

STAYING SAFE STRATEGY GROUP UPDATE REPORT TO THE BOARD

1.0 Introduction

The Staying Safe work stream of the Children and Young People's Plan aims to improve children's safety and narrow the gap in outcomes experienced by our most disadvantaged children; current priorities for 2013/14 are:

- **To support those children and young people who require extra help at the earliest opportunity;**
- **To improve outcomes for children in care and care leavers;**
- **To improve outcomes for children and young people in need of protection;**

The Staying Safe Strategy Group is the sub group of the Trust and ensures the delivery of the Staying Safe element of the Children and Young People's Plan. The Staying Safe Plan comprises a number of different projects / activities, which taken as a whole provide an integrated response to meeting the needs of vulnerable children in Wirral. At each meeting key specified target areas are reported, with a focus on demonstrating the impact on improved outcomes for children and families, and where applicable evidenced through an improvement in local or national indicators. Partners across the Trust share information and ensure that progress across the Trust is tracked and that improved outcomes for children can be measured.

2.0 Overview of progress

Key recent achievements	To support those children and young people who require extra help at the earliest opportunity
<p>Priority 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wirral experienced a Peer Challenge in 2012. A key area identified was how Wirral engaged and worked with 'harder to reach' families at level 3. This led to a review of Family Support; a review of commissioning arrangements for early help and support; and a drive to establish an early help offer across Wirral which included the Government's 'Troubled Families Programme known locally as IFIP (Intensive Family Intervention Project). • Following detailed planning and consultation, Wirral's new model of early help was established in September 2013. Known as Team Around the Family. This focuses on a more targeted, proactive approach to identifying and working with families with additional needs. • Key components include the Gateway, which coordinates requests for early help services. Here, requests from partners for support services for families are clearly coordinated and sign posted, thereby reducing duplication of services and ensuring that families receive the most appropriate help relevant to their needs. A key feature of the Gateway is that it is situated alongside the CADT (Central Advice and Duty Team for Children's Social Care enquiries). The advantage of this is that families can receive the help they need as swiftly as possible. With these 2 services working closely alongside each other there is no 'wrong front door' for families; they can feel confident that joint working between Targeted and Specialist Services will identify additional needs and the most effective interventions can be put in place. • A further component to the model is locality working. By working within the community strong professional relationships between partners can develop. Importantly, professionals and services are closer to the

families they are working with. It also enables closer working between early help and Social Care teams, thereby ensuring a smooth transition between the levels of need with minimal impact on families.

There are improved outcomes for children in care and care leavers:

- Wirral continues to prioritise housing for care leavers. There is a plan in place for Housing colleagues to work with colleagues within the Children and Young People's Department regarding jointly commissioning appropriate accommodation.
- Wirral has adopted an approach which benefits from a dedicated employability team that works closely with our Pathways Leaving Care team. The Employability team has a personal coach and a Peer Mentor to support the young people into EET. Key stakeholders attend a monthly Employability Operations Group e.g. Connexions that selects young people to work with at any time. The Pathways team identifies a caseload of young people and the employability options for each individual are discussed and progress regarding each individual is tracked closely.
- With regard to Fostering and Adoption an update report was taken to the Families and Wellbeing committee on 5 December 2013.

<http://wir06metrognome/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=681&MId=4592&Ver=4>

- Key progress areas to highlight are:
 - Foster Carer recruitment: Current priorities are placement choice for teenagers, children with more complex needs, and for children who are part of a large sibling group for whom there is a plan to place together. A project is due to get underway that focuses on a stronger customer model of recruiting and retaining foster carers.
 - A new Foster Carer Web Forum is being developed to enable foster carers and staff to exchange views, information, advice, support and training. This is an opportunity to enhance communication between carers themselves and also for the team to keep carers up to date with information and news of events.
 - Wirral Council is part of a North West Consortia of six Local Authorities and two independent agencies who bid for a government grant for the "Expanding Foster Carer project". The bid was successful and although it is early days, work has started. The project aims to develop a good practice strategy for recruitment and retention of foster carers. The project is expected to run for two years and is supported by the DfE.
 - The Adoption service has improved performance in relation to family finding timescales by learning from a diagnostic exercise. Focus has been on family finding and planning to find a family at an early stage. Performance in relation to family finding has also improved through changing how information about children is safely shared with adopters. This is referred to as the child's profile. The style, content and presentation of this information have been redesigned to provide for a more accurate representation of the children's character and personality, through the use of media such as a DVD.
 - The Centre for Excellence and Outcomes is now working with the Council as part of the agreed expenditure from the Adoption Grant on a specific project to address performance. This project is underway and focuses on embedding the principles of permanence, reducing delay in achieving permanence for children, enhancing skills in reflective practice, and sharpening analytical skills and decision making.

	<p>- In terms of timescales for adoption, these are starting to improve as a consequence of the work that has been undertaken.</p> <p>There are improved outcomes for children and young people in need of protection:</p> <p>Key activity in this area includes the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening of the ‘front door’ to early help (Targeted) and Children’s Social Care (Specialist Services). This has included the development of a MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) model alongside the CADT and the Gateway. This component of the front door enables a multi-agency approach to dealing with potential child protection queries. It ensures timely information sharing between partners, which enables swift and clearer decision-making regarding families in need of help and protection. Therefore, with efficient and effective processes from the start families can receive the intervention they need, which help to secure improved outcomes in the future. This model continues to be developed; it has its own project lead, with progress tracked by a MASH Board. • A key to achieving successful outcomes for children is early identification of need and timely interventions. This requires a clear understanding of levels of need and strong communication between partners. Systems are being developed that ensure joint discussions take place between these services so that families receive the most appropriate and effective help. To help achieve this, multi-agency training regarding CAF and early help will include a component on Wirral’s levels of need. • Audits have taken place regarding Children in Need and Child Protection Plans. This has highlighted a number of areas where practice could be improved for example, outcomes-focused plans. Improvements here will help all partners to better measure progress within families and the impact of clearly defined multi-agency interventions. • With regard to Social Care, a number of key principles have been agreed within Specialist Services that aim to improve the way Social Care staff work with children and families. This has led to proposals regarding service redesign that includes frontline Social Work teams, Fostering and Adoption and Care Leaver services. One particular key principle is the development of smaller Social Work teams with a management arrangement that enables decision-making that is closer to the child. Another principle is capacity to ensure consistent and reflective supervision of Social Work staff. Design proposals continue to be developed.
<p>Key challenges ahead</p>	<p>There continue to be key challenges in light of ongoing national and local Government reform, in particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The continuing challenging economic climate causing greater hardship to some of the most disadvantaged children and families. • Budget pressures affecting all public sector services. This can increase the potential for organisations to become more insular, thereby increasing pressure on usually strong partnerships and collaborations. • Reforms within schools as more move to Academy status. • Ongoing of Social Work Reform and continuing media interest in social work practice. <p>There are also some additional local challenges to consider:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring that Wirral benefits from a more integrated, collaborative approach between partners at both strategic and operational level; and that this is developed fully between children’s and adult-led services that reflects the “think family” agenda. • The number of children in care (currently 100 per 10,000), with continuing high activity in Court. • The high numbers of children and families open to Children’s Social Care. The overall challenge here is identifying need as early as possible and preventing needs escalating, thereby reducing the demand for more costly and intrusive interventions. • Implementing the MASH without impacting on families. With clear strategic direction and careful operational planning this risk is reduced. • Implementing a Service redesign within Specialist Services that impacts positively on families. We need to ensure we have the capacity to work with those families that need Social Care interventions and that families can be helped and supported in a preventative way where possible. • Whilst we improve the way we work with families in a more preventative way, we need to ensure that our systems and processes fully capture this quality work. There are IT challenges with this that need addressing throughout 2014/15.
Risks to outcome delivery and proposed actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of focus on key priority areas caused by restructuring/reorganisation – therefore we need to ensure governance groups are actively aware of this potential and work to mitigate risks. • Inability to recruit to key posts to deliver action plan and shortage of staff in key outcome areas – therefore we need to make effective use of recruitment and retention strategies across the Trust; and active use of risk registers and alerts within individual agencies. • Reduction in available funding e.g. on preventative services, or capacity to jointly fund services – therefore we need to monitor/evidence impact of changes to resource allocation, and be clear about what is essential.
Areas requiring further partnership involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development and implementation of the MASH model • Development of a corporate safeguarding model across Children’s and Adult Services. Within both these areas partners need to ensure that there are clearly defined lines of accountability and governance arrangements so that safeguarding systems remain strong. • Auditing of child protection/child in need cases as we develop a more multi-agency approach to this work. • Consistent application of levels of need across the continuum, from TAF and CIN to Child Protection and Looked After Children services.
Equalities impact assessment areas for development and progress made	Current equalities impact assessments are being reviewed in light of new models / frameworks of working with families.
Areas for promotion /publicity / communication / engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private Fostering rolling programme of publicity continues • Road Traffic – accident prevention continues to be delivered to schools targeting key areas such as teenagers. • Teen Wirral website launched with an area of Staying Safe which includes drugs, bullying and alcohol awareness. • Safe Sleep awareness programme developed through Public Health with local publicity distributed to parents

<p>Strengths:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Active group members, committed to delivering the Staying Safe Plan to improve outcomes for vulnerable children. 2. Strong focus on listening to children and young people’s views to inform the agenda; 3. Strong partnership working, resulting in tangible improvements e.g. in the quality of CAFs; more focused commissioning informed by identified needs, more evidence based services developed for children on the edge of care. 	<p>Weaknesses:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Constant challenge, amidst high volume of priorities to ensure effective co-ordination of activity and clear accountability for action. 2. High numbers of children continue to receive high level statutory interventions – still need to maintain and strengthen focus on effective earlier intervention.
<p>Opportunities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A Child Centred System – The Government’s response to the Munro review of child protection. 2. Reduced bureaucracy resulting in greater freedom to measure what is important / less emphasis on “ticking boxes”, and more emphasis on outcomes. 3. Review of current Trust systems/ structures in light of newly established Targeted Services and early help focus. 	<p>Threats:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increased identification of vulnerable children (which is good) leading to capacity issues in some areas of work, resulting in slower progression of plans; 2. Budget constraints leading to overstretched services and potential gaps in provision. 3. Internal service redesign in public sector organisations potentially causing a loss of focus on vulnerable service users. Loss of expertise and experience as significant numbers of people are leaving different public sector organisations.

3.0 Summary

The Staying Safe Strategy Group has addressed many key areas fundamental to keeping children safe and improving their outcomes. Now that Wirral has established new models/frameworks for working with children and families, it is an ideal opportunity to review and adapt current systems within the Trust for overseeing its key strategic priorities.

4.0 Recommendations:

- 4.1 That Wirral Children’s Trust Board endorse the report.
- 4.2 That Wirral Children’s Trust Board approve a review of the Staying Safe Strategy Group and its respective sub-groups

Report Author:
Emma Taylor
 Lead for Staying Safe Strategy Group

Contact:
 Email: emmataylor2@wirral.gov.uk