

Wirral Improvement Board Meeting

22nd February 2017

Present:

Eleanor Brazil	Chair of Improvement Board
Tony Crane	Department for Education Advisor
Eric Robinson	Chief Executive
Cllr Phil Davies	Leader of the Council
Cllr Tony Smith	Cabinet Member for Children & Family Services
Cllr Wendy Clements	Conservative Group Councillor
Cllr Phil Gilchrist	Liberal Democrat Leader
Prof. Maggie Atkinson	Chair of LSCB
Tracey Hayes	Merseyside Police
Lorna Quigley	Director of Policy & Patient Safety Clinical Commissioning Group
Julia Hassall	Director for Children's Services

Officers in Attendance:

Gladys Rhodes White	Interim Strategic Lead for Improvement
Deborah Gornik	Deputy Director for Children's Services
Sheila Murphy	Interim Deputy Director for Children's Services
Kerry Crichlow	Interim Head of Performance, Quality & Improvement
Kevin MacCallum	Senior Manager – Marketing & Communications
Matthew Humble	Business & Transformation Manager
Alison Watson	Quality Assurance & Auditing Officer
Michael Nugent	Consultant in Children's Services Performance

Apologies:

Cllr Moira McLaughlin	Chair of Scrutiny Committee
Ian Hassall	Merseyside Police – Area Commander
Avril Devaney	Director of Nursing, Therapies and Patient Partnership
Lisa Cooper	Deputy Director Quality and Safeguarding NHS England
Philippa Malcom	Chair of Wirral Primary Headteacher Consultative Group
Lisa Ayling	Chair of Wirral Association of Secondary Headteachers
Paula Wareing	Chair of Wirral Special Headteachers Association

Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous Board, held on the 18th January 2017, were agreed as an accurate record.

Eleanor Brazil, Chair of the Improvement Board, opened the meeting by reminding members of the Board that the purpose of the Board was to monitor progress, ensure that proposed actions were appropriate and to provide challenge.

Action Tracker

The Action Tracker, which captures actions arising from previous meetings, was reviewed. Eleanor Brazil reminded members that actions marked as 'Green' had been completed, those that were 'White' had been scheduled for completion and 'Red' were actions that had not been completed. Although to date all actions have either been completed or scheduled. Progress against the 'Action Tracker' was noted.

Ofsted Monitoring Visit

Julia Hassall, Director for Children's Services, provided a presentation on the outcome of the first Ofsted Monitoring Visit held on the 25th and 26th January 2017. A copy of the Monitoring Visit letter from Ofsted had been received shortly before the meeting and will be passed on to members of the Board.

Action: The Ofsted Monitoring Visit letter will be circulated to members of the Improvement Board before the next meeting.

The focus of the first Monitoring Visit was the 'Front Door'. Inspectors reviewed the progress made in the area of 'Help and Protection' with a particular focus on contact, referral and assessment arrangements. A dataset was requested by Ofsted comprising referrals from 1st December 2016 to 13th January 2017.

Ofsted selected 6 children's case records from this dataset for Wirral to audit. These comprised 2 case records where children were looked after, 2 were children that had received a Strategy Discussion/Section 47 investigation and 2 were children in need. The six cases selected for audit comprised three where the children had very complex needs, including two babies that had been the subject of physical abuse and another involving very complex domestic violence. The complexity of social work in Wirral was highlighted from the six case records selected.

On the first day of the visit inspectors met with those directly involved with the cases including Social Workers, Team Managers and Independent Reviewing Officers. On the second day of the visit Ofsted visited and observed staff in the Integrated Front

Door / MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub) and reviewed a further 24 children's case records.

Julia Hassall provided an overview of the key messages from the Ofsted monitoring visit as a part of her presentation. The letter had just been received and will be circulated to members of the Board.

At the conclusion of the presentation Eleanor Brazil noted that Ofsted had seen some positive improvements and this is encouraging to hear. No issues were raised by Ofsted that the Board had not been aware of and it appeared that Wirral now have a good sense of thresholds and the 'Front Door' is making a positive impact. Eleanor Brazil asked if members of the Board had any questions.

Cllr Phil Gilchrist asked a question in relation to Ofsted visiting and observing staff, specifically which staff were observed? Julia Hassall responded that the six Social Workers whose cases had been audited had met with Ofsted in addition to the Team Managers and Independent Reviewing Officers. At the 'Front Door' Inspectors spoke to numerous social workers in that setting. Gladys Rhodes White commented that Inspectors sat with Social Workers in the team and went through the work they were currently engaged in, went through cases and asked questions. For most Social Workers this is accepted as a part of the role, not just from Ofsted but also as a part of the supervision process. Julia Hassall expanded further on this point by stating that audit arrangements have been amended to ensure that in future auditors will always sit with the Social Worker in order to have a case discussion and the auditor can provide observations and coaching.

Tracy Hayes, Merseyside Police, asked how potential variability in work across different Districts are addressed in order to ensure consistency in response; how are we ensuring it is benchmarked across the board so that all districts are working at the same standard? Julia Hassall responded that we have set out clear expectations by introducing Standards for Social Workers and Management Standards. There are some variations between offices in terms of creating the right environment for staff and the use of Information Technology. We are setting out clear expectations of staff at all levels. Tracy Hayes asked how these standards and expectations were being monitored. Julia Hassall explained that the 'Top 10' themes from audit were shared with staff through audit workshops and staff engagement sessions to ensure consistency in practice. The reporting of audits is being enhanced to ensure that key issues are identified, reported and addressed. Gladys Rhodes White commented that a number of tasks had been taken off the Principal Social Worker in order to ensure that there was management capacity to develop consistency in practice.

Cllr Tony Smith asked if the areas for improvement identified following the monitoring visit had started to be addressed, for instance how quickly we can standardise chronologies? Gladys Rhodes White responded that an agreed action plan is to be

put in place to address the issues raised and actions will be rolled out in the next few weeks. Gladys Rhodes White offered to bring this plan into the Improvement Board. Eleanor Brazil commented that many of the issues may already be included in the Improvement Plan.

Action – An action plan in response to areas for improvement identified in the Ofsted Monitoring Visit letter is to be brought to the Improvement Board, this may be as an update to the Improvement Plan.

Directors Update

Julia Hassall provided a presentation on improvement progress.

Comments from children and young people and staff were shared with the Board. It was highlighted that currently communications to staff were not yet 'hitting the spot', while the Chief Executives weekly messages were received regularly by staff a similar approach from Julia Hassall had not been as successful, although this has now been resolved. As a part of these communications Gladys Rhodes White will be finalising a 'You said, we did' for staff which will be going out to staff shortly within the Children's Services Newsletter.

Activity since the last meeting of the Improvement Board has included:

- A permanent Deputy Director, Children's Social Care has been appointed – Simone White, who will start work in Wirral at the beginning of May.
- New permanent Group Manager for Children in Care and Care Leavers appointed.
- Managers training, delivered externally, concluded in February 2017.
- Accepted as part of Frontline Programme of Social Work training.
- Monitoring visit in January 2017 confirmed improvement in practice at the 'Front Door' including decision making, understanding of thresholds, timeliness of response to referrals and timeliness of strategy discussions and confirmed areas for development.
- Supporting Families, Enhancing Futures identified as a model to support practice delivery.
- Approach to audits has been reviewed to ensure that case holders are more involved in the audit process and discussion.

Eleanor Brazil commented that this was a helpful overview and asked if members of the Board had any questions.

Cllr Phil Gilchrist enquired why Julia Hassall's newsletters were not getting though if it was sent in the same way as the Chief Executives. Julia Hassall replied that the Chief Executive email is a global letter that goes to the whole of the council. Children's Services had not had a full up to date list of staffing but with HR now

involved it has improved. The newsletter will now be embedded into the email rather than sent as an attachment to make it easier to read quickly.

Cllr Phil Gilchrist also queried a comment from staff about a lack of business support and if this was to do with technology? Julia Hassall replied that this refers to Team Support Officers, who provide business support to Social Work Teams. Julia Hassall outlined that there will be a small increase in the number of Team Support Officers as a part of future funding agreements in order to provide additional capacity to organise meetings and co-ordinate activity, and noted that inputting case records is a social work task. Wirral is currently looking at other authorities to identify the ratio of Team Support Officers to social workers, to inform how we best support the service locally.

Wirral Safeguarding Children Board Update

Prof. Maggie Atkinson, Chair of LSCB, delivered a presentation updating members of the Board on progress made by the LSCB against their Ofsted Recommendations.

Prof. Maggie Atkinson is meeting with partners to look at financing and sharing facilities in order that the LSCB meets its duties. There is the need to look at 'Risk' and how this might be addressed better across the partnership. The LSCB has agreed a 'Core' dataset of 21 indicators in order to monitor and track performance, which is an improvement. Maggie Atkinson said that having reviewed activity and progress the LSCB should move out of inadequate within the next 18 months.

Eleanor Brazil thanked Maggie Atkinson for her helpful overview, but asked in relation to the Core Indicators for the LSCB if there was an overlap with information coming to the Improvement Board as well?

Action - It was agreed that the Core Indicators for the LSCB and the Indicators used by the Improvement Board be reviewed in order to identify if there is an overlap in reporting.

Tony Crane stated that the ability for the LSCB to take back information that comes to the Board will be a test as to how the LSCB functions and its effectiveness. Ultimately the Safeguarding Board should supersede the Improvement Board.

Improvement Progress Monitoring

A covering report has been provided which brings together the three, previously separate, reports on the Improvement Plan, Performance Monitoring and Quality Assurance.

Eleanor Brazil commented that she felt the report was helpful and noted that where actions were out of timescales exception reports were provided outlining progress towards achieving these. It was noted that issues relating to the recruitment of the Virtual Headteacher had been resolved. Eleanor Brazil asked for members of the Board to highlight areas they would wish to discuss.

Cllr Wendy Clements noted that the action on training needs analysis comments on Performance Appraisals which is currently reported as having been completed for less than 50% of staff in Children's Social Care. Cllr Clements asked what action is being taken to ensure these are done and she would like reassurance that this will not slip further. Sheila Murphy responded that all appraisals will be completed by the end of March 2017; Managers have been provided with training and are aware of the action. The completion of Performance Appraisals will continue to be reported as a part of the HR Performance Information provided in the data book.

Action – Progress against completion of Performance Appraisals will be highlighted in the Performance Monitoring Report to the Improvement Board.

Cllr Phil Gilchrist asked a question in relation to the Sickness Capability Procedure; the report states that we are reviewing absence, but it would be useful to have the numbers of staff subject to these procedures. Julia Hassall responded that staff who hit the triggers are put into the Sickness Capability Procedure.

Action: The numbers of staff subject to Sickness Capability in Children's Social Care is to form a part of a Human Resources update to the Board on a quarterly basis.

Cllr Tony Smith asked, in relation to performance of assessments completed within 45 days, if the numbers of assessments could be completed. Cllr Smith also asked if a commentary could be provided. Kerry Crichlow responded that this was included in the data book.

Action: The number and percentage of assessments completed in 45 days alongside a commentary will be highlighted in the Performance Monitoring Report to the Improvement Board.

Eleanor Brazil commented that number of Child Protection Plans ending after 3 months was high. Sheila Murphy responded that we are taking a closer look at this and will report back at the next board as a part of the 'Deep Dive' on Child Protection Plans.

Action: Child Protection Plans ceasing after 3 months will for a part of the 'Deep Dive' on Child Protection at the next Improvement Board in March.

Eleanor Brazil commented that it was pleasing to see the HR data and analysis included within the data book and that it feels like the papers and information provided to the Board is improving month on month. In relation to the update on audits the issues raised are consistent with what we already know, progress on thresholds is encouraging, the intention will be to spend more time on this area at the next meeting of the Board.

Supporting Families, Enhancing Futures

Gladys Rhodes White presented the paper on Supporting Families, Enhancing Futures. This set out the proposal to adopt this model of practice across children's services and set out an indicative timeline for implementation.

Eleanor Brazil commented that the timeline set out appeared quite protracted. It may be helpful to have a sense of how practice will be improved from one month to another or from one quarter to another through adopting a phased approach to implementation.

Tony Crane commented that the implementation of the approach links with the maturity of the organisation's staffing situation and the stability of the workforce, the implementation of this approach could contribute towards attracting staff to Wirral.

Gladys Rhodes White agreed that this framework could be used to attract and retain staff who want to use this model. We are trying to accelerate a good practice model across Wirral, the key principles – questions that need to go into the assessment, how to embed principles into plans, audits, supervisions, intervention tools - we will start to test this through audits. Throughout the summer, training will be provided through e-learning to reach the workforce more quickly. The launch will be in early June with principles and tools available. The LSCB are overseeing the implementation of this approach across the partnership.

Cllr Phil Gilchrist queried the issue of social workers being too optimistic about families. Eleanor Brazil responded by saying that this model is about starting from the perspective of a child, looking at the family through their eyes, rather than looking at the family solely from the adults perspective. The focus of the model is looking at the child with the family around them; reminding everyone that the child is the primary focus of attention.

'Deep Dive' - Children Looked After

Sheila Murphy provided a presentation on Children Looked After as a part of the Deep Dive, this included an analysis of children looked after in Wirral at December 2016.

Wirral has had consistently higher numbers of children looked after than England and statistical neighbours. Wirral also has higher numbers of 10-15 year olds entering care than comparators. 10% of Wirral children looked after are accommodated under Section 20, (Voluntarily Accommodated). Wirral Children's Services appears to initiate care proceedings more quickly than other authorities, with currently 90 cases in proceedings – almost double compared to our comparator group. Across Liverpool City Region, 30% of applications to court initiating care proceedings come from Wirral.

50% of children looked after are between the ages of 1 and 9, indicating that we are taking significantly more young children into care than statistical neighbours. Since April 2016 far more children and young people entered care than left. All children that have come into care since October 2016 have had audits completed which concluded these decisions were appropriate. Of these, all had histories that suggested Wirral could have done something differently by intervening earlier to reduce the need for care; it is noteworthy that Domestic Abuse was a significant issue in all cases.

Wirral has higher numbers of children in foster placements 76%. Also 12% of children looked after were placed with parents, compared to an England average of 5%. Wirral is looking at those children subject to Care Orders placed at home to see if we can safely revoke many of these orders. In house fostering currently has 540 children placed, although it is increasingly difficult to keep pace with current demand meaning that increasingly, independent fostering agencies are being used.

In looking at the reasons why children and young people left care there are issues with permanency planning. 6% of children leaving care were adopted last year compared to 23% amongst statistical neighbours and an England average of 15%. In relation to Special Guardianship Orders (SGO's) this is better with 35% of care leavers doing so through SGO's, which is higher than Statistical Neighbours. Permanency planning needs a greater focus, with plans being achieved in a more timely way. A Permanency Tracker has been set up to monitor progress but more work is needed focused on adoption.

Eleanor Brazil thanked Sheila Murphy for her presentation which was helpful.

Action – Eleanor Brazil asked that the Children looked after presentation should be circulated to members of the Board with the minutes.

Action – Eleanor Brazil asked that a brief update be provided to the next Improvement Board on the actions being taken to address the high numbers of children looked after.

'Deep Dive' - Effectiveness of Early Help arrangements

Deborah Gornik provided a presentation on the effectiveness of Early Help arrangements as a part of the Deep Dive. Effective early help is when a whole system interacts to get things right for children and families earlier. Deborah Gornik set out the principles and approaches to effective interagency working and provided a case study to highlight the impact of early intervention.

Early Help Highlights:

- Volunteers from 'Safer Families for Children' hosted children from 13 families as an alternative to foster care.
- 9 locality networking events engaged 181 professionals from across the partnership.
- 2 year old funded nursery placements rose from 76% (Q2) to 88.5% (Q3).
- 'Tomorrow's Women' Wirral trained 28 peer mentors as Domestic Abuse champions.
- 50% increase in activities available in Children's Centres.
- 71 CAF Champions graduated.
- 82 young people participated in the Youth Voice Conference with 70% reporting improved understanding of mental health.

Performance figures for Quarter 1 to Quarter 3 show that:

- 1464 referrals to the early help and CAF Team (Front Door)
- 1122 Early Help assessments completed
- 712 TAF Episodes
- 84% of the TAF's audited show measurable progress.

Eleanor Brazil thanked Deborah Gornik for her presentation.

Action – Eleanor Brazil asked that the Effectiveness of Early Help arrangements presentation should be circulated to members of the Board with the minutes.

Eleanor Brazil commented that given the position that Wirral is in, given that Early Help is not reaching all the children that it could be, what is happening to make sure more children receive the right service at the right time? Where are the relationships with schools and health centres etc? What is the timeline for improvement? It may be that some of the current approach needs to be rethought in order to deliver this and reduce demand on more specialist intervention?

Prof. Maggie Atkinson suggested that David Robbins, Safeguarding Board Manager, needs to work with both the children looked after and early help areas to ensure that Safeguarding and the partnership are represented.

Eleanor Brazil agreed although wanted to understand what was happening now in order to address the issues raised in the 'Deep Dives'. Julia Hassall responded that Children's Services Senior Leadership Team was having an away day on these issues on Thursday 23rd February 2017, and the actions agreed would be brought to the next meeting.

Action – Actions agreed at the SLT away day on the 23rd February 2017 on Early Help and Children Looked after are to be provided to the next Improvement Board.

Cllr Tony Smith asked what the uptake of early help services was in the most deprived areas. Deborah Gornik responded that the take up in these areas is good and improving.

Forward Plan

Eleanor Brazil asked members of the Board to note the activity scheduled for future meeting as a part of the Forward Plan.

Any Other Business

Dates of future boards, Eleanor Brazil outlined that there have been a number of complications in scheduling an Improvement Board in April 2017, due to Easter, School Holidays and Ofsted Monitoring Visits. Therefore Eleanor Brazil suggested that the Board combine the April and May meeting and hold the meeting on 10th May 2017. This was agreed by those present.

Date of the next meeting is the 22nd March 2017.

Prof. Maggie Atkinson provided her apologies to the meeting on the 22nd March 2017 as she has a prior commitment that cannot be changed, although the Safeguarding Board Manager, David Robbins, could be invited in her absence.