

COUNCIL

Monday, 17 October 2016

Present: The Civic Mayor (Councillor Pat Hackett) in the Chair
Deputy Civic Mayor (Councillor Ann McLachlan)

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| Councillors | RL Abbey T Anderson C Blakeley E Boult A Brighouse P Brightmore D Burgess-Joyce C Carubia P Cleary W Clements A Davies G Davies P Davies WJ Davies P Doughty D Elderton G Ellis S Foulkes P Gilchrist JE Green | P Hayes A Hodson K Hodson T Johnson AER Jones C Jones S Kelly B Kenny A Leech I Lewis M McLaughlin J McManus C Meaden D Mitchell B Mooney C Muspratt T Norbury M Patrick C Povall D Realey | L Reecejones L Rennie D Roberts L Rowlands T Smith W Smith C Spriggs J Stapleton P Stuart M Sullivan A Sykes T Usher J Walsh G Watt S Whittingham J Williamson I Williams KJ Williams S Williams |
| <u>Apologies</u> | Councillors | B Berry J Hale T Jones | T Pilgrim W Ward |

42 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members of the Council were invited to consider whether they had any disclosable pecuniary and/or any other relevant interest in connection with any matters to be determined at this meeting and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of such interest.

Councillor Chris Meaden declared a personal interest in item 3 – Ofsted Inspection Report by virtue of her daughter's employment within the CYPD. She remained in the meeting and took part in the discussions.

Councillor Louise ReeceJones declared a personal interest in item 3 – Ofsted Inspection Report by virtue of her children being in receipt of Social Care. She remained in the meeting and took part in the discussions.

43 CIVIC MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Civic Mayor noted that apologies had been received from Councillors Bruce Berry, John Hale, Tony Jones, Tracey Pilgrim and Warren Ward.

44 OFSTED INSPECTION REPORT

The Mayor informed that Council would be considering the recently published Ofsted Inspection Report on Wirral Council's Children's Services. He further informed that the Council Agenda pack included copies of the requisition notices from the Labour and Conservative political groups and Notices of Motion from all three political groups.

Prior to consideration of the Ofsted Inspection Report it was:

Proposed by Councillor Blakeley – that Standing Order 12(7) be suspended (limiting the time allowed for speakers during the debate).

Seconded by Councillor Phil Gilchrist.

Prior to the vote, Councillor Jeff Green and sixteen Conservative Members rose to request that a 'card vote' be recorded in respect of the vote.

A 'card vote' was then taken on Councillor Chris Blakeley's motion and the Council divided as follows:

For the amendment (23) Councillors T Anderson, C Blakeley, E Boult, A Brighouse, D Burgess-Joyce, C Carubia, P Cleary, Mrs W Clements, D Elderton, G Ellis, P Gilchrist, J Green, P Hayes, A Hodson, K Hodson, S Kelly, I Lewis, D Mitchell, L Rennie, L Rowlands, A Sykes, G Watt and S Williams.

Against the amendment (35) Councillors R Abbey, P Brightmore, A Davies, G Davies, P Davies, W Davies, S Foulkes, T Johnson, A Jones, C Jones, B Kenny, A Leech, A McLachlan, M McLaughlin, J McManus, C Meaden, B Mooney, C Muspratt, T Norbury, M Patrick, D Realey, L Reecejones, D Roberts, T Smith, W Smith, C Spriggs, J Stapleton, P Stuart, M Sullivan, T Usher, J Walsh, S Whittingham, I Williams, KJ Williams and J Williamson.

The motion was therefore lost (23:35) (One abstention).

The Mayor informed that three Notices of Motion had been received in respect of this item. He stated that all would put before Council and debated together, with a vote taken on each motion, after the debate.

The three Motions which had been circulated in advance of the meeting were submitted in accordance with Standing Order 12(1) and (9), as follows:

Labour Group Motion

Proposed by Councillor Phil Davies
Seconded by Councillor Tony Smith

- “1. Council accepts OFTSED’s report on services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers, and the 19 recommendations for improvement and agrees that there needs to be radical change across the service, the council and partnership. The details will be proposed to an Improvement Board comprising key stakeholders including an independent chair, an advisor appointed by the Department for Education and members from the main political groups on the Council.
2. Council acknowledges the difficult circumstances Wirral’s children’s services operate under - the growing demand for care from struggling families, the complexity of the cases being managed, and the cruel impact Government policy and funding decisions continue to have on families and residents in Wirral.
3. Keeping our children safe is our highest priority and there is no excuse for failing to deliver the highest quality services to vulnerable young people in Wirral. The key priority now is to develop an effective improvement plan with detailed actions and outcomes which address all of OFSTED’s recommendations.
4. Council notes, as the OFSTED report acknowledged, many of the changes suggested have already started, but they need to deliver not just improvement but outstanding services for vulnerable children.
5. Council welcomes the quick and clear response of the Labour administration in organising an improvement board with representation from across the political groups, members of the Wirral Partnership, independent advisors, and the engagement of the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive to demonstrate the priority this issue has for the whole authority.
6. Council also welcomes the allocation of £2m to enable immediate changes in children’s services to happen at pace, including recruitment of a new Head of Service and other key posts, improvements in training, improved accountability and, ultimately, improved performance and outcomes for young people.

7. Council supports the social workers, officers, voluntary sector, foster families, carers and partners who are committed to improving the services our vulnerable young people receive and to the action plans and programmes of improvement that are already underway.
8. Council agrees to receive progress reports on the improvement plan relating to OFSTED's recommendations as well as appropriate reports being submitted to Cabinet, scrutiny committees and other relevant bodies".

Conservative Group Motion

Proposed by Councillor Jeff Green
Seconded by Councillor Wendy Clements

"Council is appalled at the findings contained within the inspection report into Children's Services in Wirral from Ofsted, the opening line of which reads: "there are widespread and serious failures in the services provided to children who need help and protection in Wirral." The independent report lays bare in the starker possible terms the catastrophic failure of the Labour Administration to provide any sort of leadership to the service and their inability to perform the most important duty they have – to keep the Borough's children safe.

Council notes that under the previous Conservative / Liberal Democrat Administration, safeguarding and looked after children's services were rated good by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission.

Council is angered that the Labour Administration was warned multiple times that its plan of scrutinising itself by appointing Labour Chairmanships of Scrutiny Committees was doomed to failure. Not only did the Administration ignore opposition members they also did not implement the recommendation from the LGA Peer review in 2015 which stated "the role of scrutiny may be enhanced in the longer term by offering opposition members a leadership role on the Policy & Performance Committees."

Council is disappointed that so far a culture of spin and news management has pervaded the Labour ranks:

- leaked letters
- a long line of Council 'spokesmen' rolled out to face the public anger whilst the Labour Administration hide in their bunker
- a special council requisitioned before the Ofsted report was made public
- complete silence from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Council is gravely concerned that the current Labour Administration have abdicated all responsibility for these failings and we have absolutely no confidence that the Leader of the Council and his Cabinet, who have allowed the services to deteriorate to such an unacceptable level, are the right people to provide the leadership required to improve Wirral Council's Children's Services to the level our residents expect and children deserve.

Council therefore requests:

- A. A root and branch review of current governance arrangements for overview and scrutiny to enhance its independence from the Administration.
- B. The resignation of the Leader of the Council, the Cabinet Member for Children and Family Services, the Chair of the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Pledge Champion for 'Vulnerable children reach their full potential'.
- C. That the Strategic Director, Families and Wellbeing and other Senior Officers responsible, consider their positions and honestly assess whether they are the right people to lead and oversee the desperate requirement to improve this service.
- D. Quarterly Special Council meetings to review the progress of the action plan developed under the stewardship of the Department for Education".

Liberal Democrat Group Motion

Proposed by Councillor Phil Gilchrist
Seconded by Councillor Alan Brighouse

"OFSTED'S LEGITIMATE CONCERNS

In the light of the Inspection findings, this Council will do its utmost to ensure that the 19 recommendations relating to its role are fully implemented in a timely and purposeful manner.

Council will progress the recommendations relating to the Local Safeguarding Children's Board. It must have the capacity, input from partners, funding, accurate data, reporting arrangements and independence to carry out its work.

Council welcomes the clear process being followed as set out in the OFSTED Handbook 'Monitoring and re-inspection of local authority children's services judged inadequate' (published in August 2016). The Council must pay full regard to this statutory process and heed the advice and oversight of the DfE's independent advisor.

Since Members of the Children Sub Committee received a presentation on the issues on 22 September, a number of Members are properly apprised of the issues in hand. However, Council is concerned that the ‘Spotlight Session’ originally arranged for 11 October 2016 was postponed. The key failings could have been outlined in a similar frank manner prior to Council to provide a more informed debate from the start of the improvement journey.

Council, however, needs to reflect upon the adequacy of its oversight regarding the changes in management, structures and organisation that took place between the inspection of 2011 and the recent inspection. Cases across the country have brought about increased pressures on front line staff. A firmer OFSTED process was anticipated. This alone cannot explain the difference between the assessments.

Council needs to be reminded what OFSTED found in 2011 ...

‘overall effectiveness of safeguarding services is good’

‘The capacity for improvement is good’

‘Succession planning in children’s services to support continual improvement is very good’.

‘The quality of leadership provided by the interim director is excellent, and the internal appointment has ensured a seamless transition’

‘Managerial oversight of these cases is consistently well evidenced and ensures that effective and timely intervention is taking place’

‘There is an outstanding level of commitment to improving services for children and young people in Wirral shared by the leader, Lead Member, Interim Chief Executive and the interim Director of Children’s Services’

‘Senior managers in children’s social care offer outstanding support and share a clear vision with front line managers who in turn consider they are professionally valued and well engaged’

Members must, therefore, question whether the chopping and changing of scrutiny arrangements, limiting the choice of performance data presented, and the focus on the narrow areas in the 2020 Plan contributed to the latest findings.

It is necessary to be clear on who knew what and when, and establish if concerns were or were not acted upon in a timely manner.

A clear mechanism for reporting to and informing Members of the progress is necessary.

Council requests, in the interests of children we seek to protect and serve, the following steps:

- a. regular progress reports on the work in hand to address the failings identified;

- b. the Council agenda must provide an opportunity for regular statements by the Cabinet Member responsible;
- c. arrangements are made for a specific question time so that the adequacy of the steps can be tested".

Council then debated the recently published Ofsted Inspection Report on Wirral Council's Children's Services. Members of the Council expressed views and arguments in support of, and counter to, the motions listed above.

Following the debate and Councillor Phil Gilchrist having replied, a vote was put on the **Liberal Democrat Motion and lost (24:36) (One abstention)**.

Councillor Jeff Green having replied, a 'card vote' a vote was put on the **Conservative Motion and lost (24:36) (One abstention)**:

For the motion (24) Councillors T Anderson, C Blakeley, E Boult, A Brighouse, D Burgess-Joyce, C Carubia, P Cleary, Mrs W Clements, D Elderton, G Ellis, P Gilchrist, J Green, P Hayes, A Hodson, K Hodson, S Kelly, I Lewis, D Mitchell, C Povall, L Rennie, L Rowlands, A Sykes, G Watt and S Williams.

Against the motion (36) Councillors R Abbey, P Brightmore, A Davies, G Davies, P Davies, W Davies, P Doughty, S Foulkes, T Johnson, A Jones, C Jones, B Kenny, A Leech, A McLachlan, M McLaughlin, J McManus, C Meaden, B Mooney, C Muspratt, T Norbury, M Patrick, D Realey, L Reecejones, D Roberts, T Smith, W Smith, C Spriggs, J Stapleton, P Stuart, M Sullivan, T Usher, J Walsh, S Whittingham, I Williams, KJ Williams and J Williamson.

One abstention – Councillor P Hackett.

Prior to the final vote on the Labour Motion, Councillor Chris Blakeley and 5 Members of the Conservative Group stood, and requested that the Conservative Group Members names be recorded.

Councillor Phil Davies having replied, a vote was then taken on the Labour Motion and the Council:

RESOLVED (36:24) (One abstention) – That

1. **Council accepts OFTSED's report on services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers, and the 19 recommendations for improvement and agrees that there needs to be radical change across the service, the council and partnership. The details will be proposed to an Improvement Board comprising key stakeholders including an independent**

chair, an advisor appointed by the Department for Education and members from the main political groups on the Council.

2. Council acknowledges the difficult circumstances Wirral's children's services operate under - the growing demand for care from struggling families, the complexity of the cases being managed, and the cruel impact Government policy and funding decisions continue to have on families and residents in Wirral.
3. Keeping our children safe is our highest priority and there is no excuse for failing to deliver the highest quality services to vulnerable young people in Wirral. The key priority now is to develop an effective improvement plan with detailed actions and outcomes which address all of OFSTED's recommendations.
4. Council notes, as the OFSTED report acknowledged, many of the changes suggested have already started, but they need to deliver not just improvement but outstanding services for vulnerable children.
5. Council welcomes the quick and clear response of the Labour administration in organising an improvement board with representation from across the political groups, members of the Wirral Partnership, independent advisors, and the engagement of the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive to demonstrate the priority this issue has for the whole authority.
6. Council also welcomes the allocation of £2m to enable immediate changes in children's services to happen at pace, including recruitment of a new Head of Service and other key posts, improvements in training, improved accountability and, ultimately, improved performance and outcomes for young people.
7. Council supports the social workers, officers, voluntary sector, foster families, carers and partners who are committed to improving the services our vulnerable young people receive and to the action plans and programmes of improvement that are already underway.
8. Council agrees to receive progress reports on the improvement plan relating to OFSTED's recommendations as well as appropriate reports being submitted to Cabinet, scrutiny committees and other relevant bodies.

Recorded vote - Conservative Members against the motion (18) Councillors T Anderson, C Blakeley, E Boult, D Burgess-Joyce, Mrs W Clements, D Elderton, G Ellis, J Green, P Hayes, A Hodson, K Hodson, I Lewis, C Povall, L Rennie, L Rowlands, A Sykes, G Watt and S Williams.