



Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday, 26 September 2016

Present:

Councillor Tony Smith	Kathryn Podmore,
Councillor Wendy Clements	Principal, Birkenhead Sixth Form College
Councillor Chris Meaden	Jane Owens
Natalie Johnson	Viv Harrison
	Sallie Taylor

1 15.00 APOLOGIES AND INTRODUCTIONS - CLLR TONY SMITH

Cllr Smith welcomed the members and noted apologies had been received from Kerry Crichlow.

2 15:00 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - CLLR TONY SMITH

Cllr Meaden declared that her daughter worked at a team office for children and young people

3 15:05 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING - CLLR TONY SMITH

The minutes were checked for accuracy and were confirmed as a true reflection of the meeting with no matters arising that are not included on this agenda.

It was resolved that the minutes were taken as accurate.

4 15:15 OFSTED INSPECTION OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES, INCLUDING SAFEGUARDING. FEEDBACK AND NEXT STEPS. - JULIA HASSALL/GLADYS RHODES WHITE

Julia Hassall gave a presentation outlining the key themes from the inspection findings.

Overall Ofsted found both areas judged to be 'inadequate' this was the overall safeguarding inspection and the Local Safeguarding Board. Within the overall main inspection, children needing help and protection, care leavers and leadership, management and governance were all 'inadequate', children looked after and Adoption were found to be 'requiring improvement'.

It was noted by the Inspectors that senior leaders were aware of the issues, including recruitment and retention of staff at every level in the organisation, and in the majority of areas were already working to address issues.

There were no instances during the inspection where any child had to be removed from home as a consequence of what inspectors found, however there were children who were for example, living households where there was cumulative neglect and the level of children's vulnerability was not properly recognised or understood and they were not receiving the right level of support or services.

Ofsted highlighted that the Children in Care Council as a real strength and that most care placements are stable and of good quality. Adoption performance is improving.

The Key findings below were the main issues around partnership working:

- Thresholds and consistency need to be better understood by LA and partners.
- Ensure that all performance management information is based on accurate data, and that managers, leaders, elected members use it effectively to measure and inform service improvement
- Performance management, quality assurance, scrutiny and oversight by managers and politicians must lead to timely practice improvements
- Strategic plans to develop joint commissioned services are at an advanced stage, but joint commissioning across the spectrum of children's services is not yet apparent, indicating slow progress by the local authority and clinical commissioning group.

The 26 actions from the report are being prioritised for action. Immediate steps include:

- Recruitment of a new Head of Children's Services and more Social Workers and developing ways to retain them.
- An Improvement Board, consisting of LA and partners, has been set up. An independent Chair is being recruited.
- The DfE will recruit an independent advisor to assist the LA to improve.
- The action plan has been drafted and resources are being put into place with the aim of improving Children's Services to be good.

The findings are a very serious matter for everyone in Wirral, including Children's Services, the Council and its partners, and we must all take responsibility for these findings and working together to make the necessary improvements with pace.

K Podmore asked what level of confidence was there that the right people can be put in place quickly. J Hassall replied that salaries, job descriptions and conditions are being reviewed now to ensure that the right people are recruited in some key positions, in the meantime carefully selected interim managers and staff who can demonstrate the right quality of practice are being brought in to cover vacancies. Cllr Smith added that we need to change our recruitment in order to get it right. He added that whilst two thirds of inspections nationally are less than good because the inspection framework has changed, this inspection highlights that Children's Services need to be put at centre stage. K Podmore commented that there will still be the same financial pressures as before.

P Sheridan asked how the Improvement Board fits with the Safeguarding Board and the Wirral Children's Trust. J Hassall responded that the Improvement Board will oversee the implementation of the Improvement Plan and for example, hold the Safeguarding Board to account for delivering their 7 key actions. G R White added that these bodies will report to the Improvement Board. P Sheridan then asked if the Independent Chair has been recruited yet and J Hassall said that an individual has not yet been chosen, but a number of people with different backgrounds are being considered.

K Podmore asked what the link will be in practice. GR White replied that the Improvement Board will look at all areas and that the Children's Trust and the Children's Joint Commissioning Group will be overseeing areas such as Health and Wellbeing, Early Help etc. The Improvement Board will look for evidence that there is strong strategic ownership across all partners for all areas of improvement. K Podmore asked how the Children's Trust can hold these groups to account as we only meet 3 times a year. J Hassall responded that this will be looked at in the new Terms of Reference later in the agenda.

J Owens asked what would happen in the Safeguarding Board now that the Chair has stepped down. J Hassall said that there is a strong Vice Chair, Police Superintendent Tracy Hayes who will be leading the Board until a new Chair is recruited. The new Chair will have to be independent and will hold Children's Services and partners to account. We are using a recruitment company to ensure we find the right person. J Owens then asked how the membership of the Safeguarding Board can be made more independent in the meantime. J Hassall said that she is no longer chairing the Executive Board, we are also looking to have other partners chairing Board sub groups, so there is greater ownership across the partnership and greater independence from the Council in the Board's functioning.

Cllr Clements asked how confident the Council is that these changes can be made in a timely manner. Cllr Smith replied that work is already ongoing on the most urgent changes. The LGA improvement advisor has reconfirmed what the role of the Lead Member for Children's Services is in securing these improvements. J Hassall said that the LGA and ISOS have produced a helpful document and that as Director she now feels she is getting the right interim people in post now until we recruit permanently. Interim Managers are able to come in fresh "tell it as it is" and confront the issues and support Children's Services in having those difficult conversations. GR White added that what is happening to children and families must be challenged. K Podmore commented that we need to receive information in a format we can understand in order to be able to challenge it effectively. Cllr Clements queried how we can address the difficulties in bringing about the necessary culture change. J Hassall said that there are many changes to be made and all the workforce needs to understand clearly what has to happen and to be accountable. K Podmore asked if we have the processes to challenge and enforce if things are not being done. J Hassall replied that we do have processes and must make sure minimum standards are applied in the context where all staff and managers have the right tools and environment to do their job. Cllr Meaden raised a concern about the number of agency Social Workers being used. J Owens added that we need everyone to realise the professional expectations of all workers at all levels and that those workers then meet those expectations. Cllr Smith commented that we need to actively scrutinise that everyone is doing all the basics according to process. P Sheridan asked what teeth the Children's Trust Board and the Wirral Safeguarding Board have to hold organisations to account. J Hassall said that we must challenge each other, hold each other to account and escalate concerns if issues remain unresolved. We must work together to make sure we share the same high ambitions for children. P Sheridan and K Podmore then both asked what can actually be done to challenge what we know is not right and, if we do challenge and nothing changes as a result, what can be done. GR White responded that Board members need to understand who various groups are accountable to eg Schools are accountable to Governors, DfE, Ofsted etc. They also must be prepared to use those accountabilities when necessary. J Hassall added that we need to ensure that everyone is properly trained to carry out their roles; that everyone plays their part in keeping children safe. J Monty also added that everyone needs examine their own areas of practice and see how we can make a difference.

In conclusion J Hassall said there is a lot to do, we must work together to get it right for children, and that she is confident that we can do this.

It was resolved that The Board noted the report.

5 16:00 CHILDREN'S TRUST REFRESHED GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS - DEBORAH GORNIK

J Monty introduced K Crichlow's report on the Review of the Children's Trust Terms of Reference, the proposed Draft Terms of Reference and the Recommendations to the Board.

J Owens asked if School Governors should be included in the proposed revised membership and it was agreed that they should be.

J Graham asked if Public Health should be included in the proposed revised membership and it was agreed that they should be.

K Podmore commented that there needs to be a commitment from the membership that they will attend all 3 meetings. Cllr Smith said that a letter can be sent out in his name re the expectations to attend. J Owens said that substitute representatives should attend if any representative cannot attend and Cllr Smith added that any substitutes must be properly briefed.

Cllr Smith asked if frontline workers should be invited to be heard. J Hassall replied that work is being done with frontline practitioners re improvements, including meetings, allowing opportunity for anonymous feedback, etc. Something could be built into one of the deep dive sessions to hear the voice of practitioners. GR White added that they will be included in annual stakeholder events. J Hassall said that there will be meetings with frontline practitioners where then can air their views directly and openly and maybe a distillation of those voices can be brought to these meetings.

J Owens said that it would be useful to know the statistics re numbers of vacancies and staff in post, turnover and retention rates, salaries, sickness etc. K Podmore that it would be useful to have this in summary format with some benchmarking figures.

J Hassall said that she will work with the Improvement Board to formulate the Data Set for each of the Boards and what they will be responsible for scrutinising.

S Taylor asked if the board will receive updates of what is being done in the Children's Joint Commissioning Group and J Hassall said that they would.

It was resolved that the Board made the following decisions:

- 1. To approve and adopt the revised Terms of Reference with the agreed amendments to the Membership.**
- 2. That a small planning group will be established, meeting bi-monthly, to agree the Children's Trust work plan and the deep dive focus.**
- 3. Following further work on the protocol between the Children's Trust, The Wirral Safeguarding Children's Board and the Health and Well-being Board these be presented to the next Wirral Children's Trust meeting for adoption.**

6 16:15: THEMATIC FOCUS - DEBORAH GORNIK/SUE TALBOT/GLADYS RHODES-WHITE

Gladys Rhodes-White gave a presentation on this meeting's thematic focus of Early Help.

Wirral needs to ensure that Early Help is being effective:

- It must be soon enough
- The LA needs to ensure that we have the right services and are responsive
- Which partners are appropriate to be part of the local community footprint, the Wirral footprint and the Merseyside footprint?
- What are the cultures and behaviours that we need to address in order to make Early Help effective?

How do we move from ambition to reality re locality based services? How do we move from what we are doing to what we need to do?

- Rather than developing an LA blueprint we need to work with partners to develop the blueprint.
- Think about how best to place resources.
- Think about how to shift focus from Statutory provision to Third Sector/Voluntary Sector provision. We know that for families there is often less stigma with the voluntary sector and it can be more enduring and sustainable.
- The LA must have the commitment to bring together the right partners.
- Look at collective resources across all partners and decide how to commission effectively.
- Consider how to move away from what we currently do and instead move to locality based working.
- Consider pilot schemes for certain areas of work.

J Hassall added that there will be another event in early December to follow up the previous event around joint commissioning and partnership working. The Children's Trust will all be invited.

Cllr Clements asked how we can do this whilst still funding the old ways of working. GR White replied that it will be a massive challenge and the LA will need to invest to save. Also we need to look for opportunities to find different monies across partnerships. By jointly commissioning we can make efficiency savings with no overlap. If young people have appropriate early help they can be retained on Wirral rather than in expensive out of borough placements. J Hassall added that "Children on the Edge of Care" service is now managed by Deborah Gornik, rather than Social Care, to try and retain them in Wirral, meet their needs early and out of care. GR White said that at the Children's Panel we are seeing the results of the lack of early help impacting on LA resources at a later stage; and there is an impact on other partners eg CAMHS.

N Johnson said that all commissioned services will need to understand thresholds and to be supported in understanding risk and when a young person needs to be moved to a different service. S Taylor agreed with this and added that knowledge needs to be shared amongst both statutory and voluntary services. The Voluntary sector also needs to be supported around understanding and managing risk.

It was resolved that: The Board noted the report.

7 16:50 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

CLOSE

As there was no other business the meeting closed at 17.00 hrs.

DATE AND TIME OF FUTURE MEETINGS

23rd January at 15.00hrs.

Julie Graham in attendance

