

CHILDREN SUB-COMMITTEE

Thursday, 22 September 2016

Present:

Councillors	A Brighouse W Clements M McLaughlin	C Meaden C Povall W Smith
Councillor	W Ward (in place of Councillor A Davies)	
Co-optee	Mr M Harrison	
<u>Apologies:</u>	Co-optees	Mr D Cunningham Mrs G Peters

1 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to consider whether they had any disclosable pecuniary interests and/or any other relevant interest in connection with any items on the agenda and if so, to declare them and state the nature of the interest.

Councillor Chris Meaden declared a personal interest in the items on the agenda by virtue of her daughter's employment within the Children and Young People's Department.

2 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

On a motion by Councillor Walter Smith and seconded by Councillor Chris Meaden it was –

Resolved – That Councillor Moira McLaughlin be appointed Chair of the Children Sub-Committee for the ensuing municipal year.

3 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

On a motion by Councillor Moira McLaughlin and seconded by Councillor Walter Smith it was –

Resolved – That Councillor Wendy Clements be appointed Vice-Chair of the Children Sub-Committee for the ensuing municipal year.

4 **MINUTES**

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 30 March 2016, approved at the Council meeting held on 7 July 2016, be noted.

5 **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Children Sub-Committee's Terms of Reference, were submitted for Members' information.

Resolved – That the Terms of Reference for the Children Sub-Committee be amended to include the pledges outlined within The Wirral Plan, namely:

- Children are ready for school;
- Young people are ready for work and adulthood;
- Vulnerable children reach their full potential.

6 **WIRRAL CHILDREN'S SERVICES OFSTED REPORT**

The Director of Children's Services gave a presentation upon Wirral Children's Services Ofsted Report.

Members of the Sub-Committee were advised that Ofsted had conducted an inspection into:

- Services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers, and;
- The effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board

Further to the two inspections that had commenced on 4 July 2016, both areas had been found to be 'inadequate' overall with children looked after and adoption 'requiring improvement'. Nineteen recommendations had been made for the Council and a further seven for the Local Safeguarding Children's Board.

The Director of Children's Services advised Members that the judgement and findings from Ofsted were accepted and a robust improvement plan would be put in place.

Ofsted had found that there were 'widespread and serious failures in the services provided to children who need help and protection in Wirral' and that there had been inconsistent and poor application of thresholds by the authority and partners at almost every stage of the child's journey. , Members were informed that despite this finding, no child had been found to be at imminent risk of significant harm, but there were children who had not been receiving the right level of services in response to their need, therefore, they

were experiencing risk and vulnerability. The Director informed Members that it was a priority to ensure children receive the right services at the right time.

Ofsted also reported that the Authority did not know where too many of its care leavers were, however, it was reported by the Director that this area had since been focussed on and that it had now been identified where the care leavers were, also, a meeting had taken place to correct the data that had been recorded.

The Director of Children's Services referred to the fact that Ofsted had found almost all of the deficits identified had been known by senior leaders and that failure to identify a consistent, experienced and permanent Head of Children's Social Care had had an impact both operationally and strategically. Also, despite training, good social work was not consistently evident and practice standards were not clearly communicated to front line workers. It was found that case recording was sometimes poor and assessments and plans were not sufficiently focussed on what would make a difference to children and families. Also, there were too many changes of social workers for children. It was reported that performance data had been inaccurate in some cases and the Internal Audit Team had been requested to examine the quality of the data.

Members were advised that the Children in Care Council was reported to be a real strength to the Authority and that its work was helping to ensure the voice of the child was heard in developing services. It was also reported that the majority of children benefitted from stable placements and that almost all children lived in Wirral or nearby, with the vast majority of children attending good or better schools resulting in the poor service children had experienced before becoming looked after being mitigated by the care they received. Adoption performance was also improving and high numbers of children leaving care were through special guardianships.

The Director of Children's Services summarised the Ofsted report within three themes:

- The need to recruit a permanent, experienced and enduring Head of Children's Social Care.
- The need to ensure a permanent frontline social work workforce, to reduce levels of vacancies and assist children to develop longer term relationships with their social worker.
- The need to ensure good practice was consistently in place, including improved management controls to allow the Department to effectively monitor practice and measure the impact it was having.

Ofsted had made twenty six recommendations which had to be delivered at pace for the Council to improve and be graded 'good'. Immediate steps were being taken to recruit a permanent Head of Children's Services, more social

workers would be brought in and a recruitment campaign would be launched to recruit new and experienced social workers to attempt to fill all vacancies.

Members were informed that an Improvement Board had been set up to oversee the implementation of the Improvement Plan and that the Department for Education would be appointing an independent advisor. There would also be changes in how the core children's services were managed and the Director of Children's Services would be directly managed by the Chief Executive. It was reported that the Chief Executive would take a direct role in supporting the improvement process.

The Director of Children's Services advised that discussions had taken place with staff in respect of recognising the serious issues that needed to be improved. Front line social workers would be able to play a major role in the improvement process through their daily work and a Practitioner's Group would be set up. Monthly meetings would be held with staff and investment, support and resources would be provided.

The Director accepted that there were many issues which needed to be addressed and expressed her deep commitment to lead the improvements and make the changes required. She acknowledged that getting things right would not be a quick fix, it would, however, be a long detailed process with many challenges ahead. She advised Members that the Improvement Plan must be submitted within 70 days of the report's publication.

The Chair thanked the Director of Children's Services for her presentation. She expressed her disappointment in respect of the Ofsted report, however, she welcomed the Director's acceptance at the outcome of the report and the commitment made for improvement.

Members conveyed their disappointment and noted that some of the issues would be addressed by employing more social workers as it had been recognised that this would be a necessity for continuity for children. They agreed that a succession of interim staff was not good practice and that staffing was a problem. Members agreed that the views of frontline staff needed to be taken into consideration and incorporated into the improvements that were being made.

The Director confirmed that staff had made suggestions at a meeting that had already taken place and advised that some members of staff had also been able to draw upon their experience from other Authorities to inform of improvements needed. She further advised that Social Workers would receive further training to ensure that practice with children and families was consistently good.

Members were confident that a clear plan would be implemented and commended the positivity to move forward. They expressed their concern at the numbers of agency staff who were employed by the Department and the problems caused when they left. Members were all in agreement on the importance of outcomes for children and requested that they be kept informed of any problems.

The Director of Children's Services advised that monthly meetings with staff would be taking place to improve communication and to ensure that changes would be implemented in a safe way, also work would be undertaken with partners and the Safeguarding Scrutiny Review would be built upon.

A member of the public addressed the Sub-Committee on a matter specific to her and her family.

The Chair thanked the member of public for her attendance.

The Chair suggested that a workshop be implemented to consider the Improvement Plan prior to its' submission in December 2016.

Resolved –

- (1) That the Director of Children's Services be thanked for her presentation.**
- (2) That, following the Improvement Board's meeting in October, a workshop be convened with Members of the Children Sub-Committee and Scrutiny Support Officers.**

7 SCHOOL STANDARDS REPORT - ATTAINMENT FOR 2016 AT KEY STAGES 1 AND 2

The School Commissioning Manager gave a presentation in respect of attainment at Key Stages 1 and 2.

It was reported that there had been a slight increase in early years, however the gender gap had widened by 3%. There had been new tests in Key Stage 1 and new progress measures in Key Stage 4. There had also been a slight increase in A*-A at Key Stage 5.

There had been good levels of development in Early Years 2016, however, compared to 2015, this had decreased for boys and increased for girls and the number of free school meals had slightly increased.

Overall, Key Stage 1 levels were at the expected standard. Reading, writing and maths levels were below the national standard, however, when these were considered separately 72% met the expected levels for reading, 62% for

writing and 70% for maths. The goal was for children to be at the expected level in all three subjects. Members were advised that a new curriculum had created some anomalies.

At Key Stage 2, 53% of children nationally had met the expected standard in reading, writing and maths with 5% of pupils attaining the higher standard. In Wirral, 49% of children had attained the expected standard in reading, writing and maths.

Members were advised that reading tests had been very hard this year for children with limited vocabulary and that Our Lady and St Edward's Primary School had achieved the highest percentage, however, four primary schools were below the floor target.

In respect of Key Stage 4, there had been almost a 4% increase in Wirral in respect of pupils who had achieved 5 or more A*-C and English and Maths had increased from 63% to 67%. Key Stage 4 grades were well above the national standard and second within the North West. Wirral schools had achieved 0.3 in Progress 8 which was very good with only one secondary school being below the floor target.

At Key Stage 5, A level grades A*-A had increased year upon year, A*-B had fluctuated and A*-E had decreased.

In response to questions from Members, the School Commissioning Manager advised that work was ongoing with schools and two inspections of primary schools had already taken place. Members were also advised that validated data for primary schools would be available by the end of October 2016 and final data for post 16 would be available in March 2017.

Members discussed support for apprenticeships and whether this could be incorporated into the work programme.

Resolved – That the Strategic Service Manager for Early Years and Primary Education be thanked for her presentation.

8 **WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

A report by the Scrutiny Support Officer updated Members on progress being made towards developing a work programme for the Children Sub Committee.

The Chair requested that a workshop be arranged to consider the Improvement Plan to be submitted to the Improvement Board at its meeting in October 2016.

Resolved –

- (1) That the items on the work programme be agreed.**
- (2) That it be incorporated into the work programme that a workshop be convened with Members of the Children Sub-Committee and scrutiny officers.**