

# CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 14 November 2017

Present: Councillor T Usher (Chair)

Councillors M McLaughlin C Povall  
T Anderson J Stapleton  
A Brighouse A Sykes  
W Clements G Wood  
P Hayes A Leech (In place of B Kenny)  
T Jones D Realey (In place of W Ward)  
C Meaden I Williams

## 26 MINUTES SILENCE

The Chair paid tribute to ex-Mayor of Wirral and Labour member for Bebington, Councillor Walter Smith, who had recently passed away. The Chair informed that Councillor Smith had been involved in local politics for more than 40 years first as a member of Birkenhead County Borough Council, and subsequently as a member on Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council. He added that Walter Smith embodied all the ideals of a public servant, giving selflessly of his time and commitment to his ward and to Wirral. The Committee, and those members of the public in attendance for the meeting, stood for a minute's silence in tribute to his memory.

## 27 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors B Kenny and W Ward; co-opted members Ms J Johnson, Mr Chris Penn; and CWP representative V McGee.

## 28 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST / PARTY WHIP

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

Members were reminded that they should also declare whether they were subject to a party whip in connection with any item(s) to be considered and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of the whipping arrangement. The following declaration was made:

Councillor Chris Meaden	Personal – by virtue of her daughter's employment within the CYPD.
----------------------------	--

29 **MINUTES**

**Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting of the committee held on 26 September 2017, be confirmed as a correct record.**

30 **IMPROVEMENT JOURNEY - UPDATE**

Ms Deborah Gornik, the Interim Director of Children's Services introduced her presentation that provided Members with an update on the Council's Improvement Plan and a number of actions that had been taken since the last report to the Committee in September. These included the new appointment for the position of Director of Children's Services previously reported now has a start date for 4 the December, , which will see Mr Paul Boyce, currently the Executive Director for Children at Knowsley Council, take up post .

Ms Gornik further informed that the Local Government Association launched a paper titled 'Bright Futures – Getting the Best for Children, Young People and Families at the National Children and Adult Services Conference in October. The conference also referenced the stark financial position in respect of a predicted £2 billion funding gap for children's services by 2020, which currently sees a national overspend position in the region of £605 million across England.

The presentation advised that that the fourth Ofsted monitoring visit had been arranged for the 11/12 December 2017, a Department for Education visit had also been scheduled for January 2018 as had the annual conversation with Ofsted.

The Interim Director of Children's Services went on to present key statistics that provided Members with information on current levels of poverty (including those where parents are in work), how one in ten children in England had a diagnosable mental health condition.

The presentation highlighted Wirral's position against comparator data (regional, statistical neighbours and national data) for children looked and how this information had supported future projections to be reached.

Data highlights that whilst Wirral historically had higher levels of children in the looked after population recent growth is more in line with other local authorities.

Members noted the Council's action plan now in place and that the target for 2021 represented a reduction of 152 children looked after over 3 years from the current numbers.

Members questioned the Interim Director of Children's Services on some of the detail contained in the Action Plan, in particular to matters relating to the levels of Children Looked After, including a review of the fostering service and actions to increase the number of foster care placements.

The Chair thanked the Interim Director of Children's Services for her detailed presentation.

**Resolved – That the presentation be noted.**

31 **SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN ANNUAL REPORT (2016/17)**

Dr Maggie Atkinson, Independent Chair of the Wirral Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB), introduced her presentation summarising the WSCB Annual Report 2016/17 and priorities for 2016/18.

Dr Maggie Atkinson's presentation provided the Committee with information on the statutory objectives and functions of the WSCB as contained in Section 14 of the Children Act 2004 and how the WSCB operated as an independent multi-agency body under the direction of the Independent Chair, and was not subordinate to any other body. The Independent Chair informed the Committee of five priorities outlined in the WSCB business plan 2016/18.

The Independent Chair of the WSCB then updated the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the impact of the Children and Social Work Act 2017. She informed that the Act had received Royal Assent in April 2017 and included provision to abolish LSCB's and replace with local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. Responsibility for the arrangements lies with the three statutory safeguarding partners of the LA, Police and CCG. Changes now include removal of requirement for an independent chair, revised frameworks for case reviews and child death reviews and requirement to publish arrangements which must be independently scrutinised.

Members noted that 'Working Together' (2018) statutory guidance was currently being consulted on, with final guidance anticipated in April 2018 with new local arrangements to be in place by September 2019.

At the end of the presentation members questioned Dr Maggie Atkinson on matters relating to a recent serious case review, where a decision not to publish had been taken. Dr Maggie Atkinson reiterated the position had been reached with due diligence being given to section 1 of the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 1992, and where publication of details might lead to the identification of the victim. Members commented on the lack of disclosure to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, suggesting that an appropriately redacted copy should overcome the issue. Dr Maggie Atkinson stated she would stand firm on her decision not to publish, previously advised to Members through lengthy correspondence, had been endorsed by the DfE National Panel - the Panel reporting directly to the Minister who would have had to be informed of that backing. Dr Atkinson further informed the committee that the independent author, who was experienced in that role, tried for several weeks to redact the text sufficiently and could not do so. Dr Atkinson went on to confirm that a meaningful action plan will be published.

Members further commented on the benefit of local knowledge (specifically referencing late night take-aways and taxi licensing) that may be helpful in further investigations. Dr Atkinson advised that any such information, particularly if relating to criminal activity i.e. grooming, should be reported to the Police.

Members noted that when renewing taxi licences, drivers undertook training on this topic.

**Resolved – That the presentation be noted.**

## 32 **DOMESTIC ABUSE - STRATEGY DELIVERY UPDATE**

Mr Mark Camborne, Lead Commissioner Community Services & Resilience introduced his report that provided an update on the progress made implementing the Wirral pledge – Zero Tolerance towards Domestic Abuse.

The report provided a highlight on the work that had been undertaken across all statutory agencies and the voluntary and third sector in the 18 months since the launch of the Pledge. In addition the report also described the future steps in the bid to eradicate domestic abuse and harmful practices.

The report reaffirmed that Domestic Violence and Abuse was usually perpetrated by men against women but not exclusively. Nationally the Office of National Statistics estimates around 1.2m woman and 784,000 men experience Domestic Violence and Abuse a year. However, evidence showed women were significantly disproportionately affected by Domestic Violence and Abuse at high risk levels and were more likely to experience serious physical harm or death from a partner, as well as serious coercive and controlling behaviour. In Wirral 97% of high risk cases engaged with an IDVA (Independent Domestic Violence Advisor) were females.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted that underpinning the action plan was the recognition that both genders, as well as the wider communities, were part of the solution to preventing and reducing violence and abuse. Domestic Violence and Abuse was non-discriminate: it occurred in all groups and sections of society, but domestic violence and abuse may be experienced differently due to, and compounded by race, sexuality, disability, age, religion, culture, class or mental health.

The report also informed that the Zero Tolerance towards Domestic Abuse pledge methodology was based around a 4 P's approach which was familiar to many of the partners. The 4 P's being:

- Prevention – and Early Intervention
- Provision
- Partnership
- Perpetrators

## Resolved – That

- (1) the progress made in the first stages of the delivery against the Zero Tolerance towards Domestic Abuse pledge be noted;
- (2) the next steps in the Pledge Action Plan 2017/18 be endorsed; and
- (3) Members pledged their support of the Wirral Domestic Abuse Alliance and the Zero Tolerance campaign.

### 33 FINANCIAL MONITORING - 2017/18 Q2

Mr Andrew Roberts, Senior Manager Financial Management introduced the regular report of the Assistant Director: Finance and Section 151 Officer that set out the projected revenue and capital monitoring position for 2017/18 as at the close of quarter 2 (30 September 2017).

The report summarised information that had been drawn from the relevant sections of the most recent Cabinet revenue and capital monitoring reports and combined with additional relevant service information to produce a bespoke report for the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee that included the following:

- Performance against the revenue budget (including savings, income and debt); and
- Performance against the capital budget

The Senior Manager Financial Management provided Members with a summary presentation that set out the budgetary figures for 2017/18 as follows:

	<b>£m</b>
Safeguarding and Social Work	15.9
Commissioned Care	25.4
Early Help	6.9
Disability / SEND	4.8
Transport Adults and Children's	5.5
Other Children's Services	6.7
Assets and Teacher retirement	17.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>82.9</b>

Members were apprised of budget and forecast costs for the Commissioned Care figure (being the largest element of the CYP budget), as below:

	<b>Budget £000</b>	<b>Forecast cost £000</b>
Residential	8,971	10,534
Foster Agency	3,181	3,854

Foster in house	6,384	6,085
Special Guardianship Order / Residence Order	3,138	3,375
Adoption	1,253	1,352
Stay Put / Greenbank	474	384
Contingency / other	31	331
Commissioned Services	2,004	1,929
<b>Total</b>	<b>25,435</b>	<b>27,844</b>

Members were further apprised of the numbers and unit costs in relation to the Commissioned Care, as below:

	<b>Number</b>	<b>£ week</b>	<b>£ p.a.</b>
Residential	73	2,842	48,000
Semi Res	12	1,545	81,000
Foster Agency	99	832	43,000
Foster in house	521	200	10,400
Special Guardianship Order / Residence Order	417	155	8,100
Adoption	173	42	7,400
Staying Put	36	211	11,000
Greenbank	2	764	40,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,338</b>		

#### **Resolved – That**

**(1) the quarter 2 revenue forecast overspend of £3.9 million be noted; and**

**(2) the performance of the capital projects be noted.**

#### **34 2017/18 QUARTER 2 WIRRAL PLAN PERFORMANCE**

Ms Deborah Gornik, the Interim Director of Children’s Services introduced her report that provided the 2017/18 Quarter 2 (July – September 2017) performance report for the Wirral Plan pledges under the remit of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The report provided a description of the progress in Quarter 2 as well as providing available data in relation to a range of outcome indicators and supporting measures.

The Interim Director’s report informed of a range of key indicators and performance targets, namely:

- Foundation stage - percentage of children achieving a good level of development year end forecast 2017/18 was 69.4% with a slight drop in performance compared to the 2016/17 figure of 69.6% - Wirral still leading in national / regional comparisons, which is encouraging.

- Take up of the 2 year old offer by eligible families as identified by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) offer is 92.6% (Q1) – Data collected on a termly basis, next update in Q3).
- Percentage of children who received a 12 month Health Visitor review by the time they turned 12 months, was 64.4%, now 86% (performance improvement from Red to Green).
- Percentage of infants who receive a 6-8 week development check by the time they reach 8 weeks 84.9% – GP data better return (note: now flagged as Amber, was Red).
- Officers would continue to focus on the best way to gather data on the use of medication for Attention Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) – the CCG is currently unable to provide updated data and are reviewing alternative methods to report in future quarters.
- Permanent exclusions – Discussions have taken place with the Regional Schools Commissioner regarding the increased numbers, and the Local Authority is challenging schools appropriately in order to address the higher than average number of exclusions.

The Interim Director informed that a more detailed report on educational attainment in Wirral schools would be presented to the next meeting of the Committee by the Lead commissioner Schools.

The report informed that there had been an overall decline in the Child Protection Plan rate over the last 12 months and work was underway to ensure effective review of these cases.

Members noted that the percentage of repeat referrals to children's social care had shown a continuing decrease and was similar to the most recently available statistical neighbour values.

The Interim Director reported that quarter two continued to illustrate the complex picture of Domestic Abuse in Wirral. The launch of the Safer Wirral Hub was enabling an improved multi-agency approach to embed the Council's zero tolerance approach across Wirral.

The Chair thanked the Interim Director of Children's Services for her report.

**Resolved – That the report be noted.**

## 35 REALITY CHECK VISIT TO THE LEAVING CARE SERVICE - FEEDBACK

The Chair introduced his report that provided feedback from a visit to the Leaving Care Service on Wednesday 18 October 2017.

The Chair informed that Committee Members had previously agreed the principle of undertaking a series of Reality Check visits by small groups of Members, and that this had been the second in the proposed series of visits.

A number of Members commented on the value of the visits that enabled those Members to engage directly with frontline staff. The Chair informed that the principle of the visits had come about from a recommendation contained in a Working Group Scrutiny Review on the subject of Children Looked After.

The Committee noted the content of the report that contained a detailed summary of the visit, background to the Leaving Care Service and Members key conclusions.

**Resolved – That the report be noted.**

36 **CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE REPORT**

The Chair introduced his report that provided an update regarding progress made since the last Committee meeting held on 26 September 2017. The report informed that the current work programme was made up of a combination of scrutiny reviews, workshops, standing items and requested officer reports. The Chair advised that the agenda report provided the Committee with the opportunity to plan and regularly review its work across the municipal year. The current work programme for the Committee was attached as an appendix to the report. The report also informed that the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee, in cooperation with the other three Overview and Scrutiny Committees, was responsible for proposing and delivering an annual scrutiny work programme.

The Chair highlighted a number of key points pertinent to his report, namely:

- that the Statutory Care Plan scrutiny review was now underway, the scope having been agreed and further task and finish group meetings being scheduled. It was hoped that the final report would be available for the March 2018 meeting of the Committee;
- Reality Check Visits – the next visit to the Early Childhood Service was expected to take place on or about the 6/7 December 2017. The Chair asked for Members to take part in the visit – the following Members volunteered to attend:

Councillor Tom Usher  
Councillor Alan Brighthouse  
Councillor Paul Hayes  
Councillor Moira McLaughlin  
Councillor Chris Meaden  
Councillor Jean Stapleton;

- a training session for members was being planned, and a provisional date had been set for 16 January 2017; and
- it was anticipated that workshops would be held for members of each of the Scrutiny Committees to review proposals as the 2018/19 budget is developed. The most likely timing of which would be during January 2018.

**Resolved – That the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme update for 2017/18 be noted.**

Prior to closing the meeting the Chair expressed his gratitude and thanks of the Committee for all the work undertaken by Ms Deborah Gornik in her role as Interim Director of Children's Services.