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CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 25 January 2018

Present:

Councillor T Usher (Chair)

Councillors	M McLaughlin	C Meaden
	T Anderson	C Povall
	A Brighouse	J Stapleton
	W Clements	A Sykes
	P Hayes	W Ward
	T Jones	KJ Williams
	B Kenny	G Wood

Co-opted Member Julie Johnson

37 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Co-opted Member Chris Penn and Cabinet Member Bernie Mooney.

38 **MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST / PARTY WHIP**

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

Members were reminded that they should also declare whether they were subject to a party whip in connection with any item(s) to be considered and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of the whipping arrangement. The following declaration was made:

Councillor Chris Meaden	Personal – by virtue of her daughter's employment within the CYPD.
Councillor Wendy Clements	Personal – by virtue of her employment as an early years educator and administrator.

39 **MINUTES**

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting of the committee held on 14 November 2017, be confirmed as a correct record.

40 IMPROVEMENT JOURNEY - UPDATE

Mr Paul Boyce, the Director for Children introduced his presentation that provided Members with an update on the Council's Improvement Plan and a number of actions that had been taken since the last report to the Committee in November. These included a summary of progress to date and work underway to create the right conditions for improvement, and an update on the Ofsted Monitoring Visit that had taken place on 11/12 December 2017.

The Director for Children further informed the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the clarity of vision required and the focus on improving practice within the Children's Service i.e. what the Council is trying to do, and why. He added that by ensuring that the right number and quality of practitioners were in place to deliver good and outstanding practice, the Council would eventually become an 'employer of choice'.

The key messages contained within Mr Boyce's presentation focused on clarity about lines of accountability and 'who was doing what' to support improvement and the child. The presentation also informed of the requirement for a stable and effective access path (front door) that could evidence a consistent application of multi-agency thresholds and decision making which was timely, child focused and of high quality.

The Director for Children expressed his personal view that quality remained the key challenge of the improvement journey and that this would be the primary criteria by which individual casework practices would be measured. He explained that work was underway to ensure staff and managers had the right tools, systems and support available to enable them to produce consistently good practice. This work would also include:

- Proactive communication and engagement with front line practitioners with a step by step approach to the management of change; and
- Robust and reliable quality assurance and performance management that reflected reality, leading to the embedding of a 'learning culture'.

The Director for Children informed the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that the Ofsted Monitoring Visit had taken place on 11/12 December 2017 and that the findings had been mixed. The focus of the visit was quality of practice in relation to children over the age of 11 who have been looked after for a long time, care planning, PEPs, SDQ, advocacy and independent visiting and the challenge remained on accelerating improvement and doing the basics well, in addition to keeping continued focus on the improvement of quality of practice. Members were further informed that there currently existed a range of service delivery quality and practice, and work continued with staff

engagement to assist them with the improvement of standards and maintain a pace of change within a target 8 month timeframe.

Members questioned the Director for Children on some issue detail that included engagement with trade unions and how to tackle those staff that felt uncomfortable with change. Mr Boyce pointed out that a professional level of dialogue was being maintained, a meeting was scheduled with the trade union for the following day and that staff engagement issues were 95% complete. He added that as part of the improvement process the need to provide evidence, detail of reasonable caseloads, and regular supervision all contributed to the aim of creating a learning culture.

A Member commented that 8 months appeared somewhat slow and asked what was being done to accelerate the process, and how the Overview and Scrutiny Committee could be satisfied that the required level of improvement had / would occur. Mr Boyce explained that the timescale was feasible, given the changes required but every effort was being made to ensure the service was 'connected' and pushing forward. He further advised that professional development pathways, reality visits and evidence provided in line with LGA guidance would help in this regard. Mr Boyce also explained that statistical evidence e.g. average caseloads could be misleading, when asking the question 'how many social workers deal with more than 20 cases?' would be more indicative of the current issues faced.

Members suggested that an Overview and Scrutiny Workshop to better evaluate progress / performance against the improvement plan in the new Municipal Year would be beneficial.

The Director for Children closed his presentation informing that instability in the staffing of key roles had resulted in a stop / start approach to the delivery of change, and that the Service was not in dispute with Ofsted about the pace of change, however he believed that Ofsted were satisfied with the actions being taken by the Council and that those actions will have a positive impact on children under the Council's care.

The Chair thanked Mr Boyce for his detailed presentation.

Resolved – That the presentation be noted.

41 **PREVENTING FAMILY BREAKDOWN - CHILDREN ON THE EDGE OF CARE**

Ms Lindsay Davidson, the Senior Manager Targeted Services – Integrated Youth Support introduced her presentation that provided Members with an update on 'Edge of Care' – Preventing Family Breakdown i.e. keeping children safe in their communities and living with their families.

Ms Davidson informed that her presentation would also focus on adolescent youths and the work of the Targeted Youth Support Service for 13-19 year olds, an area that hadn't received detailed service review since 2012.

The presentation informed that the review offer for young people, that now included 11 and 12 year olds, would be:

- Modern and fit for purpose;
- Would have synergy with edge of care service – providing a seamless range of services; and
- Resources would be targeted where most needed.

The Senior Manager Targeted Services – Integrated Youth Support explained that the current offer included:

- 4 Youth Outreach Teams;
- Duke of Edinburgh's Award support and validation;
- Creative Youth Development (also lead on engagement and participation/GIRLS Project);
- Civic Award Scheme; and
- Public Health funded projects – Health Services in Schools, GIRLS Project.

Ms Davidson's presentation detailed how proposals for the future services centred around:

- Outreach – 3 geographical teams
- Key Worker
- Participation and Engagement
- Youth Arts
- GIRLS Project
- Life Skills
- Health Services in Schools
- Civic Award Scheme

The presentation further detailed that direct support be withdrawn from the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and how this programme would be managed by the NW regional office, continuing support to schools for the scheme.

The Senior Manager Targeted Services – Integrated Youth Support informed the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that the approach consisted of distinct but interlinked components of an overarching strategy to prevent family breakdown, utilising an adolescent support team, respite, family mediation, parenting programmes, and family intervention and support for pre-birth to 5 years.

Members questioned the Senior Manager Targeted Services – Integrated Youth Support on details of her presentation seeking assurance of effective monitoring, recognising the need for review, and the need to rebalance the system to target those most vulnerable. A Member questioned the Senior Manager on how the revised system would provide early identification of issues and how the programme would aid elder siblings, often impacted by factors affecting the family as a whole. Ms Davidson informed that dedicated workers would handle all members of the family, and programmes would be planned and monitored prior to final sign-offs, thus preventing possible escalation of problems.

Members also questioned Ms Davidson on key points within her presentation regarding the establishment of an Adolescent Support Hub (ASH) to provide a range of support services for young people 11-19 years in respect of an Edge of Care Service and Targeted Youth Support projects/activities, in addition to group work / programmes, regular drop in sessions involving youth workers and partners, with key staff co-located in a central office.

The Senior Manager Targeted Services – Integrated Youth Support informed that consultation with staff on the revisions to the service had commenced in early December 2017 and would run until mid-February 2018.

The Chair questioned the Senior Manager seeking clarification on the housing / homeless gateway and obstacles presented to 16-17 year olds. The Senior Manager explained that a Homeless Protocol was under review and work was being undertaken across departments in this respect. She informed that the best solution was often mediation to help young people stay at home, but emergency accommodation could be provided if this was not possible.

The Chair thanked Ms Davidson for her detailed presentation, and indicated that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may consider a review of progress as part of its future work programme, if time permitted.

Resolved – That the presentation be noted.

42 **DELIVERY OF 'CHILDREN READY FOR SCHOOL' PLEDGE - UPDATE**

Ms Elizabeth Hartley, the Senior Manager Children's Services introduced her report that detailed information on the 'Children Are Ready for School' pledge co-ordinated and delivered through the multi-agency Early Childhood Reference Group. The report informed that within the group there were four Priority Action Leads who work in partnership with various professionals to deliver the outcomes of their specific action plans. On a quarterly basis, the Early Childhood Reference Group met to receive updates from the Priority Action Leads, provide advice and support, offer challenge and agree progress updates for corporate pledge reporting.

The report provided the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee with information on the four Priority Areas for the Children Are Ready for School pledge, namely:

- To improve multi-agency arrangements to safeguard and protect our youngest children;
- Children in Wirral will start life well;
- Children receive sensitive and responsive care from their main caregivers in the first years of life; and
- Increase the % of children achieving a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

A Member questioned why the 6-8 week development checks for infants continued to be missed by G.P.s, and what actions were being taken to address this failing. The Senior Manager Children's Services informed the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that the current figure stood at 84% with a year-end target of 90%. She added that a written response / update on this matter would be provided to Members.

Another Member asked if the multi-agency Early Childhood Reference Group had made any significant progress against its planned outcomes. The Senior Manager informed that significant progress had been made against the named priorities and provided some key examples relating to arrangements to safeguard and protect the boroughs youngest children. These included:

- Year to date (YTD) figures showed 104 unborns had been discussed at the pre-birth liaison meeting, with 82 receiving additional support;
- an increase in the number of unborns supported through a co-ordinated Team Around the Family approach. YTD figure was 56 against the 2016-17 figure of 12; and
- an increase in the number of under 5s being supported through a Team Around the Family approach. YTD figure was 532 against a figure of 234 for 2016-17.

The Senior Manager Children's Services also provided a summary of the challenges as identified by the Early Childhood Reference Group to ensure school readiness. These included improving outcomes for disadvantaged children, avoiding a plateau for good levels of development, increasing service integrations and improving information sharing across the partnership.

The Chair commented on the benefits of the reality check visit to the Early Childhood Service on 7 December 2017, the subject of a report later on the meeting agenda. Ms Hartley agreed that the joint approach and well established relationships between the local authority and health services

should be replicated wherever possible. She added that the reality check visits had helped in this regard.

A Member questioned the Senior Manager on the subject of the current consultation with parents (identified under Priority 3 (ix) of the report) regarding 'parenting programmes' that sought to provide further insight into 'what works'. Ms Hartley informed that the consultation was due to be completed by mid-February 2018

Resolved – that the report be noted.

43 **REALITY CHECK VISIT - EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICE - FEEDBACK REPORT**

The Chair of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee introduced his report that updated members on the principle of undertaking a series of Reality Check visits by small groups of councillors to enable those elected members to engage directly with frontline staff. His report provided feedback from the visit to the Early Childhood Service that had taken place on Wednesday 7 December 2017.

The Chair informed that the visit had been very useful and had enabled to see first-hand evidence of the amount of partnership and co-operation work in evidence, and the enthusiasm for staff from all teams working together to provide improved outcomes for children and families.

A Member commented that visits should provide more opportunity for Councillors to speak to frontline staff. The Chair informed that, in general this had been a key feature of recent visits, and although time hadn't permitted it on this occasion, Members had still gained substantial benefit from this particular visit as demonstrated by Member's conclusions detailed in para 3.4.1 of his report.

Resolved – that the report be noted.

44 **SUMMARY OF STANDARDS, PROVISIONAL OUTCOMES FOR KEY STAGE 4 AND KEY STAGE 5**

Mrs Sue Talbot, Lead School Commissioner introduced a report of the Director for Children's Services report that provided an in depth analysis and overall summary for the pupil outcomes at the age of 16 (GCSEs) and the age of 18 (GCEs) in relation to GCSE and GCE Standards 2017.

This report provided the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a detailed analysis of outcomes for all pupil groups at Key Stages 4 and 5 in the secondary phase of their education, and supplemented earlier reports considered by the Committee.

The Lead School Commissioner informed the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that there had been significant changes to the content and grading system of GCSEs. The changes had been designed to make subject content and exams more challenging with most exams taken at the end of the two-year course rather than on completion of modules. Grading for English and Mathematics also moved to a 9-1 scale, with grade nine being roughly equivalent to a top A* grade and a grade four equivalent to a low to mid-grade C. Mrs Talbot also informed that GCE A levels had been reformed and that assessments would now be mainly by exam.

The report provided detailed analysis of pupil outcomes used in the measurement of the Council's 2020 pledges – Children are ready for school, Young People are ready for work and adulthood, and Vulnerable children reach their full potential.

Members questioned the Lead School Commissioner if comparable data with statistical neighbours (not available at the time of writing the report) could be provided, together with information regarding the GCSE performance of Academies. Mrs Talbot advised that this information would be sent out to Members following the meeting. She added that more detail could be provided in future reports and that the current numbers showed improved performance and she hoped to see this trend continue.

In addition to a detailed breakdown summary of A Level outcomes (August 2017) and Key Stage 4, in response to a question from a Member, Mrs Talbot provided a brief update on the proactive targeted approaches being taken in respect of school exclusions, absenteeism and home schooling.

The Lead School Commissioner informed that the statistics with regard to Wallasey schools had been skewed as a result of some unexpected figures from one school. It was noted that the geographical statistical splits were also affected by the location of Wirral's Grammar Schools. Members noted that many 6th Form Colleges were performing well as a result of the 'pairing' of schools that had helped greatly with pupil transitions.

Members thanked Mrs Talbot for her comprehensive report and her detailed responses to their questions.

Resolved – that the GCSE & GCE Standards 2017 report be noted.

45 **CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OSC - FEEDBACK FROM BUDGET SCRUTINY (2018/19)**

A report from the Chair presented the work of the Business Overview and Scrutiny Committee in relation to scrutinising the 2018/19 budget proposals. A workshop had been held on 11 January for Members to explore in more detail

the various budget proposals being put forward that fell under the remit of this committee. A report on the workshop had been circulated as a supplement to the agenda. The Committee was requested to acknowledge this report as its response to the 2018/19 budget proposals to be referred on to Cabinet as part of its considerations in developing any budget recommendation to Council.

Resolved –

(1) That this Committee acknowledges this report as its response to the 2018/19 budget proposals; and

(2) That this report be referred to Cabinet as part of its considerations in developing any budget recommendation to Council.

46 **CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OSC - WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE REPORT**

The Chair introduced his report that informed that the Children and Families Overview & Scrutiny Committee, in cooperation with the other three Overview & Scrutiny Committees, was responsible for proposing and delivering an annual scrutiny work programme. The report further informed that the work programme should align with the corporate priorities of the Council, in particular the delivery of the Wirral Plan pledges which were within the remit of the Committee.

The Chair's report provided an update regarding progress made since the last Committee meeting held on 14 November 2017. The current work programme was made up of a combination of scrutiny reviews, workshops, standing items and requested officer reports. The update report provided the committee with an opportunity to plan and regularly review its work across the municipal year. The current work programme for the Committee was attached as an appendix to the report.

The Chair highlighted the forthcoming Member Workshops and Training Sessions, and that at a meeting of the Chairs of the four Overview & Scrutiny Committees, it was agreed to undertake further scrutiny of Universal Credit in February 2018 when the implications of implementing Universal Credit may be better known and the relevant data could be made available to Members. Although not formally part of this Committee's work programme, it was anticipated that members of all four scrutiny committees will be invited to participate in the workshops. The Chair asked if Members could agree in principal, and that if possible Member please indicate their availability to take part in this work.

The following Members indicated that they would be keen to be involved in the next reality check visit which would focus on the Performance Dashboard:

- Councillor Alan Brighthouse (LD)
- Councillor Moira McLaughlin (L)
- Councillor Chris Meaden (L)
- Councillor Cherry Povall (C)
- Councillor Jean Stapleton (L)
- Councillor Adam Sykes (C)

A Member requested that future dates for the Reality Check Visits be factored into the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's work programme diary for the forthcoming Municipal Year (2018/19).

Resolved – that the updated Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for 2017/18 be approved.