

# CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 21 June 2022

Present: Councillor K Hodson (Chair)

Councillors C Cooke E Gleaves  
C Carubia D Kenny  
H Collinson S Powell-Wilde  
C Povall V Wilson  
S Bennett A Wright

## 1 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair welcomed Members, Officers and members of the public to the meeting.

## 2 APOLOGIES

No apologies were received.

## 3 MEMBERS CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Members were asked to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests and any other relevant interest and to state the nature of the interest.

The following declaration was made:

Councillor Sue Powell Wilde	Personal interest by virtue of item 7 by virtue of her position as foster carer in Wirral through a private fostering agency.
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## 4 MINUTES

**Resolved - That the minutes of the meeting held on 10 March, 2022 be approved and adopted as a correct record**

## 5 PUBLIC AND MEMBERS QUESTIONS

No public or member questions were received.

## 6 **INDEPENDENT REVIEWING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22**

The Assistant Director for Children and Families introduced the report of the Director of Children, Families and Education advising that since March 2010 there had been a requirement that the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) service within each local authority produce an Annual Report of activity regarding Children Looked After (CLA).

It was explained how the purpose of the IRO Annual Report, attached as appendix 1 to the report was to evaluate the extent to which Wirral Council had fulfilled its responsibilities to its Children Looked After for the period 1 April 2021 – 31 March 2022.

The report focused upon the role of the safeguarding unit, key performance data, quality assurance, the impact of Covid 19, the local authority designated Officer (LADO) and escalations. The report also focused on key priorities for 2022 - 23.

Officers responded to a number of questions in relation to LADO enquiries and the thresholds for investigation and challenges in relation to timeframes of children looked after review meetings being completed. It was suggested that a workshop may be helpful for Members to gain insight into how the threshold is met in order to pursue an investigation.

Further clarity was sought upon methods of communication with children looked after and Members were advised that there was currently a combination of meetings virtually or in person.

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

## 7 **FOSTERING ANNUAL REPORT 1ST APRIL 2021 - 31ST MARCH 2022**

The Head of Service for Permanence introduced the report of the Director of Children, Families and Education. The report provided an overview of the Fostering Annual Report for the period of 31st March 2021 - 1st April 2022 for consideration and scrutiny by Members.

The Fostering Annual Report provided an overview of the fostering service in terms of: key performance to date, analysis of current practice, key issues and risks, plans for continuous improvement and progress over the next 12 months. Members were advised that the monitoring of the Fostering Service was required under the Care Standards Act 2000 and Fostering Regulations 2011 and the Fostering National Minimum Standards 2011.

The report focused upon achievements such as new reporting tools, enhanced training, increased numbers of foster panels and the improvement

of the quality of foster panels. Challenges were also reported upon, most notably the proportion of prospective foster parents converting into applications being at an all time low of 6 %. The report set out service priorities for 2022 -23.

Officers responded to a number of questions in relation to training for foster carers, the percentage of children who were placed with parents or fostering agencies, financial incentives and the availability of peer mentors.

A discussion ensued regarding recruitment of foster carers and some suggestions were put forward by members to officers including: incentives for retention of foster care placements i.e. an additional payment after two years, foster carer open days, introduction of admin support for foster carers and discount on council tax or leisure services. Members were advised that a comprehensive review would be undertaken regarding payments and incentives for foster carers.

**Resolved – That the Annual Fostering Report 2021-22 be agreed and noted.**

## **8      PROGRESS REPORT 1: WIRRAL STATEMENT OF ACTION FOR SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES (SEND)**

The Director of Children, Families and Education provided Members of the Committee with an update on progress towards the Wirral Statement of Action (WSoA). Members were advised how in September 2021, the local area's services for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) was inspected by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

Members were advised how, as a result of the inspection, the Local Authority were required to submit a Written Statement of Action to address the areas of improvement which had been identified. Attached as appendix 1 to the report was the final version of the Written Statement of Action (WSoA), approved by Ofsted on behalf of the CQC on 28th March 2022. The WSoA identified six workstreams which would guide the improvement plan for SEND, each with a dedicated workstream lead from the local authority (adults and children's services) and the Clinical Commissioning Group.

In response to a question by a Member it was explained that a key barrier to the progress of the consideration of Educational Health Care Plans (EHCPs) had been the difficulty in recruiting Educational Psychologists, however within 12 months EHCP progress should be within the required timescales.

A discussion ensued regarding deadlines and the timeframes for completion were described as ambitious by Members. In response, Members were

assured that resources were in place in order to meet deadlines throughout both the Local Authority, Schools and the NHS.

Members welcomed the Wirral Statement of Action and acknowledged the impressive and innovative work that had already been undertaken. Members were advised that further reports would be taken to this committee to inform and update on progress.

**Resolved – That**

**(1) the progress made to date on the actions in the Wirral Statement of Action be noted; and**

**(2) a further monitoring report be received at a future date.**

**9 2021-22 BUDGET MONITORING FOR QUARTER 4 (1 JAN -31 MAR), 2021-22 OUTTURN**

A Report by the Director of Children, Families and Education, presented by the Senior Finance Business Partner provided a summary of the year-end revenue position for the 2021/22 financial year for Children, Families and Education.

Members were advised how the Children Young People and Education Committee was accountable for ensuring that the budgets remained within the relevant funding envelope and would take collective responsibility via the Policy and Resources Committee to ensure that the whole Council budget remains in balance at all times and should a deficit be forecast, agreeing mitigating actions to bring the budget back into balance.

It was outlined that the year-end revenue outturn for 2021/22, represented a favourable variance of £0.640m against revenue budget of £87.318m.

**Resolved – That:**

**(1) the year-end revenue position of 0.640m favourable outturn variance reported for 2021/22 be noted;**

**(2) the progress on the achievement of approved savings and the year-end position of 2021/22 be noted;**

**(3) the reserves allocated to the Committee for future commitments be noted; and**

**(4) the year-end capital position reported for 2021/22 be noted.**

## 10 2022/23 BUDGET MONITORING AND BUDGET SETTING

A Report by the Director of Resources, presented by the Senior Finance Business Partner set out how the 2022/23 budget would be monitored through the Committee system, which would facilitate the Policy and Services Committees to take ownership of their specific budgets and present appropriate challenge and scrutiny of Officers on the management and performance of those budgets.

Members were advised of the concurrent activity of budget setting for 2023/24, and how this would be approached, incorporating:

- revisions to the approved Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) – the formulation of savings proposals and presentation of pressure/growth items;
- the application of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) principles that underpin the budget process and decision-making, with links to the Wirral Plan; and
- how savings plans are to be configured
- considerations of requisite consultation exercises; and
- the role of the Finance Sub-Committee

Members observed that there had been an underspend on the 'Transforming Care Short Breaks' project and it was explained that the scheme was a capital scheme and the money would be used to purchase and refurbish a property to deliver a three bedroom children's home.

### **Resolved That –**

**(1) the process for in-year monitoring of the 2022/23 budget be noted;**

**(2) the 2023/24 budget setting process be noted;**

**(3) a Budget Monitoring Panel be established to comprise of the Committee Chair and Spokespersons, in line with Section 3.12 of the report with sessions to be led by the relevant Director/Assistant Director; and**

**(4) budget workshops be held as detailed in Section 3.26 of the report, the outcome of which to be reported back to Committee in September 2022.**

## 11 CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE REPORT

A report by the Director of Children, Families and Education, introduced by the Department's Performance and Improvement Manager provided Members with the latest performance information for Children's Services.

The Improvement Manager drew Members' attention to details within the report such as the increase of social care contact and referrals following the reduction in covid 19 restrictions. It was further explained how evidence showed there was a clear correlation in Wirral between the average household income, standard of living and volumes of Children in Need (CIN). It was also acknowledged that the rate of CIN in Wirral had increased by comparison to last year, but remained in line with statistical neighbours.

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

## 12 **WIRRAL'S EARLY HELP SYSTEM**

A report by the Director of Children, Young People and Education, presented by the Assistant Director, Early Help and Prevention provided Members with an opportunity to apply scrutiny to Wirral's early help system, led by Children's Services.

Members were advised how since inception of the Early Help and Prevention Service in 2018, there had been ambition to:

- Optimise the total resource in the system for early help;
- lead high-quality early help services that prevent children and young people requiring statutory intervention; and
- transform services to provide empowering, strengths-based support for children, young people, their parents, and carers.

Members were informed that the impact of Wirral's early help system could be evidenced in performance data over a 3 year period (January 2019 to January 2022). Most notably, it was clearly evidenced within the report that reduced demand for children's social care had been accompanied by increasing numbers of early help episodes, thus indicating that more children, young people, and families were now successfully being supported outside of the statutory system.

An initiative of interest was the implementation of the newly commissioned early help alliance, Family Toolbox that had been instrumental in facilitating a shift in behaviours. It was explained how the family toolbox gave access to a wide variety of supportive experiences for example online resources, one to one family coaching, grassroots activities and group support. Members heard how since launching on 4 April 22, the Family Toolbox had over 3000 unique

users viewing over 19,000 pages in its first month. The report detailed some positive feedback from parents and carers.

A query was raised about the accessibility of the website and the accessibility of the website was confirmed to be in accordance with accessibility regulations. Furthermore, Members were advised that the early help alliance have bases across Wirral should individuals wish to meet an agent in person.

In response to a question, Members heard how analytics on website use were in place and although no personal details were collected, a record of use is maintained.

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

13 **CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

The Head of Legal Services outlined the report detailing the work programme for the Children, Young People and Education Committee for the municipal year.

The report also sought the Committees view on the re-establishing of the working group for the provision of food and activities in school holidays during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Councillor Chris Cooke queried the Child Poverty Working Group that had been listed on the work programme to be established and was advised that officers would follow this up.

**Resolved – That**

**(1) the work programme be noted;**

**(2) the working group for the provision of food and activities in school holidays during the Covid-19 Pandemic be re-established; and**

**(3) Councillors Cherry Povall, Chris Carubia, Daisy Kenny and Chris Cooke be appointed to the working group for the provision of food and activities in school holidays during the Covid-19 pandemic.**

14 **APPOINTMENT OF PANELS, STATUTORY AND ADVISORY COMMITTEES AND WORKING PARTIES 2022-23**

The Head of Legal Services introduced the report which outlined the need to review the continuing need for various panels, statutory / advisory committees

and working parties, and to appoint members and named deputies to serve on those (including the statutory committees and panels) that are to be retained in 2022/2023.

**Resolved – That the Children, Young People and Education Committee**

- (1) authorise the Monitoring Officer as proper officer to carry out the wishes of the Group Leaders in allocating Members to membership of the Statutory and Advisory Committees listed in the report and to appoint those Members with effect from the date at which the proper officer is advised of the names of such Members; and**
  
- (2) note the current constitution and membership of the School Appeals Panel.**