

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 11 September 2012

Present: Councillor W Clements (Chair)

Councillors J Crabtree C Povall
D Dodd W Smith
P Doughty P Williams
P Hayes Smith
B Mooney Owens

Co-opted: Mrs J Owens
Mrs N Smith

Apologies Mr A Scott

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

Members of the Committee were asked to declare any disclosable pecuniary or non pecuniary interests, in connection with any item(s) on the agenda and state the nature of the 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 any item(s) to be considered and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of the whipping arrangement.

Councillor Jim Crabtree declared a non pecuniary interest in Minute 26 post by virtue of him being a foster carer.

Mrs Jane Owens declared a non pecuniary interest in Minute 26 post by virtue of her work for Social Enterprise and being a member of a Foster Panel.

Councillor Wendy Clements declared a non pecuniary interest in Minute 23 post by virtue of her employment and as a Governor of a school.

20 MINUTES

Members were requested to receive the minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 6 June, 2012.

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting of 6 June, 2012 be approved as a correct record.

21 ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Chair agreed to vary the order of business.

22 **2012/13 QUARTER ONE PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL REVIEW**

The Acting Director of Children's Services reported upon the performance of the Council's Corporate Plan 2012-13 and Departmental Plan 2012-13 for April 2012 - June 2012, in relation to children and young people. She provided an overview of performance, resources and risk monitoring.

For Quarter one of 2012/13 there were 25 performance indicators that could be reported, of these 88% were achieving or exceeding target. The report gave details of the corrective action being taken for those indicators missing their target.

The Acting Director of Children's Services further reported upon pressures of £4.9 million that had been identified by the Children and Young People's Department. The main areas of pressure related to looked after children including residential placements and foster care allowances and home to school transport. Numbers of children in care continued to remain high compared to similar Councils. Budgetary control measures were in place and expenditure was being closely monitored.

Responding to comments from Members, Nancy Clarkson, Strategic Service Manager Infrastructure, provided an update relating to children subject to a child protection plan for a second or third time.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

23 **REVIEW OF ATTAINMENT AND PROGRESS AT THE END OF EYFS, KEY STAGE 1 AND KEY STAGE 2**

The Acting Director of Children's Services provided a summary of the standards attained at the end of the Early Years & Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 for 2012. Priority 2 of the Corporate Plan 'My Family' stated the objective "Support schools and other settings to improve educational provision and attainment maintaining a specific focus on addressing the impact of poverty". This analysis linked with the Enjoying & Achieving outcome area of the Children & Young People's Plan 2012-13 – in particular area 2 "Improve the educational outcomes for children and young people affected by poverty and disadvantage including children in care."

The report gave details of the main areas by which success was measured. It further provided the performance indicators that would be evaluated as key milestones in the Learning & Achievement Branch Plan through the implementation of the new School Improvement Strategy to ensure statutory duties were met.

Sue Talbot, Strategic Service Manager (Early Years and Primary) and Stuart Bellerby, Strategic Service Manager (Secondary), gave a comprehensive presentation on the headline figures for the 2012 test results at Early Years, Key stages 1, 2, 3 and 4 and Looked After Children.

Officers elaborated on the information in the presentation in response to Members' questions and reported that every main provisional stage result was up on the previous year and that no school was in OFSTED categories.

Resolved – That

- 1) the report and presentation be noted.
- 2) congratulations be offered to the schools and officers be thanked for their work in supporting young people.

24 VALUING OUR SAFEGUARDING EMPLOYEES

The Acting Director of Children's Services submitted a report in response to the Notice of Motion "Valuing our Safeguarding Employees" that had been approved by the Council on 16 July 2012. (Minute 35 refers).

The Acting Director of Children's Services reported that the Children's Social Care service provided a front-line social work service to children in need and at risk in Wirral. By its nature, the service worked with children who were exposed to varying levels of harm and stress. The Performance Report which was presented to members of the committee on a quarterly basis outlined the key performance areas and some of the demands on the service.

It was further reported that the service had received a number of inspections in the last two years. The outcomes of these inspections had been previously reported to members but in summary the service continued to deliver a good and in parts an outstanding service to children and young people.

The Acting Director of Children's Services responded in detail to the points raised to the Notice of Motion.

In response to comments from Members, Tracey Coffey, Acting Head of Branch, noted that newly qualified social workers would have a reduced and protected caseload for the first 3 months and for the remainder of their first year as 10% of their time was protected for learning and development.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

25 ADOPTION SCORECARD

The Acting Director of Children's Services outlined the Government's approach to addressing delays in the adoption system which had been detailed in An Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay (published by the Department for Education in March 2012).

She reported that one of the government's measures was the publication of the Adoption Scorecards for each local authority. The report showed Wirral Council's performance for the Adoption Scorecard for the 3 year average (2008-09 to 2010-11) as published in May 2012, and specified the steps that were being taken to improve performance.

In addition the report detailed the action being taken by Wirral in response to the measures relating to reducing delays in the court process and the implementation of the Adoption Agencies (Panel and Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2012 which prohibited adoption agencies from referring cases to an adoption panel before making a decision whether a child should be placed for adoption where they intended to apply to court for a Placement Order.

The report outlined the importance of using additional contextual information to make comparisons of local authorities' performance as the time taken for adoption could be longer for some children and may be dependent on other agencies such as the family court justice system.

It was noted that previous Inspections of Adoption Services had not specifically focused on delay and Wirral's performance in relation to the Adoption Standards and Regulations had been assessed by Ofsted in 2011 as 'Good' with 'Outstanding features'.

The Acting Director of Children's Services further reported that the purpose of the Adoption Scorecard was to publish the minimum expectations on local authorities for timeliness in the adoption.

In May 2012 the Department for Education had published the adoption scorecard for the 3 year average period April 2008 to March 2011 which measured all local authorities' performance against three key indicators.

An action plan for the implementation of new models of practice for decision making for adoption was attached as an Appendix to the report.

Resolved – That

- 1) the report be noted.**
- 2) the proposed actions for the implementation of new models of practice for decision making for adoption attached as an Appendix to the report be accepted.**

26 **FOSTERING SERVICE REPORT**

The Acting Director of Children's Services submitted a report that provided a quarterly update on developments and performance in Wirral's fostering service in accordance with the requirements of the Fostering Regulations and Guidance 2011 National Minimum Fostering Standards. The fostering service provided quality foster care for children who need to be looked after in public care; this was at a much lower cost than other regulated children's placements.

Local Authorities had to ensure that they were able to provide sufficient foster care placements for those children who needed family based care in accordance with the relevant Regulations and Standards governing such services.

The report also gave details of the financial implications, both in terms of the previous year and the current year. It was further reported that there was a CYPD plan to reduce the overall costs and the number of children in foster care, however this continued to prove challenging.

Resolved – That

- 1) following consideration of the report the Committee noted it was satisfied the service was being managed effectively and that there were good outcomes for the children and young people that are fostered.
- 2) the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee continue to receive an annual report about the fostering service, but in the future the 3 month report be presented to the Corporate Parenting Group.

27 **RESPONSE TO THE REPORT FROM THE JOINT INQUIRY INTO CHILDREN WHO GO MISSING**

The Acting Director of Children's Services submitted a report that advised members of the Government's response to the concerns raised about the care received by children who go missing from care, highlighted by the Derbyshire and Rochdale criminal cases of men who were convicted of abusing and exploiting young girls in care. The report also set out the process and timescale for producing a local response.

She reported that an All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults had called a parliamentary Inquiry to examine these issues more closely. The Inquiry had heard from children, professionals, national agencies such as Ofsted and Minister who had all agreed that urgent action was needed to safeguard children who go missing and run away from care.

The APPG had reported in June 2012 and made 31 recommendations and on 3rd July Tim Loughton, the Children's Minister had responded stating that he would set up a task and finish group on placement planning on out of borough placements to report in September 2012. There would also be an action plan to drive up quality and safety.

In Wirral the Local Safeguarding Children Board had brought together key agencies such as the Police, Public Health, Barnardo's, Independent Provider representation and other key partners to consider the APPG report and to begin to bring together data on the extent of the issues contained within the recommendations.

This group would report back to the LSCB in December 2012 on key issues identified locally and a work plan that would seek to make improvements in the analysis and data management between agencies. Following this the Head of Safeguarding would report to the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the plans agreed by the LSCB.

The Children and Young People's Department had commissioned Barnardos locally to respond to children who run away since 2003. This service ensured that each child had an interview with Barnardos on their return from running through a reporting system developed with Merseyside Police. The LSCB received quarterly information on the number of children missing, the length of time they were missing, the homes from which they ran (either from their foster, residential or family home). This service would continue to be offered whilst the review described above was being conducted.

Resolved – That

- 1) the All-Party Parliamentary Group report be noted.

2) a further report be submitted to the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee once the local assessment is completed under the auspices of the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

28 **YOUTH PARLIAMENT 2012**

The Acting Director of Children's Services submitted a report that had been produced at the request of the Committee and provided a progress report on planning arrangements for the next Youth Voice Conference and Youth Parliament. These annual events provided young people with the opportunity to present their views to councillors on matters that were important to them. This year they would take place at Wallasey Town Hall on 9 October 2012.

A list of schools registered for the Youth Voice Conference and Youth Parliament was attached as an appendix to the report and it was anticipated that the target of 20 would be reached.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

29 **CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMISSIONING**

The Committee was invited to consider a letter received from Wirral Link Forum.

Wirral Link Forum was an umbrella organisation for voluntary, community and faith sector organisations that worked with children, young people and families in Wirral, offering them a voice through representation on the Children's Trust Board, Local Safeguarding Children Board and Every Child Matters Outcome Groups. It also acted as a conduit between the statutory and voluntary sectors, cascading information through its website, weekly bulletins and at monthly meetings. Link Forum had been set up in 2005 because existing infrastructure organisations were unable to provide the services/support/information needed for those voluntary organisations that were working with children, young people and families. The organisation worked closely with Wirral's Children & Young People's Department, who had funded a paid worker for several years, and were committed to doing so for the foreseeable future.

At a recent meeting of Link Forum members, concern had been expressed regarding the plans for commissioning of children's services from April 2013. A representative of Link Forum played an active part in the planning meetings for the commissioning process, and the letter informed that Commissioners were restricted from meaningful forward planning due to the uncertainty around the Council budget. The impact on the voluntary sector of this lack of clarity was set out in the letter.

Julia Hassall, Acting Director of Children's Services responded to the points raised in the letter.

On a motion by Cllr Wendy Clements and seconded by Cllr Bernie Mooney it was:-

Resolved (11:00) – That

1) the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee note Link Forum members concern over the restrictions that 12 month contracts bring to the commissioned services they provide.

2) while recognising the opportunities for re-focussing which each round of commissioning brings; the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee ask the Lead member for Children's Services and Life-long Learning and Acting Director to consider the potential benefits to commissioned services (and thereby their service users) of a 3 year commissioning cycle. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommend this be for as many services as possible and as soon as feasible.

3) the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee suggest that over this timescale: regular reviews of effectiveness and outcomes etc would enhance the service offered to children and young people while probably costing less than full scale tendering processes each year.

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

The Acting Director of Children's Services provided an update to Members, in accordance with the Constitution of the Council, of those instances where delegated authority had been used by the Acting Director of Children's Services with respect to the acceptance of tenders and to the appointment of Contractors.

Details of tenders and appointment of contractors that had been accepted by the Acting Director of Children's Services under delegated authority were provided.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

31 **BUDGET CONSULTATION - SCRUTINY WORKSHOPS**

Jane Morgan, Corporate Policy Manager, gave the Committee a presentation that outlined details of the budget consultation – Consultation and Engagement to inform improvements, budgets and plans. The budget consultation was intended to engage the public, staff and stakeholders in developing a 3 Year Corporate Plan and a 3 Year Financial Plan. The presentation outlined key milestones, the questionnaire, Scrutiny Workshops and the key points in the budget consultation. The workshop for the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be held on 4 October, 2012.

Resolved – That the presentation be noted.

32 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee was requested to consider suggested additions to its work programme for the ensuing municipal year. The Committee's attention was also drawn to Minute 7 of the Scrutiny Programme Board, 18 July, 2012, in particular part (1) 1 of the resolution.

Resolved – That the Committee notes the following on the list of topics on the suggested work programme:

SEN – leave on as it is at present.

Serious case review training – complete.

Scrutiny review: agreed that Chair / Spokesperson will carry out a review building on/updating the previous literacy work done.

Children with child protection plan numbers – completed 11/9/12.

Sickness absence - outstanding.

Post 16 standards report – due in November.

Lifelong and family learning service – update due in November meeting.

Family and friends policy – be considered by Corporate Parenting.

Tackling sexual exploitation - future agenda.

Childminding and private sector – report received 21/03/12.

A report on Child Poverty strategy be included on future agenda reports.

33 **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.