

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 27 October 2021

Present: Councillor W Clements (Chair)

Councillors K Cannon H Collinson
C Cooke P Stuart
C Carubia A Wright
M Booth Y Nolan (In place of
D Brennan S Frost)
I Camphor (In place
of C Povall)

37 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair welcomed Members, Officers and members of the public to the meeting.

38 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Cherry Povall and Councillor Samantha Frost.

39 MEMBERS CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Members were asked to consider whether they had any disclosable pecuniary interests in connection with any item(s) on the agenda and, if so, declare and state what they were.

Councillor Paul Stuart declared a personal interest as a Local Authority Foster Carer.

40 MINUTES

Resolved – That

(1) the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 13 September 2021 be agreed; and

(2) the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 4 October 2021 be agreed.

41 PUBLIC AND MEMBERS QUESTIONS

There were no public questions, requests to make a statement or petitions submitted.

42 **PROCUREMENT OF SERVICES TO ENCOURAGE, ENABLE AND ASSIST YOUNG PEOPLE TO PARTICIPATION IN EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

The Head of Integrated Learning, Skills and Employment introduced the report of the Director of Children, Families and Education, which detailed the background of the service to encourage, enable and assist young people's participation in employment, education and training as well as the proposed procurement of the service alongside Halton Council and Knowsley Council, with Halton Council agreeing to lead on the procurement activity. It was reported that the service had historically been jointly commissioned which had produced improvements in the proportion of children not in education, employment or training, with Wirral performing better than the England and North West average. The current contract with the existing provider was due to expire on 31 March 2022.

Members considered the proposed joint arrangements and sought further information on the previous partnership which had included Liverpool City Council. It was reported that Liverpool City Council had opted to test and trial alternative approaches, but that officers felt that the partnership still provided the best value to Wirral children. It was further reported that Liverpool City Region authorities were closely aligned on the work area to share best practice.

Resolved – That delegated authority be given to the Director of Children, Families and Education to enter into a partnership service delivery contract with Halton Council, Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council, and an approved service provider, at the end of the procurement process to deliver a service to support and enable NEET young people to positively participate.

43 **EXTENSION OF THE ADOPTION IN MERSEYSIDE (AIM) PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT AND REVIEW OF PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS**

The Director of Children, Families and Education introduced the report which outlined the partnership arrangements for the Adoption in Merseyside regional adoption service and sought agreement for the extension of the current arrangements as well as outlining the proposed review of those arrangements. The Committee was advised that the regional adoption service was established in April 2017 following the introduction of the Education and Adoption Act 2016 which set out the requirement to have a service in place. The agency was a partnership with Knowsley Council, Liverpool City Council, Sefton Council and Wirral Council, with Knowsley acting as the host authority.

The existing contract had concluded in March 2021 and had not been reviewed due to Covid-19, therefore approval was sought to extend the contract until March 2022 with a view to a review of the arrangements taking place.

It was noted that the option of Wirral Council hosting the service was considered as part of the budget workshops, but it was felt that there was little extra value when compared to just being part of the arrangements.

Resolved – That

(1) The current Adoption in Merseyside partnership agreement be extended to 31 March 2022.

(2) it be noted that a review of the existing partnership arrangements would take place and a further report would be brought back on future partnership arrangements for 01 April 2022.

(3) the proposal for Wirral Council to not put itself forward as the host authority at the current time be supported.

44 PERFORMANCE UPDATE - SOCIAL WORK WORKFORCE

The Assistant Director of Children and Families Services introduced the report of the Director of Children, Families and Education which provided an overview on the current position of the social work workforce and highlighted some of the key challenges faced by the Service, including the workforce adapting to new ways of working, supporting recruitment and retention, managing staff absence rates, and the use of temporary agency staffing.

The report detailed the national issues with workforce instability in children's social work staffing which had been exacerbated by Covid-19. Within Wirral, it was reported that the vacancy rate had increased by over 6% in the previous 12 months to 28%. In the 12 months up to 30 August 2021 32 new employees had been recruited into qualified social work posts, and 36 had left posts, the first 12-month period with a deficit position in terms of staff recruitment and retention. Members were advised that through exit interviews, it was ascertained that a number of staff members had delayed the decision to seek progression elsewhere until after Covid-19 which may have exacerbated the deficit position. Further details were also provided on new initiatives to encourage recruitment and retention.

A detailed discussion ensued where the wellbeing of staff was raised. It was reported that the national survey of social workers was undertaken in September 2020 which identified that the caseload rate of 13.9 per Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff at Wirral was significantly lower than all statistical neighbours, and whilst it had since risen to 15 per FTE, it was still one of the

lowest rates. The sickness absence levels within the service was also raised and the Director of Children, Families and Education undertook to provide a further detailed report to Committee on the issue. The need to ensure the experience of social workers leaving was retained or replaced was emphasised. Furthermore, the use of agency staff was raised, where it was reported that many staff members preferred the flexibility and increased rate of pay for agency work, but that the benefits of becoming a permanent member of staff were outlined to agency workers such as pension contribution, essential care use and annual leave.

Resolved – That

(1) the current position regarding the children’s social workforce position be noted.

(2) the proposed actions outlined in the report including the development of a revised Social Work Workforce Strategy be noted.

45 **REVIEW OF PARTICIPATION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 16 TO 18
SEPT 2021**

The Head of Integrated Learning, Skills and Employment introduced the report of the Director for Children, Families and Education which provided an overview of post-16 participation in employment, education and training following the Covid-19 pandemic. The report detailed that the overall rate of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) and those not know (NK) in Wirral was at 4.9%, a 0.9% reduction from 2018 and overall in the top 50% nationally against the backdrop of the Liverpool City Region’s NEET ‘hotspot’ status. The work ongoing to increase participation was outlined to the Committee which included working with Wirral Growth Company and Morgan Sindall plc on apprenticeships and Wirral Met College. The key challenges were also outlined, with the number of long term inactive young people a growing challenge following the pandemic.

The statistics provided showed that the number of children in education in Year 13 reduced whilst the number in apprenticeships in the same year group grew, and it was suggested that greater advice and guidance at an earlier stage could be assist young people in choosing the most appropriate career path. Further data was also sought on the breakdown of NEET young people on a ward basis as well as the number of young people with Special Education Needs and Disabilities accessing programmes to support participation in employment, education and training.

Resolved – That

(1) the report be noted.

(2) the services' continued intervention to support and engage young people not in education, employment or training or at risk of being be supported.

46 **WIRRAL PLAN DELIVERY PLANS**

The Director of Children, Families and Education introduced the report of the Chief Executive, which presented the Wirral Plan 2021-26 Draft Delivery Plans, which were approved at Council on 6th September 2021, together with the recommendation that engagement and discussion with relevant Committees would take place to further shape the underpinning delivery plans and work programmes required to implement the Wirral Plan. Members were reminded that the Wirral Plan had five key objective areas, and that the Children, Young People and Education work area contributed to every objective. The strands within the plans that directly related to Children, Young People and Education were outlined including early help and prevention and school improvement and sufficiency, but it was felt that it was important for children, young people and families to have a voice in how all elements of the delivery plans.

Members highlighted the importance of the breaking the cycle programme for both Children and Adults and how that would improve prevention across all areas. It was requested that the Covid-19 Education Catch Up Plan be included within the projects and initiatives section of the plans.

Resolved – That the Draft Delivery Plans be noted.

47 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Head of Legal Services introduced the report of the Director of Law and Governance which provided the Committee with an opportunity to plan and regularly review its work across the municipal year.

It was highlighted that the Committee had agreed at its last meeting to receive a report on the Covid-19 Education Catch Up Plan in January 2022 and that it needed to be included on the work programme.

Resolved – That

(1) the Work Programme be noted.

(2) the Covid-19 Education Catch Up Plan be added to the Work Programme for January 2022.