

## **CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Wednesday, 27 February 2019

Present: Councillor T Usher (Chair)

Councillors EA Grey KJ Williams  
D Burgess-Joyce G Wood  
K Cannon C Carubia  
W Clements M Jordan (In place  
C Povall of P Hayes)  
M McLaughlin I Lewis (In place of  
Robinson P Hayes)  
J Walsh AER Jones (In  
place of J  
McManus)

### 40 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Andrew Gardner, Paul Hayes and Julie McManus. An apology for absence was also received from Julie Jones, a Co-opted Member of the Committee.

### 41 **MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Cherry Povall declared a personal interest in respect of agenda item 8 (Wirral Fostering Service) by virtue of membership of the Wirral Fostering Panel.

There were no declarations made in respect of the application of a party whipping arrangement.

### 42 **MINUTES**

#### **RESOLVED:**

**That the minutes of the meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 24 January 2019 be confirmed as a correct record.**

### 43 **TACKLING OBESITY**

Further to the meeting of the Committee held on 24 January 2019 (Minute 36 refers), the Acting Director of Public Health introduced a report providing

further detail on the key challenges that Wirral faces in relation to overweight and obesity, the opportunities to help local people maintain a healthy weight and outlining a series of recommendations for action.

Obesity is one of the most serious and complex health challenges, with several different but often interlinked causes. There was no single effective solution in tackling obesity and action across agencies, sectors and with local people is needed to address it effectively. Almost two thirds of local people are either overweight or obese and the impact of this is far reaching and has multiple implications. Without effective action the health of individuals will continue to suffer, the health inequalities associated with obesity will remain, and the economic and social costs will increase to unsustainable levels.

It was noted that a number of actions required national policy and that Councils were well placed to lobby national government on behalf of local people and to deliver action locally. At the local level, there was opportunity to go beyond educating people about healthy eating and to also tackle key local environmental drivers of obesity and to support people who are already overweight. It was proposed that this Committee support a whole systems approach for the Council to work with stakeholders to develop an understanding of the reality of the challenge, consider how the system is operating, and where there are the greatest opportunities for change. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee was considered to be well placed to lead this approach and several issues that could be explored via this approach that could lead to local action were considered within the submitted report.

The Committee was also invited to consider supporting a Local Government Declaration on Healthy Weight for Wirral Council that would present a vision for the promotion of healthy weight and the improvement of the health and wellbeing of the local population, recognising the Council's need to exercise its responsibility in developing and implementing policies that promote healthy weight. In response to a query, it was advised that Blackpool's Declaration, provided to the Committee as an exemplar, had had varied success and was being refreshed with these outcomes in mind.

The link between mental health and obesity was noted, and comment made that healthy eating contributed to being in the right frame of mind. While this had not been addressed directly in the submitted paper, the issue was being picked up in work with people with anxiety and depression.

It was queried whether the quality of school meals was monitored and whether nutrition legislation was being followed. While this could not be responded to at the meeting, the Acting Director advised of an approach received from Edsential and the offer they provided. The quality of the Edsential offer was stressed by a Member referencing his experience as a school governor. Noting that schools also used other providers to deliver school meals and had a big role to play in delivering healthy food, Members

asked to be advised of the monitoring arrangements. The Acting Director advised that work with schools was an area that Public Health wished to address and improve upon, looking to commission a Healthy Child Programme and to develop links with Edsential.

A Member noted that of the several issues put forward for exploration in the submitted report only the proposed Declaration had any indication of enforcement queried how healthy eating and measures to tackle obesity were to be 'enforced'. The Acting Director advised that the approach was about changing behaviours, and so it was important to create the right environment to help people make choices and be encouraged to eat healthily. The importance of tackling obesity was stressed by a rise in Type 2 diabetes.

In response to a query concerning work to address takeaways through the planning system which had been supported by Members, the Acting Director advised that this remained a work in progress, but maybe not as quickly as would have been liked from a public health perspective. In discussion, a Member noted that this approach had been a recommendation of the Task and Finish Group.

**RESOLVED: That**

- (1) a Committee working group be established to develop, through a series of workshops, an action plan to develop key areas of work to support local people to maintain a healthy weight;**
- (2) the opportunities to promote healthy weight as identified within the submitted report be noted;**
- (3) the proposed development of and commitment to a Local Government Declaration on Healthy Weight for Wirral be endorsed.**

**44 2018/19 QUARTER 3 WIRRAL PLAN PERFORMANCE**

The Committee received a report presenting the 2018/19 Quarter 3 (October - December 2018) performance report for the Wirral Plan Pledges under the remit of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The performance report, which was included as an Appendix to the submitted report, provided a description of progress in Quarter 3 as well as providing available data in relation to a range of outcome indicators and supporting measures.

The performance report contained details of the progress made, and overviews of that progress from the Lead Cabinet Member, in respect of individual measures being pursued with regard to the following Wirral Plan Pledges pertinent to the Committee -

- Children are Ready for School;
- Young People are Ready for Work and Adulthood;
- Vulnerable Children Reach their Full Potential;
- People with Disabilities Live Independent Lives; and
- Zero Tolerance to Domestic Violence.

The Director for Children presented the performance report and invited comment from Members on it's content.

The worsening trend in the percentage of women booked to access professional maternity services on or before 12+6 weeks gestation was raised. The Director noted that the figures gave the impression that women were not engaged, but whether this was true was queried. It may be that the wrong measure was being used and this issue required a deeper understanding.

Worsening trends in several measures relating to domestic violence were raised. The Director advised of discussions on these points and of the need to get a better understanding of the data. While the data suggested a greater prevalence, was it actually a case of increased detection? A Member commented that nothing seemed to have progressed in respect of domestic violence issues, and that a progress report was required to advise more fully on such matters. The Chair noted that while the Committee had recently received a report, questions still remained. A report submission or a workshop session could be added to the Committee work programme to seek to understand the issues, the data and the effectiveness of the Council's response.

**RESOLVED: That**

- (1) **the report be noted;**
- (2) **the approach towards the consideration of domestic violence issues within the Committee work programme be discussed further by the Chair and Party Spokespersons.**

45 **IMPROVEMENT JOURNEY AND DATA TRACKER (OFSTED READINESS)**

The Corporate Director for Children's Services made a presentation on the Children and Young People's Service improvement journey. He provided –

- an overview of re-inspection preparation, including
  - key workstreams to capture feedback and actions from monitoring visits and Ofsted inspections
  - validation of Annex A, self-assessment, dashboards, performance reporting and the functionality of Liquid Logic;
  - development of a solid infrastructure of support and guidance for the workforce, partners and elected Members,

all underpinned by a high level action plan and appropriate governance and management;

- a summary of current practice in respect of
  - the integrated front door and complex investigations;
  - assessment and intervention and Child Protection;
  - permanency and planning for children;
  - care leavers;
  - fostering and adoption;and further considering areas for development;
- key data headlines;
- workforce information, including agency staffing, sickness absence and wellbeing;
- ongoing service improvements, looking beyond the Ofsted inspection; and
- details of developments in partnership working.

In concluding the presentation, the Corporate Director thanked the Committee for their work and support over the previous 12 months, noting that the Reality Visits had been particularly helpful in developing good practice from scrutiny. A date for the Ofsted inspection had not yet been indicated, though it was suggested that it would be held before June 2019.

A Member noted that while sickness absence figures were moving in the right direction, they were still higher than the national and Council averages. The Corporate Director advised that a number of long term absences were being addressed that would further improve the Service's figures.

The Corporate Director referred to safeguarding matters and the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangement (MASA), currently operating in shadow form prior to full implementation in September 2019. The Lead Member for Children retained a statutory role, but there was a need for determining a protocol for scrutiny input beyond consideration of the annual report.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the presentation of the Corporate Director on the Children and Young People's Service improvement journey be noted.**

**FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT QUARTER 3 2018/19**

The Senior Manager Corporate Finance presented a report that set out financial monitoring information for Children and Families as at the close of Quarter 3 of the 2018/19 financial year. The report provided Members with the detail to scrutinise budget performance for this area of activity, the financial information provided including –

- performance against the Revenue Budget (including savings, income and debt); and

- performance against the Capital Budget.

In presenting the report, the Senior Manager Corporate Finance presented details on the 2018/19 revenue budget, reported on changes to the agreed Children and Families budget, advised on the 2018/19 forecast outturn and reported on the 2018/19 capital programme.

Further to queries concerning funding of Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision, as shown at paragraph 3.2 to the submitted report, it was confirmed that funding was available to address the identified needs of pupils, and that the first phase of the Premier Advisory Group independent review of SEN provision was due to report shortly.

The Chair noted that an earlier budget exercise had set out to deliver high quality early help that would then drive down demand on statutory services. However, the figures as presented indicated an underspend on early help that appeared to be supporting an overspend on statutory services. The Corporate Director advised the underspend reflected a part year cost of a new service and was not a deliberate underspend. The Committee was advised that full year spend on the early help service would cause a further budget pressure in the following year.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the report be noted.**

47 **WIRRAL FOSTERING SERVICE**

The Committee received a report providing an update in respect of Wirral's in-house Fostering Service that recruits and supports carers and provides placements for children from across the Borough. The report addressed in detail the following key areas of consideration that had been identified by Members –

- details of foster carer recruitment and retention;
- training and support offered before and during placements;
- levels of placement breakdowns and the reasons; and
- numbers of young people who remain in the 'Staying Put' scheme.

The submitted report set out current practice in the identified key areas and provided further contextual information for consideration, considering local, regional and national issues relating to fostering services. The Committee was advised that there was a significant challenge in the market for foster carers which was exacerbated in Wirral by the number of children fostered.

Members raised several queries and were advised of the following -

- it was confirmed that requirements to compile several extensive assessment reports for the same child were generally Court directed and did deflect from other aspects of work;
- the Staying Put scheme needed to be kept under review and considerations given as to how to improve the offer for those leaving care at the age of 18 years;
- with regard to foster carer resignations, these could arise, for example, for family reasons or changing circumstances, while recruitment by an agency might also be a factor. A request was made for resignation data to be included in any future report on fostering;
- with regard to detail in the submitted report such that a number of foster carers had been 'terminated', this generally arose though concerns about practice or levels of care;
- regarding foster carers who are family members, it was advised that the same Regulations, training and supervision applied to these carers as to other foster carers.

Referring to content within the submitted report that Wirral had a higher proportion of looked after children in some form of foster placement than most other north-west local authorities, it was noted that across the north west the figure was generally higher than in other regions. The Committee was advised that the local courts preferred an approach that they believed provided the extra rigour of a care order or interim care order. It was confirmed that this approach had been queried previously, but no change had been seen.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the report be noted.**

**48 EARLY HELP – COMMUNITY MATTERS**

The Committee received a report presenting an overview of the new Community Matters initiative which has been established to provide early help for children, young people and families in Wirral.

'Early help' means taking action to support a child, young person or their family as soon as a problem emerges. It can be required at any stage in a child's life and applies to any problem or need that the family can't deal with alone. Early help can lead to better outcomes for children, prevent problems escalating or overwhelming families, create social mobility and support communities to thrive.

Community Matters sought to create the right conditions for community-based early help to thrive, including:

- the revitalising of the voluntary, community and faith sector by creating a vibrant and visible network of providers;

- the provision of support to children and families which is straight-forward and effective, easy to engage with and not constrained by overwhelming processes; and
- the engaging of all stakeholders in the process of developing a long-term approach to early help which is sustainable, responsive to need, proactive in delivery, and is owned by communities.

The development of the early help offer was outlined in the submitted report and contracts had been let for the provision of Community Matters services as follows -

- **Co-ordination of early help** - Revitalising the voluntary, community and faith sector by creating a vibrant and visible network of providers through publishing the early help offer; re-launching the Link Forum; hosting quarterly networking events; triaging requests for service and signposting children and families to support; allocating families to early help support providers for casework support; and maintaining information systems, recording all early help activity and casework;
- **Delivery of early help support** - Providing support to children and families which is straight-forward and effective, easy to engage with and not constrained by overwhelming processes. To work with 120 families annually, ensuring each family has a lead worker, an early help assessment, an early help plan and a recorded outcome and closure summary. A further contract would be award with effect from 1 April 2019 to provide a whole family mental health and wellbeing service.
- **Development of early help** - Engaging all stakeholders in the process of developing a long-term approach to early help which is sustainable, responsive to need, proactive in delivery, and owned by communities, involving Stakeholder engagement, capacity building, evaluation, collective impact modelling, and the launching a new model by 1 April 2021.

In noting the increase in activity by the community and voluntary sector, it was queried how it could be assured that a group of people with an important need were not missing out on necessary referrals. The Committee was advised that a manager post had been established for oversight, that the early help hub accessed the liquid logic system, and that all organisations were doing rigorous data collection. A communications strategy had been developed that would seek to ensure that all necessary agencies were aware of the new and developing arrangements.

**RESOLVED: That**

- (1) **the report be noted;**
- (2) **the Community Matters initiative be supported.**

49 **FUTURE MULTI-AGENCY SAFEGUARDING ARRANGEMENTS -  
WORKSHOP REPORT**

The Committee received the report and recommendations arising from a Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee Workshop held on 28 January 2019 that had reviewed proposed Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements.

The requirements of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 would see the cessation of the current Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCBs) later in the year and Members had convened the Workshop to receive more information regarding the proposed model for future Local Safeguarding arrangements.

**RESOLVED: That**

- (1) the report be noted;**
- (2) a draft protocol be produced between the Scrutiny Committee and Wirral Partnership Group and shared with attendees of the workshop for further suggestions and comments, this to be put in place once both bodies are satisfied with it and prior to the Wirral Safeguarding Partnership Group going live and the Wirral Safeguarding Children Board standing down;**
- (3) this Committee should receive bi-annual updates from the Wirral Safeguarding Partnership Group, one of which is to be an annual report;**
- (4) consideration of the formalising of arrangements whereby Scrutiny could become involved in the Wirral Safeguarding Partnership Group and informed of its activities be deferred for further consideration.**

50 **CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE -  
WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE REPORT**

The Chair introduced his report advising that this Committee, in co-operation with the other three Overview and Scrutiny Committees, was responsible for proposing and delivering an annual Scrutiny Work Programme. 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 Committee meeting held on 24 January 2019, and the current work programme made up of a combination of scrutiny reviews, workshops,

standing items and requested Officer reports was appended. Also appended was a report on a Pooled Funding Arrangements Scrutiny Workshop held jointly with the Adult Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January 2019.

Further to the Workshop report and in response to a query concerning gaps in Special Educational Needs provision and the implications for those with Education, Health and Care Plans once they reach 18 years of age, the Committee was advised that transition was being looked at across Wirral as a whole as different services had differing approaches to transfer between children and adult services. It was also noted that criteria to access services could be different between children and adult services.

With regard to the proposed Obesity Working Group (Minute 43 refers), the Chair and Councillors Burgess-Joyce, Carubia, Clement, Grey, McLaughlin and Wood registered an interest in membership. It was noted that membership of this Group would be confirmed on appointment of the new Committee in May 2019.

**RESOLVED: That**

- (1) the addition of the establishment of an Obesity Working Group to the work programme be noted, along with further work relating to domestic abuse in a form to be determined by the Chair and Spokespersons as agreed at Minute 44 above;**
- (2) the updated Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme for 2018/19, as amended, be approved;**
- (3) the report and recommendations of the Pooled Funding Arrangements Scrutiny Workshop be noted and accepted.**