

CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND LIFELONG LEARNING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday 16 March 2009

<u>Present:</u>	Councillor	S Clarke (Chair)	
	Councillors	F Doyle T Anderson T Harney	T Smith W Smith
<u>Deputy:</u>	Councillors	A Pritchard	
<u>Cabinet member:</u>	Councillor	PL Davies	
<u>Co-opted members:</u>		Mrs J Kearney Mrs M Liddy	Mrs J Owens

53 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The members of the Committee were asked to consider whether they had a personal or prejudicial interest in connection with any item on the agenda and, if so, to declare it and to state the nature of such interest. The following declaration was made:

Councillor Sheila Clarke – a personal interest in minute 59 by virtue of having served as a member of the Adoption Panel.

54 PROPOSED CHILDREN IN CARE COUNCIL

The Director of Children's Services reported on proposals for the creation of Wirral's Children in Care Council; a minimum expectation for all Children's Services authorities as outlined in 'Care Matters: Time for Change' (DfES - 2007). The Government expected each local authority to put in place arrangements for a Children in Care Council with direct links to the Director of Children's Services and the lead elected member, in order to improve the corporate parenting role and ultimately to improve the outcomes for children in care.

The precise form that the Care Council would take was not currently prescribed, but Care Matters required that the accountability and governance arrangements for the Children's Services corporate parenting structure should include a Children in Care Council. In addition the Council was required to develop a pledge which covered the services and support children in care should expect to receive. Ofsted would take account of both of those in future inspections. Local authorities had to ensure that children were involved in planning for their lives and in developing services; and they should have in place a process that demonstrated that there was visible dialogue between the Director of Children's Services and the lead elected member for Children's Services.

Two of the young people who had been involved in drawing up the pledge, Sam and Chris, attended the meeting and stressed in particular the need for children in care to

be treated the same as other children. They responded to a number of questions by members on other aspects of the pledge, such as the need to avoid delays in obtaining consents and each child in care having a qualified social worker assigned to them.

Julia Hassall, Head of Children's Social Care, stated that the issue of permissions had been raised at a national level, resulting in national guidance, but it was still necessary to ensure that individual foster parents felt sufficiently confident to act in accordance with them. The position with assigned social workers was that currently 95% of children had one; particular attention was paid to those who didn't; and action was being taken to ensure the retention of existing staff. Social workers' visits took place more regularly than required by national standards.

Resolved - That

- (1) Sam and Chris, together with all of the young people and officers involved in the process, be thanked for their work;**
- (2) the Pledge and the whole of the arrangements for the Children in Care Council be endorsed; and**
- (3) progress be reviewed in 12 months' time, with representatives of the Children in Care Council being invited to the meeting.**

55 COMPLAINTS MONITORING

The Director of Children's Services presented an analysis of complaints registered under The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006. Over the period 1 October to 31 December 2008 the following complaints had been registered:

Stage 1 complaints – 17, compared with 20 complaints the previous quarter;
Stage 2 complaints – four, compared with two complaints in the previous quarter;
Stage 3 complaints – none.

It was felt that progress in the way complaints were dealt with was continuing.

Resolved – That

- (1) the report be noted;**
- (2) future reports identify any themes that might be apparent from the complaints.**

56 MINUTES

Resolved - That the minutes of the previous meeting, held on 13 January 2009, be accepted as a correct record.

57 ACTIONS RESULTING FROM THE BABY P CASE

Arising out of minute 47 (13/1/09), the Director of Children's Services reported upon measures to strengthen childcare services in the light of the findings of the Baby P case. A report, to be considered by the Cabinet on 19 March, dealt with the creation

of an additional nine social worker posts, measures for improving links between agencies and improved information/administrative systems. Nationally, additional training for directors of children's services, and aspiring directors, was being put in place, and the Director himself was a member of the team responsible for devising the programme.

The Director went on to explain progress in training professionals in the use of the Child Concern Model. With regard to complying with recommended caseloads, Julia Hassall explained that they had actually increased since 2003. The additional nine posts would alleviate that situation, especially in assessment teams. In addition, measures were being investigated with the aim of balancing caseloads in terms of complexity and the relative experience of social workers. Recruitment and retention remained a significant factor.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

58 EARLY YEARS PROVISION IN WIRRAL

The Director of Children's Services submitted a comprehensive report that outlined the development in Wirral's provision for young children and their families and advised of progress in key parts of the Early Years Outcomes Duty Plan. The Committee was reminded that a good start in life was essential if children were to fulfil their potential. Services available in early childhood services would result in better outcomes for young children, their families and society. All parents, from the time they are expecting a baby, should be able to access integrated child health, high quality early years provision and family support services, some free at the point of delivery. He went on to describe the new duties on local authorities and partner agencies under the Childcare Act 2006

Caroline Kerr, Principal Manager (Children's Centres), explained the implementation of the children's centres programme in more detail and how progress and outcomes were being measured. She referred in particular to how services had been targeted initially on the most disadvantaged areas.

The members of the Committee raised a number of issues including literacy levels among young children, outreach work to deal with those families with whom it was difficult to engage, relationships between children's centres and private nurseries, the input from health services. Some concern was expressed about the target date of 2020, by which time at least 90% of children were expected to be developing well across all areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile by age five. Caroline Kerr stated that Wirral had made progress towards that target in each of the last five years. Mark Parkinson, Head of Learning and Achievement, added that the development of comprehensive family services through the centres, would be a key element in supporting that progress.

Resolved – That the officers be thanked for their most informative report.

59 ADOPTION SERVICE - INSPECTION, AND REPORT OF THE ADOPTION PANEL

The Director of Children's Services reported on the outcome of the inspection of the Adoption Service, undertaken by Ofsted in September 2008. The report also includes the Adoption Panel's Annual Report, as it had a key part to play in the performance

of the service. The Director explained that the previous inspection had taken place in July 2005. Wirral's Adoption Service undertook all statutory responsibilities associated with current legislation and regulations. Those responsibilities included the recruitment, preparation, assessment and approvals of adopters, placement support and post-adoption support. The service also undertook case management of a limited number of children's cases who had a plan for adoption. Those responsibilities reflected local authority services for adoption across the region.

The key findings of the inspection were that it was a satisfactory service, with some good aspects:

- the service had a strong commitment to improving outcomes for children and was focused on their safety and well being;
- there was a thorough approach to the preparation, assessment and support of adopters and an emphasis on achieving suitable matches based on children's needs – that was reflected in a low level of disruption of placements;
- a range of services were provided to birth families which encouraged them to be involved in planning for their children's futures;
- the manager and senior managers provided leadership and support to staff, and the whole team were committed to moving the service forward;
- the manager, senior managers and the team were aware of the areas that were in need of improvement and there were already plans in place to address those prior to the inspection.

The inspectors had commented that the service had made progress since 2005 in many areas, including improved staff training, preparation and assessment of potential adopters, adoption support planning and working with birth parents. The arrangements for archiving adoption files had been improved and personnel records of staff and panel members operating in the service are now largely compliant with standards. The two recommended actions from the latest report were that the service must ensure that full and correct information on children was contained in their child permanence report, and that case records for children contained the required information. Those were already being addressed prior to the inspection.

Resolved – That the report and the action being taken in response to it be noted.

60 PERFORMANCE MONITORING - THIRD QUARTER

The Director of Children's Services submitted the Department's third quarter performance monitoring report.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

61 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE DEPARTMENT - FINANCIAL MONITORING

The Director of Children's Services submitted a financial overview of his department's budget in the current year. At the time of reporting there was no projected overspend for the department. Cost pressures had been contained by maximising grants and expenditure restrictions. He referred to particular areas of the budget including out-of-borough placements. He pointed out that, having achieved

significant reductions in numbers in previous years, it would in future be difficult to set specific targets, though continuing to reduce the total remained a long-term aim.

Resolved – That the Director and his staff be congratulated on the high standard of financial management within the Department.

62 **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE DEPARTMENT - CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING**

The Director of Children's Services reported on progress in implementing the Department's capital programme.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

63 **CONTRACTS EXCEEDING £50,000**

The Director of Children's services report, in accordance with the Contracts Procedure Rules, on those instances where he had exercised his delegated authority to accept tenders and to appoint contractors. The contracts were in respect of:

- building works
- out-of-authority placements
- residential care placements
- Connexions (Positive Activities for Young People)
- secondary school catering
- miscellaneous supplies and services.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

64 **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chair submitted an update on the Committee's work programme showing:

- (i) all items selected by the Committee for inclusion on the work programme for the current year, together with monitoring of previous recommendations;
- (ii) an opportunity for adding to the work programme
- (iii) the proposed outline meeting schedule for the municipal year;
- (iv) progress on the in-depth panel reviews.

Councillor Harney suggested the addition of a topic of the correlation between deprivation and under-achievement by pupils and how, in those circumstances, families were supported. Members discussed the content of reports and concluded that the use of case studies, for example to illustrate the extent of family deprivation, might sometimes be more helpful, rather than relying wholly on statistics. Councillor Harney was conscious of the potential workload involved in that topic and suggested that the Committee might make use of research undertaken for university qualifications.

Councillor Doyle referred to a proposal for a joint study, with the Social Care, Health and Inclusion Committee, on alcohol abuse. Councillor Tony Smith suggested the issue of surpluses in school budgets.

In relation to the earlier proposal that the Committee should look at the issue of teenage pregnancy, it was noted that the Cabinet would be considering a report on the subject on 9 April and that Wirral PCT's Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinator had arranged a seminar for all Council members on 21 April.

Resolved – That the issues now suggested be added to the Committee's work programme.

65 SCHOOL STANDARDS SUB-COMMITTEE - MINUTES

The minutes of meetings of the School Standards Sub-Committee, held on 2 and 9 February 2009, were submitted. The Sub-Committee had considered a number of issues, in particular the Ofsted reports relating to the following schools:

Primary

Satisfactory schools

Bedford Drive
Brackenwood Junior
Castleway Primary
Holy Cross Catholic Primary
Kingsway Primary
Leasowe Primary
Liscard Primary
New Brighton Primary
St Joseph's Catholic Primary, Wallasey

Good schools

Barnston Primary
Brookdale Primary
Ladymount Catholic Primary
Mersey Park Primary
Overchurch Infant
Portland Primary
Rock Ferry Primary
St Bridget's C of E Primary
St George's Primary
St Joseph's Catholic Primary, Birkenhead
St Laurence's Catholic Primary
Somerville Primary
Stanton Road Primary

Outstanding schools

Dawpool C of E Primary
Elleray Park (Special School)
Greasby Junior
Higher Bebington Junior
Our Lady of Pity Catholic Primary

Secondary

Good schools

Park High
Rock Ferry High
Wallasey

Outstanding schools

West Kirby Grammar for Girls
Woodchurch High

Resolved – That the minutes be noted.