

WIRRAL CHILDREN'S TRUST BOARD – 20th MAY 2011

District Board Review

1. Introduction

- 1.1 It was agreed in January 2010 that the District Boards were to be re-launched and a review of their effectiveness was to be completed by April 2011. This report summarises the review undertaken by the District Managers and makes recommendations regarding the future.

2 District Boards

- 2.1 There are very mixed views about the success of the district boards. A survey was sent to all members. South and West Boards sent out 16 surveys with 4 returned; Wallasey sent 12 and received 3 responses and Birkenhead sent out 15 surveys and received 7 responses. Giving a response rate of 32.6%. The chairs in Wallasey and Birkenhead responded but the other chairs did not send a response to the survey.
- 2.2 Birkenhead had the highest number of positive comments from its members who value the information sharing and the opportunity to discuss local working. Birkenhead has also built upon the work of Tranmere Together and has members from the local neighbourhood management group with direct resident input into how the Children and Young Peoples plan is delivered in the Birkenhead area.
- 2.3 Wallasey and South and West have not had a similar neighbourhood renewal project to draw upon and involve members of the community in its work. Comments from both of these districts highlight a lack of understanding of what the district board is for and the value of sharing information.
- 2.4 Elected Members have been very active in chairing and attending the boards, and taken a keen interest in hearing how the Children and Young Peoples plan works in practice.
- 2.5 All the boards have action plans but these are not unique to the local area. They replicate the work that agencies are already doing in that area. This has an impact on attendance across all 4 boards as agencies are already reporting on their progress in a number of different forums such as the Strategy Groups and as such do not see value in reporting to the District Board. There is also no sense that the boards can hold members to account for failure to attend or to provide reports on actions assigned to them.
- 2.6 Birkenhead district is the only board that has regular and consistent attendance from the majority of its members. One reason for this is the investment that Julia Hassall has made in the development of the board. However, another reason is that for the majority of agencies, their work largely involves Birkenhead. Given the nominations for membership were set at a senior operational and strategic level, members choose to attend Birkenhead rather than the other Boards. This is a serious capacity issue for agencies as those identified already attend the Strategy Groups and cannot attend all four boards. When alternative representation has been arranged, it has been difficult for those representatives to understand their role and their attendance reduces as other priorities demand their time and there is a lack of relevance for their agency. In Wallasey and South and West, the agenda has been mainly social care driven and involved the area teams as the District Managers have struggled to get engagement from others. Attendance has been particularly problematic for the South and West boards.

- 2.7 The District Boards do not have a mechanism that evidences its role and the accountability. It does not have a direct role in managing or commissioning services and as such this does not allow for full governance of local services. Their function is dependant on goodwill and interest from the relevant agencies.
- 2.8 As reported above, there is a lot of duplication for agencies in their reporting to their own individual agencies and the Strategy Groups. Partnership working is well developed and on the ground in each District there are examples of cross-agency working that is happening regardless of the District Boards which is not shaped by them. Agencies take the overall Children and Young Peoples plan as the template for planning and development.
- 2.9 It is therefore hard to argue that District Boards are effective and represent value for money. In their individual reviews, no District Manager could clearly evidence that District Boards made a difference to outcomes for children in their district.

3 Conclusions

- 3.1 The District Board model has not been effective in monitoring the delivery of the Children and Young Peoples plan on a local level as the performance monitoring takes place via the Strategy Groups.
- 3.2 There is value in local agencies and services on an operational level coming together to share practice and develop local services. Both Birkenhead and Wallasey Districts have multi-agency meetings on a regular basis which attract wide representation from front-line staff across all agencies. The co-location in South and West will further develop and enhance such an approach.
- 3.3 This approach enables a more local approach to delivery and cross-partnership working and also enables information sharing.
- 3.4 It is therefore recommended that the District Board model ceases, that performance monitoring continues to be monitored via the Strategy Groups and, where relevant to local need, District Managers build on the elements which have worked successfully in developing effective multi-agency working and engagement with their local communities.

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 That Wirral Children's Trust Board endorse the report.

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