both service areas, there were no priority actions identified. There were seven 'Areas for Development'. An action plan was established in order to track progress against these areas for development and also additional actions extracted from the body of the OFSTED report, which supported the continuous improvement journey in order to make the transition to outstanding, in all areas.

The Acting Director reported that there had been a second unannounced inspection on 1 and 2 February, 2012 and a report published in 1 March would be brought to this Committee in June.

Resolved – That the report be noted and a report on progress made on the February inspection and the Action Plan be brought to the Committee in June.

67 **COUNCIL MOTION ON ADOPTION - BEING THE BEST CORPORATE PARENTS**

The Acting Director of Children's Services submitted a report produced in response to a motion to Council on 12 December 2011 on adoption. The recent release in 2011 of the Children in Care Performance tables from the DfE showed that, as an average for the 3 year period 2008-2010, Wirral Council was ranked 105th out of 143 authorities in terms of the percentage of children (69%) who were adopted, who were placed within 12 months of the decision being taken that adoption was in their best interests. These tables were subsequently updated in December 2011 when Wirral was ranked 74th with 76%.

The report gave details of how each of the issues raised in the motion were being addressed by the department.

Responding to comments from Members, Simon Garner, Strategic Service Manager Children's Resources, reported that the Government were to introduce a new two stage process, although he had not seen any detail of this yet. A new Looked After Children's Service Manager would be taking up post in April.

Councillor Mrs P Williams, gave Councillor M Johnston's apologies, as mover of the motion at Council, and passed on his comments that he believed there was no shortage of prospective adopters but that there needed to be more emphasis on preparing children for adoption.

Simon Garner, in response, stated that preparatory work was second to none on Wirral but acknowledged that more work was needed in speeding up the process of adoption.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

68 **CHILDMINDER PROVISION ON WIRRAL**

Further to minute 33 (16/11/11), the Acting Director of Children's Services submitted a report on childminding services across Wirral. The report included information on the wider aspects of childcare with a variety of providers in the private and voluntary sectors and described the support available to providers in enabling the highest quality of service to families.

The provision described was either:

- Registered and regulated by OFSTED as the statutory body, either independently or as part of a school registration;
- Defined as a childcare provider but not required to be registered as the scheme operated for less than 2 hours.

Responding to comments from Members, Janet Devine, Quality Assurance Manager, commented that one childminder could have up to eight school age children. If any concerns regarding a childminder were flagged up with OFSTED then they did respond very quickly. Although the local authority were not responsible for regulating childminders, the Council did run pre-registration training and each childminder had a development worker attached, there were also network meetings which took place regularly.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

69 **2011/12 THIRD 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 October to December 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 £1m. This was an improved position from previous quarters, partly due to the agreement of the Schools Forum to fund maintenance expenditure and the use of other one-off funding from balances and uncommitted funds. There

were still significant underlying pressures within the Children and Young People's revenue budget. Those that were within Children's Social Care for looked after children, Fostering and Adoption and within the Integrated Transport Unit were likely to be ongoing requirements, at least in the short term. Work was ongoing with the aim of improving this position where possible. In the longer term the Strategic Change Programme for Looked after Children would help to stabilise the Social Care budget.

Responding to comments from Members, Nancy Clarkson, Head of Planning and Performance, and the Acting Director stated that they would clarify with health colleagues in respect of National Indicator 70a, and the target to reduce emergency hospital admissions caused by unintentional and deliberate injuries in 0 – 4 year olds, as it would be for medical specialists to define whether or not something was unintentional or deliberate.

In respect of NI 65, the number of children who were subject to a Child Protection Plan, which had shown an increase, the Acting Director stated that he would bring a further more detailed report including strategies, early intervention and action plans as to how this was being addressed.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

70 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
- Out of Authority placements
- Children's Residential Care Placements

Resolved – That the report be noted.

71 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.

72 0-19 STANDARDS SUB-COMMITTEE

Following the recent changes in the Chair and membership of the Committee, the Committee was requested to confirm the membership of the 0-19 Standards Sub-Committee as follows:

Councillors Ann McLachlan (Chair), Paul Hayes and Pat Williams together with the diocesan and parent governor representatives and the remaining Committee members serving as deputies.

Resolved – That the membership of the 0-19 Standards Sub-Committee be noted.

73 **ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS ACCEPTED BY THE CHAIR**

The Chair thanked all the officers in the Children and Young People's Department for all their work over the past year with this Committee.

She also thanked all the elected Members on the Committee and those officers supporting the Committee in its work.