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CHILDREN SUB-COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 14 December 2016

Present:

Councillors	A Brighthouse	C Meaden
	D Burgess-Joyce	C Povall
	(In place of W Clements)	W Smith
	A Davies	
	M McLaughlin	

Apologies

Councillors	Mr D Cunningham
	Mr M Harrison
	Mrs G Peters

9 **MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members were asked to consider whether they had any disclosable pecuniary interests and/or any other relevant interest in connection with any items on the agenda and, if so, to declare them and state the nature of the interest.

No such declarations were made.

10 **MINUTES**

Resolved – That the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2016 be approved.

11 **REVISED TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The revised Terms of Reference of the Children Sub-Committee were submitted for Members' information.

Resolved – That the revised Terms of Reference of the Children Sub-Committee be noted.

12 **ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT**

Dawn Stanley-Smith, Customer Resolution and Information Manager outlined a report providing information on representations and complaints received by children's social care services within the Children and Young People's Department for the year 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016. The report demonstrated an overview of complaint trends, performance and areas for development.

Members heard that a number of complainants and representations that had been made did not meet the criteria of the complaint regulations and had either been referred to the relevant process or procedure or had been acknowledged, registered as comments or feedback and forwarded to managers for a response. Members were informed that twenty complainants had had their complaint resolved at first contact with the Customer Resolution and Information Team without the need to formally register a complaint.

Numbers of complaints registered over twelve months had been provided and it was explained that 82.9% of complaints made by children or young people had been resolved within the statutory timescale and that Stage 1 complaints registered by an adult were dealt with by an appropriate manager. Also 92.3% of stage 1 complaints had been responded to within the timescale and 100% of stage 2 complaint investigations had been completed within the expected timescale.

Members heard what had been learned from complaints and that a new policy and procedure in relation to managing difficult communication had been produced to assist staff and children and families. Also work was underway on recommendations in respect of another two new procedures.

Members then heard that when reviewing effectiveness, it had been identified that the number of complaints received from children and young people had tripled following the work undertaken with the Children in Care Council to ensure that all children knew how to make their voices heard. It was suggested that the vast majority of complaints continued to be resolved by Council staff or the Customer Resolution and Information Team at an early stage.

It was further explained that a series of workshops had been planned which included an overview of the complaint process in order to increase and improve awareness of how to support children and young people to make representations. Work would continue with corporate IT colleagues in relation to identifying an effective IT platform and a recruitment process was to be undertaken to increase the number of Independent Persons to work on stage 2 investigations.

A representative of the Children in Care Council attended the meeting and gave an overview in respect of the workshop she had undertaken in relation to complaints. She believed that the workshop had been successful and helped to improve the service.

In response to questions raised by Members, the representative of the Children in Care Council outlined her personal experience in relation to the complaints procedure and confirmed that all the correct steps had been followed. She advised Members that she now felt capable of helping someone through the process.

Also in response to questions, the Customer Resolution and Information Manager confirmed that an increase in complaints could be expected as the message filtered out to young people in respect of how to engage in the process. She also advised that the number of Ombudsman complaints could be as a result of people being advised they had not met the criteria to follow the complaints procedure. She reported that quarterly briefings were to take place with staff to share best practice.

Resolved –

(1) That the report be noted.

(2) That the Customer Resolution and Information Manager be thanked for her report and the representative of the Children in Care Council be thanked for her attendance.

13 OFSTED PROGRESS UPDATE

The Director of Children's Services provided a verbal update on the progress of Ofsted.

Members were advised that three meetings of the Improvement Board had already taken place with a new chair, Eleanor Brazil, who would be working with Children's Services and that another key appointment had been made from January to the Chair of Children Safeguarding Board, Maggie Atkinson, formerly the National Children's Commissioner.

It was reported that other key posts were in the process of being filled and that a first response team had been placed in the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub. Social work practice standards had been issued to develop a more consistent practice by front line staff and improved mechanisms for feedback from complaints had been implemented. Sub groups to the Improvement Board had been set up including a workforce sub-group to support better recruitment and retention of high quality staff. Members were informed that Ofsted were due to undertake their first quarterly monitoring visit in January and would be looking at the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub.

Members were advised that the Local Government Association had been working with Local Authorities and a company called ISOS to set out the improvement journey in Children's Services.

In response to questions from Members, the Director of Children's Services advised that staff appraisal was a key part of the plan to improve the service and that more staff were needed in order to reduce caseloads so that people could be held to account. Despite an additional £2m of funding, there would

be pressures on the core budget and additional costs of reducing caseloads were being considered.

Resolved – That the Director of Children’s Services be thanked for her presentation.

14 **CORE INDICATORS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT BOARD**

The Director of Children’s Services reported upon a proposed set of core indicators that would be reported in detail at each meeting to ensure Improvement Board members would be able to monitor, challenge and assure progress against the key areas identified in the Ofsted inspection.

It was reported that Children’s Services required a good system for the accumulation of valid and reliable data and for its interpretation. All service-critical activities had to be recorded and reported accurately in order that service leaders could carry out their jobs effectively and demonstrate that activity was leading to beneficial outcomes. The poor performance information in respect of care leavers had been rectified and Members were provided with a number of proposed core improvement indicators.

In response to questions from Members, the Director of Children’s Services advised that one issue of concern was that there were too many children with a child protection plan who no longer need a plan after three months. There could be a number of reasons for this which were currently being analysed. Keeping children safe was at the core of all considerations.

Further to a question in respect of the number of times of change of Social Workers for a child, the Director of Children’s Services advised that she would consider how this could be measured and advocated that a permanent, stable workforce was required to consistently reduce changes for children.

Resolved – That the Director of Children’s Services be thanked for her report.

15 **FEEDBACK FROM MEMBER WORKSHOP**

The Chair reported that, at the previous meeting of the Children Sub-Committee on 22 September 2016, Members had requested that a workshop be held to discuss how best to scrutinise the implementation of the Ofsted improvement plan.

She advised that the workshop had been held on Monday 7 November 2016 and that the notes from the workshop were attached to the report.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

16 **SCHOOL STANDARDS REPORT: ATTAINMENT AT GCSE AND A LEVEL**

The Lead Commissioner for Schools provided a presentation on Key Stage 4 and 5 attainment and progress.

It was reported that the benchmark measures had changed this year for secondary schools and they are judged on the percentage of pupils achieving A*-C in English and Mathematics, Attainment 8 and Progress 8. The new measure (Attainment 8) shows a closing of the free school meal gap but that the gap is wider than the national average.

Members were informed that the percentage of students attaining A*-A in English or mathematics was higher than the national average for all pupils, boys and girls. However there were significantly less Free School Meal students attaining these higher grades. The Progress 8 score of -0.04 was just below the national average of 0. Overall Wirral was ranked top against neighbouring authorities for A level outcomes and third for GCSEs. The percentage of 2As and a B at A level remained below the national average but had increased from the previous year. Wirral was above the North West average for 5A*-C including English and mathematics and girls were out performing boys in A*-A in English or mathematics. Wirral was ahead of the national average in Attainment 8 and the Free School Meal gap had improved.

It was further reported that Wirral ranked top against neighbouring authorities for outcomes at Level 3 and Key Stage 5.

Resolved – That the Lead Commissioner for Schools be thanked for her report.

17 **WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The Scrutiny Support Officer provided a report updating Members on progress towards delivering the work programme for the Children Sub Committee for the 2016/17 municipal year and the proposed changes as a result of the recent workshop.

Resolved – That the proposed work programme for 2016/17 be approved with the inclusion of Troubled Families Programme.

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