



Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Thursday, 25 January 2018

REPORT TITLE:	Reality Check visit to the Early Childhood Service - Feedback
REPORT OF:	The Chair of the Committee – Councillor Tom Usher

Report Summary

Committee members have previously agreed the principle of undertaking a series of Reality Check visits by small groups of members to enable those members to engage directly with frontline staff. This report provides feedback from a visit to the Early Childhood Service on Wednesday 7th December 2017

Recommendation/s

It is recommended that Committee:

- 1) Notes the report.
- 2) Considers any points to be learned prior to the next of the Reality Check visits.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 Reasons for Recommendations

The reality visit and subsequent recommendations will enable Committee members to complete part of the Committee's work programme.

2.0 Other Options Considered

Not Applicable

3.0 Background Information

3.1 Principles of Reality Check visits

Key to the success of scrutiny is the ability of members to check evidence from a variety of sources. While members routinely receive reports from senior management and have access to performance monitoring reports, it is suggested that greater access to frontline staff and service users would enable scrutiny members to triangulate evidence with other sources and would give members greater confidence in the outcomes of their scrutiny work. It was, therefore, agreed at the meeting of the Children and Families Overview & Scrutiny Committee held in June to establish a programme of Reality Check Visits through which scrutiny members could engage independently and directly with frontline staff.

Key operating principles for the visits include:

- A programme of visits will be scheduled and will form part of the Committee's work programme. A visit will normally take place approximately every eight weeks. Visits will be set or amended taking into account the programme of externally set scrutiny by Ofsted and the Department of Education.
- There will be no direct relationship between each visit. Therefore, Members may volunteer to participate in any particular visit.
- Prior to each visit, a short briefing note will be prepared to inform members of the function of the service area, background information and any issues directly relevant to the Ofsted report.
- Each visit will comprise a maximum of six members supported by a scrutiny officer. A visit will usually take a maximum of 2 hours.
- The visits will give Members the opportunity to talk directly to staff so they can understand their perspective of the service. Members will be able to ask questions directly, for example, on caseloads, support offered to staff, auditing of cases and the outcomes for children and families.
- The findings from each visit will be reported to the next meeting of the Children and Families Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

3.2 Visit to the Early Childhood Service 7th December 2017

The visit to the Early Childhood Service took place on Wednesday 7th December 2017 at Seacombe Children's Centre. Cllrs Tom Usher (Chair), Alan Brighthouse, Paul Hayes, Moira McLaughlin, Chris Meaden and Jean Stapleton took part in the visit, which was hosted by Elizabeth Hartley (Senior Manager). Elizabeth was accompanied by a number of representatives from the teams which make up the service.

3.3 Overview of the Early Childhood Service

Early Childhood Services are delivered in partnership by the Local Authority and a wide range of partners. Collaboration is as follows:

Local Authority Services	Function
Children's Centres	<p>Parenting- evidence-based programmes, one-to-one support, group sessions, courses for foster carers and general advice</p> <p>Early Education- evidence-based programmes, crèche, parent-child sessions, home learning and advice</p> <p>Community engagement- events and signposting</p>
Business Support Team	<p>Free early years education- facilitation and administration of 2, 3 and 4 year old funded places including the extended offer and brokerage for parents regarding childcare more generally</p> <p>Administration of Early Years Pupil Premium- support to access and appropriately utilise EYPP</p> <p>Business support to providers- networks and one-to-one support for childminders, public, private and voluntary providers</p>
Quality Assurance & Improvement	<p>Practice Improvement- individual and cluster group support to improve quality, engagement and safeguarding practice in-line with statutory guidelines</p> <p>Progress Tracking- facilitating progress monitoring for the cohort</p> <p>Training- facilitation of appropriate training to meet needs of providers and improve children's outcomes</p>
Family Information Service	<p>Access to information, advice and guidance- a tiered system of information and advice for parents, carers, and providers on service availability and access</p>
Early Years SEND Team	<p>Assessment- support to families and providers on the early identification of need and access to provision</p> <p>Intervention- advice and training for parents, carers and families on how to meet the need of children with SEND</p> <p>Access to Inclusive Practice Funding- facilitation of access to funds to support individual children's learning needs</p>
Partner Services	Function
0-19 Health Services	<p>Midwifery- ante-natal groups, one-to-one appointments, booking in appointments, access to specialist provision</p> <p>Health Visiting- baby clinics, 1-2-1 appointments, group sessions</p> <p>Family Nurse Partnership- delivering intensive one-to-one support for parents 24 and under</p>
Family Intervention and Support Service	<p>Parenting and Family Support- co-delivery of parenting and domestic abuse programmes, one-to-one support</p>

Community & Voluntary Groups	Breast-feeding- one-to-one and group sessions Family Support- access to community-based and volunteer befriending services Home Learning- community parenting groups and programmes Financial Support- links to foodbanks, debt management, CAB Housing Support- links to support services and charities
Job Centre Plus	Learning Opportunities- access to training, employment, education and volunteering Advice on benefits and Universal Credit- one-to-one support, advice and guidance

Children’s Centres and their Core Purpose

The core purpose of Children’s Centres is to improve outcomes for young children and their families and to reduce inequalities between families in greatest need and their peers in: child development and school readiness; parenting aspirations and parenting skills; and. child and family health and life chances.

In Wirral Children’s Centres are organised in hubs and satellites, managed by the Local Authority, which deliver services for under 5s in an integrated and co-ordinated way. Children’s Centres make available both universal and targeted services, although the focus is particularly upon target groups.

There are approximately 70,500 children in Wirral of which just over 19,000 are under 5. Of those 19,000 more than 11,000 belong to a target group. This includes Children in Need, children on Child Protection plans, Children Looked After, those in Lower Super Output Areas, children with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND), children eligible for funded nursery places, children from black and minority ethnic groups (BME) and those with English as an additional language.

Advisory Boards

Each Children’s Centre is governed by an Advisory Board. This board has membership from the community, partner agencies, parents, local authority staff and relevant parties. The Advisory Board is charged with holding each centre to account in relation to service delivery, outcomes, performance, engagement and meeting the needs of the local community. The Advisory Boards meet regularly and complete an Annual Conversation with the Local Authority in order to review progress, accountability and overcome any obstacles to achieving the best outcomes for children.

Current Priorities

- Complete a formal review of under 1s becoming subject to a Child Protection plan or becoming Children Looked After to better understand and provide preventative services.
- Implementing a 1001 Critical Days Pathway (from conception to 2 years) to improve attachment, bonding, development, parenting and more integrated services.
- Implement the Preventing Family Breakdown Strategy (Edge of Care) to work intensively and purposefully with those parents most likely to have their babies removed.

- Embedding the use of a Wirral-wide Progress Tracker for Early Years development to improve Good Level of Development outcomes.
- Ensuring all Children Looked After under 3 have a good quality Personal Education Plan.
- Increase registration and sustained contact for children supported by Children's Social Care.
- Develop and implement an approach, with Birkenhead Foundation Years Trust, to utilise home learning strategies to decrease the achievement gap in Good Level of Development.

Summary

Since the launch of the Early Childhood Service in April 2016, significant progress has been made in defining the core purpose of the service, increasing activity within centres, re-engaging both partners and service users, upgrading facilities, aligning resource (such as the SEND team) and re-branding/marketing of the service. This comprehensive approach combined with the passion and commitment of all staff and partners to deliver the *Children Are Ready for School* pledge has led to significant improvement which can be demonstrated through performance data. There is continued commitment to improve and for Wirral to become a leading authority on best practice and improved outcomes for children and families.

3.4 Findings from the Members' visit to the Early Childhood Service

Members were taken on a tour of Seacombe Children's Centre and were shown around the new Birthing Suite which is currently under construction. This will be a pilot scheme providing twenty-four hour community based, Midwife led birthing facilities alongside existing ante-natal care. It is hoped that this will ensure greater continuity of care for local mothers in line with NHS priorities. When complete, this may be the first community based facility of its kind in the UK.

Midwifery services offered at the centre also include aromatherapy and foot massage for overdue women, and ante-natal drop-in.

Members were shown one of the four contact rooms at the centre. These are used for supervised contacts, with the décor and furniture being designed specifically to create a warm, homely environment for contact visits.

Seacombe and Pensby Children's Centres are now open over holiday periods and the Service Manager explained that the service ambition is to move away from a Monday to Friday 9 to 5 model of services and offer weekend and evening opening times. Increased opening hours are possible due to the range of health services and appointments being offered in the Centres.

Members were informed of a potential development of a community café in the centre which, it is hoped, would provide a community focal point and meeting place.

Members were also shown the early learning room, soft play area and specialist sensory room. The Centre is also home to the privately operated Jack and Jill Day Nursery.

Members then talked to a number of representatives from the services provided at the centre.

Penny Bishop, Team Leader for Early Years Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND) Team. Penny explained to Members that the SEND Team

has been based within the Early Childhood Service for around one year. Penny explained the Portage Service, which is a home-visiting educational service for pre-school children with SEND, and their families. The Portage Service works with up to 30 children on a home visit basis and up to 300 children via support provided to childcare settings.

Staff agreed that it was a positive step bringing the SEND team into the ECS and recognised the benefit to children and providers. It was agreed that the challenge is to encourage more children with special educational needs or disabilities to use children's centres and ultimately to go into mainstream education.

Lyndsey Costello, Health Visitor. Lyndsey informed Members of the close working relationship between Health Visitors and the Seacombe Children's Centre. Hot desking facilities at Seacombe allow Health Visitors to work from the Centre. Health Visitors encourage families to use centre services and hold Healthy Child drop-ins at the centre. Good relationships have been built between the different teams. Performance data for the Wallasey area has improved as a consequence of increased integration, with the number of missed appointments reducing, as an example.

Lyndsey explained that other agencies are using the centre to provide advice around benefits, and workshops and tutorials to promote healthy eating, cooking skills etc. This was an example of how teams are becoming more creative about preventative and health promotion activities, and making services easier to access.

Elizabeth Hartley explained that an exercise to map the parenting journey has led to an advice leaflet being produced charting key contact points for parents along the journey from pregnancy to the child starting school. More service contacts have been added along this journey as the team noticed gaps in contact where engagement may drop. The team recognised the importance of encouraging continued engagement with services during this period. The leaflet uses the 'My Child Can...' branding, developed for the service with Wirral's marketing team.

Sarah Harper, Business Support Team. The Business Support Team manages the data and statistics on registration, engagement and levels of development of children in the target groups. Data suggested that children who attend children's centres and take up the 2 year old funding offer are more likely to achieve a Good Level of Development (GLD).

The Business Support Team also aims to embed the use of a Progress Tracker for Wirral childcare providers to manage and analyse their own data more effectively. This is aimed at improving the number of children achieving GLD. There are also plans to provide training for practitioners to improve the consistency of assessments.

Daniel Franklin, Quality Improvement Officer. Daniel summarised the work carried out to support practitioners and child minders. The Quality Improvement team works with providers prior to their first Ofsted inspection to prepare them for visits. The team also works with those who have received 'poor' or 'inadequate' Ofsted ratings. The aim is to ensure that all practitioners provide a consistent level of service, rated as 'good' or above by Ofsted. The

team organised their first Early Years Conference event this year, for providers to network and share best practice. The team delivers Childminding Information sessions and provides ongoing training and telephone or email support to all providers. Currently, just under 95% of registered childcare providers in Wirral are rated as 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted.

3.4.1 Key conclusions reached by the Members

Positives

- Members were very impressed with the amount of partnership and co-operation work in evidence, and the enthusiasm of staff from all teams to work together to provide improved outcomes for children and families.
- The use of data to monitor performance and target services to those most in need was welcomed, as was the level of advice, support and training offered to childcare providers.
- Members noted the focus on improving outcomes such as the Good Level of Development.
- The 'My Child Can...' service branding for the Children's Centres and advice and information materials provides a positive message to families. The 'My Child Can...' film viewed by Members demonstrated the range of support, activities and groups available to parents and revealed how highly users value the services.
- The Birthing Suite was welcomed by Members as an innovative development. Members would be interested in receiving an update on usage and feedback from users after the suite has been in operation for a number of months.
- The encouragement of children with special educational needs or disabilities to integrate with mainstream services in Children's Centres was welcomed as a positive approach.

3.4.2 Challenges

- Health Visitors integration / co-location. There was evidence of good practice at Seacombe and an enhanced offer to children and families as a result of close links between Health Visitors and Centre staff. Members noted that this was an informal arrangement and would be interested to find out if this was replicated at other Children's Centres around the borough and to understand any barriers to formal integration or co-location of teams.

4.0 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

5.0 Legal Implications

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

6.0 Resource Implications: ICT, Staffing and Assets

There are no resource implications arising directly from this report.

7.0 Relevant Risks

Not Applicable

8.0 Engagement/Consultation

Not Applicable

9.0 Equality Implications

This report is for information to members and there are no direct equality implications.

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Appendices: None

Reference Material

Subject History (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
N/A	