

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 14 September 2010

<u>Present:</u>	Councillor	C Meaden (Chair)	
	Councillors	T Harney P Hayes W Clements K Hayes	A McArdle C Povall T Smith
<u>In attendance:</u>	Councillor	S Clarke	
<u>Apologies</u>	Councillor	W Smith Mr R Neale	Mr M Clarke
<u>Deputy:</u>	Councillor	M Johnston (for Mrs PM Williams)	
<u>Co-opted Members:</u>		Mrs J Kearney	Mrs J Owens

14 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST / PARTY WHIP

Members were asked to consider whether they had a personal or prejudicial interest in connection with any item on the agenda and, if so, to declare it and to state the nature of such interest.

Members were reminded that they should also declare, pursuant to paragraph 18 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, whether they were subject to a party whip in connection with the item to be considered and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of the whipping arrangement.

Councillor C Meaden declared a personal general interest because of her daughter's employment within the Children and Young People's Department.

15 MINUTES

Members were requested to receive the minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 2 June, 2010.

In connection with minute 13, the Director of Law, HR and Asset Management informed the meeting of the position in respect of voting and non-voting co-opted members. In accordance with the Council's constitution the Committee had 4 co-opted members with the right to vote on education matters, 2 parent governor representatives together with one Church of England Diocesan representative and one Roman Catholic Diocesan representative. The co-opted member for the voluntary and community sectors did not have any voting rights.

All Overview and Scrutiny Committees were entitled to recommend to Council the appointment of a number of people as non-voting co-optees. Any change to the constitution would have to be made by a meeting of the Council.

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 2 June, 2010, be approved as a correct record.

16 PRESENTATION ON FIRST QUARTER PERFORMANCE 2010/11

Nancy Clarkson, Head of Planning and Performance, gave a presentation on the first quarter performance report and upon key activities which were relevant to the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

She gave details of what was working well, including:

- The percentage of final SEN statements issued within 26 weeks had exceeded the target set and reached 100%.
- There had been an increase in placement choice for foster care. 7.0% placement stability (number of moves) was in the OFSTED “Very Good” category.
- Through effective planning and alternative provision arrangements no children had child protection plans lasting more than 2 years.
- All child protection cases were reviewed within required timescales.

In her presentation Nancy Clarkson also referred to key performance issues which had not met their targets and key risks including:

- Birkenhead University Academy project which was subject to national review, although funding for Birkenhead Girls Academy had been confirmed.
- The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) transfer of duties to the LA which was successfully completed but new government guidance had been received and funding for the Sixth Form College and Wirral Metropolitan College would now be managed by the Young Persons Learning Organisation which had implications on the recent staffing transition.

The Director elaborated on some of the points raised in the presentation and the measures being taken to address these points, including the increase in the number of children on a Child Protection Plan and those on a plan for a second or subsequent time. Also the number of 16 to 18 year olds who were not in education, employment or training (NEET).

In respect of the financial position, the current forecast was for a £900,000 overspend although the Director expressed confidence that by the year end the budget would be balanced by the year end.

Resolved – That the presentation be noted.

17 **ANNUAL UNANNOUNCED INSPECTION OF CONTACT, REFERRAL AND ASSESSMENT ARRANGEMENTS WITHIN WIRRAL COUNCIL'S CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report on the first unannounced inspection of Contact, Referral and Assessment arrangements within local authority children's services in Wirral Council which was conducted by Ofsted on 20 and 21 July 2010. The letter setting out the findings of the inspection was attached to the report.

The report and letter outlined the findings of the inspection and the six strengths, thirteen areas of satisfactory practice and four areas for development. The inspection was very positive and reflected the hard work by staff and managers to improve services for children and families. This was a challenging area of working requiring constant vigilance and attention, which would be sustained through a constant focus on maintaining and improving services still further, for some of the most vulnerable children in Wirral.

The provision of excellent contact, referral and assessment services for children in need, at risk of significant harm or who had experienced significant harm was an area of work demanding constant attention, monitoring and oversight. The inspection had confirmed that good systems were in place to do this; however, there could never be any room for complacency. It was an area of considerable risk.

Members expressed gratitude to the staff for the excellent report and asked that the OFSTED action plan be circulated to the Committee once available.

The Director, responding to comments from Members, stated that this key area of work was on the Corporate Risk Register.

Resolved – That the congratulations and thanks of this Committee be conveyed to all those staff involved in this area of work and the report be noted.

18 **APPROVED SCHEME OF DELEGATION - CONTRACTS EXCEEDING £50,000**

The Director of Children's services reported, in accordance with the Contracts Procedure Rules, on those instances where he had exercised his delegated authority to accept tenders and to appoint contractors. The contracts were in respect of a range of services, including:

- Building works
- Transport of pupils to swimming baths
- Out-of-authority placements
- Residential care placements
- Extensions to existing contracts

Resolved – That the report be noted.

19 **SCHOOLS' PERFORMANCE**

Mark Parkinson, Head of Learning & Achievement, together with Marie Lawrence, Strategic Service Manager (Primary & Early Years), Stuart Bellerby, Strategic Service Manager (Secondary) and Vivian Stafford, Strategic Service Manager (Post - 16), gave a comprehensive presentation on the headline figures for the 2010 test results at Early Years, Key stages 1, 2, 4 (GCSE) and 5 (Post - 16) and for Looked After Children.

The Director and officers elaborated on the information in the presentation in response to Members' questions.

Resolved – That the presentation be noted.

20 **0-19 STANDARDS SUB-COMMITTEE MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the 0-19 Standards Sub-Committee, held on 13 July, 2010, were submitted. The Sub-Committee had considered a number of issues, in particular the Ofsted reports relating to the following establishments:

Colleges

Good

Wirral Metropolitan College

Special Schools

Good

The Lyndale School
Meadowside School

Early Years Centre

Outstanding

Ganney's Meadow

Secondary School

Satisfactory

Bebington High Sports College

Primary Schools

Inadequate

Castleway Primary

Satisfactory

Hillside Primary
St John's Catholic Primary
Woodslee Primary
Heygarth Primary
Millfields Primary

Good

Eastway Primary
Park Primary
Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary
St Alban's Catholic Primary
Heswall St Peter's CE Primary

A Member suggested that it would be useful to have a list of previous inspections so that they could be compared to the current inspection results and the Director responded that he would be happy to circulate a list for each of the schools.

The Chair remarked that this was the last meeting of the Committee which Marie Lawrence, Strategic Service Manager (Primary & Early Years), would be attending before taking early retirement and thanked her for all her work for the authority.

Resolved – That the minutes be noted and the thanks of this Committee be accorded to Marie Lawrence.

21 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee received an update on its work programme including the reports to be scheduled for the November meeting.

A Member referred to the “Narrowing the gap” – Impact of deprivation funding’ scrutiny review and the need to continue this to a conclusion. The Chair suggested the need for the original members of the Scrutiny Review Panel to meet. Councillor Sheila Clarke, Cabinet Member for Children’s Services and Lifelong Learning, and one of the original Panel members, indicated that she would be happy to meet, together with one of the Scrutiny Officers.

It was also suggested that the work carried out previously with looked after children should be revisited and the Director commented that he would be happy to facilitate this as there had been many changes over the past couple of years, including the establishment of the Children in Care Council.

Mrs J Kearney expressed her wish to be included in the discussion of the work programme, which had previously been agreed, and the Chair apologised for her omission from previous discussions.

The Director responded to Members’ comments and sought to clarify some concerns with regard to suggested topics including the fact that Sure Start was currently funded by a ring-fenced grant but he was not aware of any intention to remove this grant. He would be reporting back to the Committee on the impact of the

Government's Comprehensive Spending Review and also on the Schools National Review.

Resolved – That the Work Programme be agreed with the addition of a report on the Governors' support service to be considered at the January or March, 2011 meeting.

22 **FORWARD PLAN**

The Committee had been invited to review the Forward Plan prior to the meeting in order for it to consider, having regard to the Committee's work programme, whether scrutiny should take place of any items contained within the Plan and, if so, how it could be done within relevant timescales and resources.

Resolved – That the forward plan be noted.

23 **ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS ACCEPTED BY THE CHAIR**

The Chair informed the Committee of a number of items she and members wished to raise, including:

- (1) The need for children's homes visits by Members - Julia Hassall, Head of Children's Social Care, responded that she would be inviting those Members interested to a brief introductory session prior to visits being arranged
- (2) A visit to the new Woodchurch High School – the Director responded that he would be happy to arrange this.
- (3) Funding for special needs – the Director remarked that he would bring a report on any future Government 'green' paper to the Committee on any proposed changes to the system of Special Educational Needs.

In respect of the Children and Young People's Task Force, one of four Task Forces which had been set up, Councillor McArdle then moved, seconded by the Chair, that –

"In view of the fact that this Scrutiny and Overview Committee is charged within the Council's Constitution with the task of Scrutinising Children's Services, and that this role appears to have been bypassed through the appointment of a Task Force acting outside the normal range of Council meetings and procedures, this Committee urgently requests the following:

- (i) A standing item of the regular minutes of the Children and Young People's Task Force on this agenda for the duration of its existence.
- (ii) A report which sets out the process that was followed in the selection and appointment of the Task Force members.
- (iii) A copy of any register or declaration of interests by Task Force members.
- (iv) Details of whether any vetting procedures were required as they have apparently been given access to Looked after Children, and, if so, whether or not those procedures were followed.

- (v) A presentation from Officers that mirrors the presentation that was originally given to the Task Force which has informed the questions on this area within the consultation questionnaire.
- (vi) A detailed explanation from officers on the exact meaning and implication of each question concerning Children's Services in the questionnaire. (For example, when questions talk about voluntary services stepping in to provide alternative services, are we talking about commissioning services from voluntary agencies, or just hoping they will fill a gap with no additional resources provided if we withdraw from providing services ourselves?)
- (vii) Any potential costings that may have been drawn up as part of the options being considered."

Some Members expressed the view that they would need some time to consider this motion. The Chair suggested that a special meeting of the Committee be arranged to consider this motion.

Resolved – That a special meeting of the Committee be held to consider this motion on a date to be arranged.