

CABINET PORTFOLIO SUMMARY REPORT

REPORT OF	Councillor Tony Smith
CABINET PORTFOLIO FOR	Children & Family Services
CO-ORDINATING CHIEF OFFICER	Julia Hassall, Director of Children's Services

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is an update from the Cabinet Portfolio Holder to Members of the Council on matters relevant to her portfolio.

1.0 VULNERABLE CHILDREN REACH THEIR FULL POTENTIAL

The recent OFSTED inspection into elements of children's services in Wirral was disappointing and concerning for everyone involved. Keeping Wirral children and families safe is our most important and enduring responsibility – making the improvements which are required, and ensuring our services are nothing short of outstanding, is this Council's number one priority.

This work has already started. We have numerous issues to address and a detailed, forensic improvement plan has already been developed. A positive meeting was held with senior advisors from the Department for Education, on the day the report was published, who agreed with the steps we have put in place so far.

A recruitment process has been started to identify a new Independent Chair for the Local Safeguarding Children's Board, as well as a new Head of Service to lead children's social care. We are also taking rapid steps to recruit more, experienced social workers. An Improvement Board has been established, with representation from all Parties at Council, partners and external experts. The Department for Education will identify a senior advisor to work with us on the Board and the Council will also appoint an independent chair. This Board will help oversee and drive through the changes we need to make, ensuring they are delivered at pace and for the benefit of all children in the borough.

This is the most important point of all: we are determined to make these services outstanding not because of the Ofsted rating it will bring, but because we have an obligation to the children, young people and families who rely upon us. Getting there is the collective top priority of everyone in this organisation and all of our partner agencies.

Our social work teams work extremely hard. We are constantly asking them to do more, with less. They come into work each day with one mission in mind – to provide the best possible care for our vulnerable children. It is important we do not forget this, and equally important we quickly provide our teams with the right tools and environment to do their jobs well, and holding everyone to account when our high standards are not met.

I remain very disappointed at the outcome of this inspection, but now is not the time for looking backwards. We understand what went wrong, and why, and we know how to put things right. Now is the time for us to move forward and deliver Wirral residents the high-quality, first rate services they deserve.

2.0 CHILDREN ARE READY FOR SCHOOL

The Council's new approach to providing Early Years' services was officially launched earlier this year, with three multi-disciplinary teams across Wallasey, Birkenhead and South & West Wirral.

The service has an ambitious plan which places "children being school ready" at the heart of everything it does. The service plan outlines target groups and key priorities to ensure there is a balanced universal and targeted approach to engaging with school ready activities.

To date the new service has seen a 3% increase of the take up of free 2 year entitlement; from 72% to 75%, and increased the take up of Early Years Pupil Premium. The service has also revised the free early years funding contract to pay a more stringent focus on attendance, safeguarding and quality.

3.0 YOUNG PEOPLE ARE READY FOR WORK & ADULTHOOD

Twenty-three schools were inspected by OFSTED during the academic year 2016-17 (7 secondary, 2 special and 14 primary schools). 91% of primary schools and 76% of secondary schools are currently judged as good or better. All special schools are currently good or better.

The first Multi Academy Trust (MAT) for primary schools has been approved by the Regional School Commissioner. There are five primary schools in the MAT. Conversion is expected for April 1st 2017. Three secondary schools are exploring the formation of MATs with primary and secondary schools.

There have been changes to the Key Stage 4 performance measures. Unvalidated data indicates that the percentage of pupils attaining A*-C in English and Mathematics has increased from 63% in 2015 to 67.2% in 2016. Two secondary schools are below the Progress 8 DfE floor target.

4.0 REDUCE CHILD & FAMILY POVERTY

Following the success of the Improving Life Chances event earlier this year it was agreed to hold an annual event to review performance and build on excellent practice. This event will be held on 20 October at Birkenhead Town Hall and arrangements for the event are well underway.

A series of community pilot areas have been identified - Beechwood, Bidston and St James and Seacombe – and within these areas we will trial new approaches and look to develop innovative ways of providing support tailored to local needs.

An e-learning package to raise awareness of child poverty is currently in development and will be piloted this month. The training highlights what child poverty is, the signs and symptoms for professionals/volunteers to be aware of when they are working with families and what we are doing locally to address it. Training more of our local workforce and volunteers will help more families to be signposted to available information and support.

We have developed an affordable savings and loans take up plan, which is relevant not just for families, but across the life course. The plan includes top tips to prevent money worries. We have started to work with local employers to get them to set up payroll giving to a credit union and encourage their staff to save and avoid debts.