



Children Sub-Committee

Date:	Wednesday, 8 February 2017
Time:	6.00 pm
Venue:	Committee Room 1 - Wallasey Town Hall

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AGENDA

1. MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members are asked to consider whether they have any disclosable pecuniary interests and/or any other relevant interest in connection with any item(s) on this agenda, if so, to declare them and state the nature of the interest.

2. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR FOR THE MEETING AND VICE-CHAIR FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE MUNICIPAL YEAR

The Sub-Committee is invited to appoint a Chair for this meeting and a Vice-Chair for the remainder of the municipal year.

3. MINUTES (Pages 1 - 6)

To approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 14 December 2016.

4. IMPROVEMENT PLAN

To receive a verbal update from Julia Hassall.

5. IMPROVEMENT PLAN PERFORMANCE REPORT (Pages 7 - 10)

6. WORK PROGRAMME FOR FUTURE MEETINGS (Pages 11 - 14)

7. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS ACCEPTED BY THE CHAIR

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CHILDREN SUB-COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 14 December 2016

Present:

Councillors	A Brighthouse	C Meaden
	D Burgess-Joyce	C Povall
	(In place of W Clements)	W Smith
	A Davies	
	M McLaughlin	

Apologies

Councillors	Mr D Cunningham
	Mr M Harrison
	Mrs G Peters

9 **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.

No such declarations were made.

10 **MINUTES**

Resolved – That the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2016 be approved.

11 **REVISED TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The revised Terms of Reference of the Children Sub-Committee were submitted for Members' information.

Resolved – That the revised Terms of Reference of the Children Sub-Committee be noted.

12 **ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT**

Dawn Stanley-Smith, Customer Resolution and Information Manager outlined a report providing information on representations and complaints received by children's social care services within the Children and Young People's Department for the year 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016. The report demonstrated an overview of complaint trends, performance and areas for development.

Members heard that a number of complainants and representations that had been made did not meet the criteria of the complaint regulations and had either been referred to the relevant process or procedure or had been acknowledged, registered as comments or feedback and forwarded to managers for a response. Members were informed that twenty complainants had had their complaint resolved at first contact with the Customer Resolution and Information Team without the need to formally register a complaint.

Numbers of complaints registered over twelve months had been provided and it was explained that 82.9% of complaints made by children or young people had been resolved within the statutory timescale and that Stage 1 complaints registered by an adult were dealt with by an appropriate manager. Also 92.3% of stage 1 complaints had been responded to within the timescale and 100% of stage 2 complaint investigations had been completed within the expected timescale.

Members heard what had been learned from complaints and that a new policy and procedure in relation to managing difficult communication had been produced to assist staff and children and families. Also work was underway on recommendations in respect of another two new procedures.

Members then heard that when reviewing effectiveness, it had been identified that the number of complaints received from children and young people had tripled following the work undertaken with the Children in Care Council to ensure that all children knew how to make their voices heard. It was suggested that the vast majority of complaints continued to be resolved by Council staff or the Customer Resolution and Information Team at an early stage.

It was further explained that a series of workshops had been planned which included an overview of the complaint process in order to increase and improve awareness of how to support children and young people to make representations. Work would continue with corporate IT colleagues in relation to identifying an effective IT platform and a recruitment process was to be undertaken to increase the number of Independent Persons to work on stage 2 investigations.

A representative of the Children in Care Council attended the meeting and gave an overview in respect of the workshop she had undertaken in relation to complaints. She believed that the workshop had been successful and helped to improve the service.

In response to questions raised by Members, the representative of the Children in Care Council outlined her personal experience in relation to the complaints procedure and confirmed that all the correct steps had been followed. She advised Members that she now felt capable of helping someone through the process.

Also in response to questions, the Customer Resolution and Information Manager confirmed that an increase in complaints could be expected as the message filtered out to young people in respect of how to engage in the process. She also advised that the number of Ombudsman complaints could be as a result of people being advised they had not met the criteria to follow the complaints procedure. She reported that quarterly briefings were to take place with staff to share best practice.

Resolved –

(1) That the report be noted.

(2) That the Customer Resolution and Information Manager be thanked for her report and the representative of the Children in Care Council be thanked for her attendance.

13 OFSTED PROGRESS UPDATE

The Director of Children's Services provided a verbal update on the progress of Ofsted.

Members were advised that three meetings of the Improvement Board had already taken place with a new chair, Eleanor Brazil, who would be working with Children's Services and that another key appointment had been made from January to the Chair of Children Safeguarding Board, Maggie Atkinson, formerly the National Children's Commissioner.

It was reported that other key posts were in the process of being filled and that a first response team had been placed in the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub. Social work practice standards had been issued to develop a more consistent practice by front line staff and improved mechanisms for feedback from complaints had been implemented. Sub groups to the Improvement Board had been set up including a workforce sub-group to support better recruitment and retention of high quality staff. Members were informed that Ofsted were due to undertake their first quarterly monitoring visit in January and would be looking at the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub.

Members were advised that the Local Government Association had been working with Local Authorities and a company called ISOS to set out the improvement journey in Children's Services.

In response to questions from Members, the Director of Children's Services advised that staff appraisal was a key part of the plan to improve the service and that more staff were needed in order to reduce caseloads so that people could be held to account. Despite an additional £2m of funding, there would

be pressures on the core budget and additional costs of reducing caseloads were being considered.

Resolved – That the Director of Children’s Services be thanked for her presentation.

14 **CORE INDICATORS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT BOARD**

The Director of Children’s Services reported upon a proposed set of core indicators that would be reported in detail at each meeting to ensure Improvement Board members would be able to monitor, challenge and assure progress against the key areas identified in the Ofsted inspection.

It was reported that Children’s Services required a good system for the accumulation of valid and reliable data and for its interpretation. All service-critical activities had to be recorded and reported accurately in order that service leaders could carry out their jobs effectively and demonstrate that activity was leading to beneficial outcomes. The poor performance information in respect of care leavers had been rectified and Members were provided with a number of proposed core improvement indicators.

In response to questions from Members, the Director of Children’s Services advised that one issue of concern was that there were too many children with a child protection plan who no longer need a plan after three months. There could be a number of reasons for this which were currently being analysed. Keeping children safe was at the core of all considerations.

Further to a question in respect of the number of times of change of Social Workers for a child, the Director of Children’s Services advised that she would consider how this could be measured and advocated that a permanent, stable workforce was required to consistently reduce changes for children.

Resolved – That the Director of Children’s Services be thanked for her report.

15 **FEEDBACK FROM MEMBER WORKSHOP**

The Chair reported that, at the previous meeting of the Children Sub-Committee on 22 September 2016, Members had requested that a workshop be held to discuss how best to scrutinise the implementation of the Ofsted improvement plan.

She advised that the workshop had been held on Monday 7 November 2016 and that the notes from the workshop were attached to the report.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

16 **SCHOOL STANDARDS REPORT: ATTAINMENT AT GCSE AND A LEVEL**

The Lead Commissioner for Schools provided a presentation on Key Stage 4 and 5 attainment and progress.

It was reported that the benchmark measures had changed this year for secondary schools and they are judged on the percentage of pupils achieving A*-C in English and Mathematics, Attainment 8 and Progress 8. The new measure (Attainment 8) shows a closing of the free school meal gap but that the gap is wider than the national average.

Members were informed that the percentage of students attaining A*-A in English or mathematics was higher than the national average for all pupils, boys and girls. However there were significantly less Free School Meal students attaining these higher grades. The Progress 8 score of -0.04 was just below the national average of 0. Overall Wirral was ranked top against neighbouring authorities for A level outcomes and third for GCSEs. The percentage of 2As and a B at A level remained below the national average but had increased from the previous year. Wirral was above the North West average for 5A*-C including English and mathematics and girls were out performing boys in A*-A in English or mathematics. Wirral was ahead of the national average in Attainment 8 and the Free School Meal gap had improved.

It was further reported that Wirral ranked top against neighbouring authorities for outcomes at Level 3 and Key Stage 5.

Resolved – That the Lead Commissioner for Schools be thanked for her report.

17 **WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The Scrutiny Support Officer provided a report updating Members on progress towards delivering the work programme for the Children Sub Committee for the 2016/17 municipal year and the proposed changes as a result of the recent workshop.

Resolved – That the proposed work programme for 2016/17 be approved with the inclusion of Troubled Families Programme.

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REPORT	IMPROVEMENT PLAN PERFORMANCE MONITORING
MEETING	CHILDREN SUB COMMITTEE
DATE	8 th FEBRUARY 2017
REPORT OF	KERRY CRICLOW HEAD OF QUALITY, PERFORMANCE AND IMPROVEMENT

1.0 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report highlights the core indicator areas that are currently being reviewed in greater depth in order to develop insight and thereby establish the most appropriate actions that will be taken.
- 1.2 More detailed analyses will be completed to better understand the local drivers that underpin the increase in the number of children looked and those subject to child protection plans, drawing on and extending the intelligence set out in paragraphs 2.2 to 2.11 below.

2.0 PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- 2.1 Detailed analysis is continuing in the key areas of child protection plans and Looked after children services, for both of which the current rates are high:

Children subject to a Child Protection Plan (CPP)

- 2.2 Wirral's rate of children subject to a CPP has varied considerably over the last decade. At 31 March 2015 Wirral had the lowest rate among its group of statistical neighbours and a rate well below that of England and the North West; twelve months later the rate was the fourth highest in the group and was above the group average and the rates for England and the North West. This represented a 73% rate increase in the year.
- 2.3 Following a slight fall in CPP numbers between April and July 2016 the month-end count had risen to 435 by 31 December 2016, an increase of 8% in nine months. Whereas the rate of growth is significantly slower than in the previous year, the total number of open cases is high.
- 2.4 Rate growth has been attributed to changes in child protection practice between 2014/15 and the present. The LSCB reviewed these changes and concluded that the increase in the number of CPPs was as a result of

- the threshold policy and criteria having been re-launched among partner agencies
 - further training having been provided to social workers around the Section 47 process, and
 - the review of CIN cases open for six months or more.
- 2.5 Other (though not all) North West local authorities recorded an increase in CPP rates between March 2015 and March 2016, but among geographically close and statistical neighbours none other than Lancashire came close to matching the Wirral rate of increase. It has been previously but incorrectly reported that rates in Merseyside also rose over the corresponding period; whereas there was a marginal year-on-year increase in Sefton and Knowsley, the sub-regional average was a fall of nearly five per cent.
- 2.6 Whatever contribution policy and training revisions may have had to an increase in CPP numbers, the recent and current CPP rates have been consistently inflated by about four rate points, because of delays in the closure of CP plans on children who have become Looked After.

Children Looked After (CLA)

- 2.7 Work has continued to analyse and characterise the CLA population and better understand the origins of Wirral's historically high CLA rate and the drivers of continued growth in CLA numbers. There is a distinction to be made between the high but relatively stable base rate, which varied little over the three years to March 2016, and the growth since April 2016.
- 2.8 Analysis of Wirral's CLA population in November 2016 has revealed two characteristics that have a bearing on overall population size, the first being children's age, the second being the duration of care episodes:
- Since 2012, for England as a whole, the age profile of children looked after has been characterised by a steady increase in the proportion of older children, but not so in Wirral
 - Wirral's CLA population has had fewer very young children and fewer older children, but a significantly larger proportion than England of children in the age range 1-9 years.
 - Care episodes have got shorter in England between 2012 and 2016 and the average duration of episodes ending in the year to 31 March 2016 was 765 days, down from 785 in 2015 and 886 in 2012

- But if one looks at the 180 episodes that ended between 1 April and 30 November 2016, the average duration was 1327 days: children who left care in Wirral between April and November were, on average, looked after for eighteen months longer than the average for England in the previous year
- 2.9 Care episodes in Wirral have been and remain significantly longer than the England average; children entering care after the age of one year can remain Looked after for several years, contributing to the long-term high CLA rate.
- 2.10 The CLA population rose 12% between 1 April to 31 December 2016. The simple arithmetic of CLA population growth is that more children have become Looked after than have ceased to be Looked after. The rate of children becoming Looked after has been consistently high since March 2016 and the rates for commencements and cessations have increasingly diverged. Of recent months only in June 2016 has the number of children leaving care been greater than the number entering care.
- 2.11 Step-up from a child protection plan appears to have been a significant driver in the recent growth of the CLA population. 252 care episodes on 247 children started between 1 April and 30 November 2016. 170 (69%) of these children had also been the subject of a child protection plan at some time since 1 April 2016, either immediately prior to the commencement of a Looked after episode or until a very short time beforehand. Sixty-nine per cent is a minimum estimate and does not allow for the possibility of children who became looked after in April having been on a plan that ended in March or early April.

Care Leavers

- 2.12 Considerable work has been undertaken on improving practice in 'staying in touch' with care leavers; this was a key area of concern in the Ofsted judgement in July 2016. The initial focus has been on ensuring contact has been initiated with all care leavers, as well as direct contact this included indirect contact such as making a call to the young person or writing to them. When measuring this activity as an outcome for 'being in touch with care leavers' we have regularly achieved 93%.
- 2.13 Having ensured that we are initiating contact with all our care leavers, there has been focussed work on that contact being meaningful. The measure in December reflects the requirement to demonstrate meaningful 'in touch' contact with our care leavers. With the changed measurement against this indicator, we have returned at 70.3% for December.

- 2.14 There is intense management focus on improving this performance which includes; weekly performance meetings between team managers and their teams, fortnightly management review of performance led by the senior manager for children looked after.
- 2.15 Additional resources have been agreed to ensure we are providing a quality service to our care leavers and we evidence improved performance in the coming months. This includes increasing the Personal Advisers who support and work directly with care leavers, from 4 to 12, with the additional workers due to join the service in the next two weeks. Increased management capacity has been agreed for the Children in Care teams to ensure management oversight and grip; this capacity will be in the service by the end of January.



Children Sub Committee Wednesday, 8th February 2017

REPORT TITLE:	Children Sub Committee – work programme update
REPORT OF:	The Chair of the Committee

REPORT SUMMARY

This report updates members on progress towards delivering the work programme for the Children Sub Committee as agreed for the 2016/17 municipal year. The report also takes account of discussions relating to scrutiny of the implementation of the Ofsted improvement plan. Clearly the work programme of the Sub Committee should supplement, not duplicate, the work programme of the parent committee, the People Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

RECOMMENDATION/S

1. Members are requested to approve the proposed Children Sub Committee work programme for 2016/17, making any required amendments, including suggestions for additional items and changed priorities.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

To ensure members of the Children Sub Committee have the opportunity to contribute to the delivery of the annual work programme.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

Not Applicable

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3.1 CURRENT WORK PROGRAMME

Existing items on the work programme, agreed at the previous meeting of the Sub Committee on 14th December are:

Item	Format	Timescale	Lead Departmental Officer
Exception reports highlighting positive and negative aspects arising from school Ofsted inspection reports	Report	8 th March 2017	Sue Talbot
School Strategy	Report	8 th March 2017	Sue Talbot
Special Guardianship Orders	Report	8 th March 2017	Julia Hassall
Impact of the IFIP programme (Troubled Families) in Wirral	Report	8 th March 2017	Julia Hassall
Governance arrangements and the role of scrutiny in safeguarding	Report	To be agreed	
Devolution of the Further education budget and the apprenticeship framework	Report	To be agreed	
Quality Assurance process of care plans	Report	To be agreed	

Further items proposed at the workshop held on 7th November 2016 to discuss the implementation of the Ofsted improvement plan included:

Item	Format	Timescale	Lead Departmental Officer
Monitoring the key milestones of the Improvement Plan	Report	Standing item	
Reviewing the performance data tracker	Report	Standing item	
Early intervention / prevention, including the application of thresholds, partnership arrangements and the operation of MASH	Possible task & finish group	To be agreed	
The management of care plans and related performance; leaving care and IROs	Possible task & finish group	To be agreed	
Competent skilled workforce and the quality of social work practice	Possible task & finish group	To be agreed	
Scrutiny's place in long-term governance arrangements	To be agreed	To be agreed	
Follow-up to the original Looked after children scrutiny review (August 2013)	To be agreed	To be agreed	
Follow-up to the previous Safeguarding scrutiny review (December 2015)	To be agreed	To be agreed	

Prioritisation of these items plus the addition of any further items would assist in the planning and delivery of the work programme.

In order to manage the work programme more effectively, it is now proposed that some meetings will be dedicated to scrutiny of Ofsted improvement-related issues while other meetings will focus on other issues within the remit of the Sub Committee. It is proposed that, for the remainder of the municipal year, meetings will be arranged as follows:

Meeting date	Agenda Items
8 th February	Ofsted improvement-related scrutiny
8 th March	Other issues
5 th April	Ofsted improvement-related scrutiny

3.2 RELEVANT ITEMS FROM THE PEOPLE OSC WORK PROGRAMME

The People OSC (28th November 2016) confirmed that the following items should form part of the work programme of the main committee:

Item	Format	Timescale	Lead Departmental Officer
Children Safeguarding Annual Report	Committee Report	16 Jan 2017	
Looked after children - Follow-up review	Evidence Day(s)	Deferred until post-Ofsted planning for scrutiny is complete	Liz Davenport
Children ready for school	Task & finish group	Deferred	Deborah Gornik

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Not Applicable

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Not Applicable

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: ICT, STAFFING AND ASSETS

The delivery of the scrutiny work programme will be met from within existing resources.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

Not Applicable

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

Not Applicable

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct equality implications.

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APPENDICES

None