

LGA Wirral Improvement Board

Progress Report Wirral Improvement Board 19th October 2012

The Programme Board is a partnership between Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council and the Local Government Association and will provide oversight, support and challenge to Wirral's improvement and transformation journey.

The Board aims to support the Council to:

- Demonstrate its ambitions for its local communities
- Drive forward its plans for improvement in corporate governance and services in a timely way
- Prioritise what is most important
- Create the capacity and plans to embed lasting improvements and culture change
- Deliver improved services within realistic spending constraints

The Improvement Board's role is to:

- Provide support and guidance
- Identify and signpost appropriate good practice
- Provide challenge and act as a critical friend
- Ensure the contributions from different external agencies/bodies to Wirral's improvement journey are coordinated
- Ensure there is a single, integrated and holistic improvement plan that can be clearly understood and communicated internally and externally
- Endorse decisions which impact on political and managerial leadership arrangements, corporate governance and improvement in advance of them going through Wirral's own decision-making structures, e.g. Cabinet or Council.

Meeting in Public - Every third meeting of the Board will be held in public to report on progress and take questions. These sessions will be organised by the Council. The public will be asked to supply questions in advance of the meeting. The Chair will be responsible for answering these questions. Any questions relating to issues that are not the business of the Improvement Board will be forward to the correct officer for them to respond directly.

Key messages from the last 3 Board meetings

Messages from Board Meeting 22nd June 2012

The Board welcomed the members of the public who had attended and the interest they showed in its work. There were three questions, which were discussed, and these centred on Wirral Council's overall vision for the future; Freedom of Information and transparency in the authority and accountability. The Board agreed that Wirral Council would commission an independent review of information sharing within the authority and with the public to ensure best practice.

The Board considered the new Elected Member Development Programme, which is being developed and commended the work of the working group behind it. The Programme is ambitious and will provide an accredited training and development programme to cover the needs of all Members in Wirral to ensure they have the current skills and knowledge needed to oversee an effective local authority. The Board will look at this again in more detail in September together with the parallel programme for officer training and development.

There was a detailed discussion of the progress being made in Adults Services following a presentation by its Director. This reported on the recent external Peer Challenge of Safeguarding which the Department had commissioned and which had found significant progress made although there is much more still to do. An Action Plan is being developed to address the issues raised and the Department is also preparing for a further Peer Review of all its services next week. The outcomes of the Peer Review and Peer Challenge will be reported openly once the Action Plan is complete and the Board will receive a further report in September.

The Board considered the draft Improvement Plan that the authority's Management Team had developed and commended the work done thus far. The key priority identified was to engage with all Members and to take on board their comments and views. There will be a session for all Members on 11th July to discuss the Improvement Plan and the role of the Improvement Board in supporting it.

Messages from Board Meeting 20th July 2012

The Board welcomed the appointment of Graham Burgess as the new Chief Executive of the Council. Graham is the Chief Executive of Blackburn with Darwen Council and Blackburn with Darwen Primary Care Trust at the moment. He is hoping to start with the Council early in September 2012.

A discussion took place about the changing role, size and governance of councils in light of significantly streamlined budgets. Councillors from Wirral agreed to debate this further with their Local Government Association counterparts. This work will aid the Council in establishing a vision for the future.

A review of the first six months of the Improvement Board was debated. Looking forward, for the next six months, it was agreed that the Board needed to deliver on its core purpose of assuring the improvement process, endorsing those issues which relate to the corporate governance, leadership and improvement process but being clear that the decision making role rests with the Council. For the next six months, the Board will monitor:

- Achievements in terms of improvement,
- Ensure that Wirral has support and commentary on progress, and that,
- It has delivered changes following appropriate consultation.

The complete version of the high-level improvement plan, including a first indication of how it would be resourced, was accepted by the Improvement Board. The Council confirmed that both councillors and officers had shared ownership of the plan.

The Board reflected on the initial findings of the Peer Review work with the Adult Social Care Directorate. They welcomed the positive signs of improvement and the realism of knowing that there were still further improvements to be made. The Council will publish the report as soon as it arrives.

Messages from Board Meeting 21st September 2012

The Board welcomed the sense of purpose and direction both politically and managerially that had developed since its last meeting in July. The Board felt that there was a new culture at the top which was tackling issues as they emerged in partnership between the new Chief Executive and the three Party Leaders. The new Leadership Board had brought a measure of stability to the council and had assisted in developing a consensus on improvement priorities.

The Senior Management Restructure would provide for a stronger corporate management function both to drive through the improvement plan priorities and to transform the performance and delivery of Wirral services. The Board welcomed the budget review that has been undertaken and the measures put in place to reduce the current in year budget gap. The Board also welcomed the update on the current budget consultation and noted that there had been 2,500 responses to date.

The Improvement Board noted the real progress that had been made in moving the Improvement Plan towards the implementation phase. Wirral is aware of the need to develop a narrative to the plan in order to provide a better sense of direction and an overall vision for the borough. The council is also aware of the need to embed appraisals and outcomes within the plan and is addressing these areas.

The Improvement Board would wish to see in future meeting the council's Scrutiny Forward Plan, the Members Development Plan and the Cultural Change Plan. The Improvement Board is keen to engage with the forthcoming Corporate Peer Challenge. The Board noted the need to streamline the agenda of meetings in order that it could focus on the areas that really matter.

The Improvement Board welcomed the comments from the District Auditor which indicated that there were early signs of improvement in relation to the Annual Audit Letter and that the council had provided a good response to the HESPE report with a single action plan that links well to the improvement plan.