

CABINET PORTFOLIO SUMMARY REPORT

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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

1. VULNERABLE CHILDREN REACH THEIR FULL POTENTIAL

Following the publication of the Ofsted report in September we have been working hard to identify all the issues which need to be addressed in order to make the improvements needed.

Ofsted have led a workshop with officers and partners to ensure the detail of their report and recommendations are thoroughly understood. Tony Crane, the Department for Education Advisor, has been appointed, and we have recruited Eleanor Brazil to chair our Improvement Board. Both Tony and Eleanor have considerable expertise and experience in supporting children's services to improve. Our Improvement Board has now met on three occasions and members will sign off the Improvement Plan at the next meeting, before its submission to Ofsted by 30th December.

Examples of improvement activity during the past two months include implementing updated social work practice standards, auditing practice, holding staff engagement sessions with social workers and visits to teams to listen and set out the improvements required. We have put extra social workers in teams to reduce the number of cases held by social workers. A dedicated human resources team has been located in children's services to support workforce development and permanent recruitment to key management and social worker positions.

Work is also underway with partners, which will be completed in January 2017, to ensure everyone is clear about the thresholds for children and families receiving services, so that children and young people receive the right service, at the right time. The Corporate Parenting Group now has refreshed terms of reference and a sharper focus on securing good outcomes for children looked after, and we now have a new Chair of the Safeguarding Children Board.

I am absolutely determined we will make rapid progress to improve our safeguarding practice with children and young people. What I also know is that for changes to last they will require time to embed. It is estimated nationally that solid improvements that are built to last take about 18 months to achieve. On 21 December there is a members training session on the complexity of work being dealt with by social care practitioners and how we apply thresholds which I urge you all to attend. It is vitally important that safeguarding children is everyone's business and that we are all alert to issues in our communities.

2. CHILDREN ARE READY FOR SCHOOL

This year's early year's foundation stage profile results have again increased slightly and remain among the highest in the country however, there is still some way to go and our drive for all children to reach their true potential continues. This year we are working with 22 schools to provide additional packages of support through the early year's foundation stage consultants, including additional staff training, to support continued improvements in children achieving a good level of development.

There is a continuous focus on vulnerable two year olds accessing their child care entitlement. The take up has improved overall from 75% when I last reported in October, to 88% this autumn term; this information will now be considered in detail on a locality footprint, to continue to improve take-up for the most vulnerable children.

3. YOUNG PEOPLE ARE READY FOR WORK AND ADULTHOOD

Validated results show the number of pupils achieving good GCSEs in English and Mathematics has improved by 4% to 67.2% which makes Wirral the second highest attaining North West authority. The gap for children in receipt of free school meals has narrowed slightly, but this still remains a priority for improvement.

As a result of recent Ofsted inspections six schools have been upgraded from requires improvement to good; this now means across Wirral 9 out of 10 primary school pupils and 8 out of 10 secondary school pupils attend schools which Ofsted rate as either good or outstanding.

To date twenty secondary schools have signed up to participate in the Young Chamber 2016-17 programme. Wirral employers are helping young people to understand the variety of job opportunities, and activities are focused on raising young people's aspirations and supporting them in making future career choices.

The 2016 Youth Voice Conference was held October, where young people articulately debated the issues around mental health. It was a truly inspirational experience.

4. REDUCE CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY

We held the first annual improving life chances event on 20th October. The event was well attended and provided the opportunity for local organisations to hear how the strategy is progressing, to network and share what they are doing and discuss how they can work better together.

The Welfare Reform Group continues to meet regularly and is enabling key partners to have a co-ordinated response to the imminent Benefit Cap which was implemented in Wirral in early December.

The work around the community pilots is progressing well and as awareness increases, additional services are coming on board, which will increase the offer available to local families in those areas. We have managed to lever in some additional funding, enabling a Christmas food hamper to be put together for distribution in the pilot areas. The hampers will enable information about the services available locally to be included. We are currently working with our partners to identify how we will evaluate these pilots to show the outcomes for the families that are supported in these areas.