

**Wirral Improvement Board Meeting**  
**23<sup>rd</sup> November 2016**

**Present:**

Eleanor Brazil	Chair of Improvement Board
Angela Windle	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
Tracy Hayes	Merseyside Police – Vice Chair WSCB
Lorna Quigley	Director of Policy & Patient Safety Wirral CCG
Avril Devaney	CWP NHS Partnership Trust
Philippa Malcolm	Chair of Wirral Primary Head Teachers Consultative Group
Paula Wearing	Chair of Wirral Special Head Teachers Association
Annette Roberts	CEO Community Action Wirral

**Officers in Attendance:**

Julia Hassall	Director of Children's Services
Gladys Rhodes White	Interim Strategic Lead for Improvement
Deborah Gornick	Head of Early Help & Prevention
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

**Apologies:**

Ian Hassall	Area Commander – Wirral, Merseyside Police
Lisa Cooper	Deputy Director, Quality & Safeguarding NHS England
Tony Crane	Department for Education Advisor
Lisa Ayling	Chair of Wirral Association of Secondary Head Teachers
Simon Garner	Corporate Safeguarding Manager

**Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

Cllr Phil Gilchrist, referring to comments in the minutes regarding turnover of staff, asked if there was any data available regarding staff turnover.

**Action:** It was agreed that time to discuss workforce issues and data would be a part of the next Improvement Board meeting.

Lorna Quigley, referring to the Terms of Reference, asked whether frontline practitioners had been invited to attend the Improvement Board. The Chair of the

Board responded by stating that it was important to hear the views of frontline staff and to know how the improvement actions are affecting them. The Chair suggested that this was not best achieved with having two frontline staff members on the Board. There is a reference group chaired by the deputy director and the chair will meet with that group.

In relation to the Terms of Reference and the operation of the Improvement Board, the Chair suggested that future meetings of the Board should be in two parts. The first part will include data, the improvement plan and actions. The second part will focus on specific elements for example workforce with additional attendees for specific agenda items.

The Chair suggested that we need an explicit declaration around confidentiality included in the terms of reference for all Board members as members of the board need to be able to express views and provide challenge.

**Action:** It was agreed that a confidentiality statement be included in the Terms of Reference.

A question was raised as to whether the minutes of the Improvement Board were confidential, as members of the Board would wish to share them with the Local Children's Safeguarding Board. The Chair agreed to highlight any confidential parts within the minutes that should not be shared but that the expectation is that they record actions and decision's rather than contain detailed notes of discussions.

The Chair asked that the membership of the board be altered in the Terms of Reference to include the Chair of Scrutiny and the Deputy Director Children's Care Services as a member of the Board. Also that Director of Children's Services should be members of the Board and not a participant.

**Action:** The Chair of Scrutiny and the Deputy Director Children's Care Services be invited to be member of the Improvement Board and the Director of Children's Service is a member of the Improvement Board.

## **Communication and Engagement Strategy**

Kevin MacCallum, Senior Manager – Marketing & Communications, presented a report on the Communication and Engagement Strategy. The report focused on getting the information to the right people at the right time. Members of the Board were asked to comment on the strategy.

Members of the Board highlighted that the tone of communications was especially important, as it has to be in the context of improvement, also that messages need to be clear, accessible and engaging. The strategy was a very helpful, clear and comprehensive document.

It was noted that the strategy needs to talk about improvement outcomes for vulnerable children rather than Children's Services. It was also noted that the strategy was very focused on Children's Social Care but that partners need to do things differently too. The importance of making clear message that everyone can understand which include what is happening both in Children's Social Care and the wider partnership to improve the lives of children was highlighted. It was also noted that it would be helpful to include timescales to the proposed activities in the strategy.

At the previous meeting of the Board comments were made around schools having difficulty getting contacts into social care, there is a need to keep in touch with Head Teachers in particular. It was suggested that a 'Plan on a Page' would be useful for partners.

A member of the board provided an example of another Local Authority providing a bulletin via email that included clear messages and actions which was signed off by LSCB members, which they were happy to share.

**Action:** It was agreed that the Communication and Engagement Strategy would be updated in line with the comments made.

**Action:** It was agreed that any new communications that come out, members of the Improvement Board need to be made aware of.

### **Independence of IRO's**

At the last Improvement Board a paper was requested on Independent Reviewing Officers. A report setting out the role and function of the IRO Service formed the basis of a discussion at the Board.

A question was raised regarding the recruitment of IRO's in Wirral and if there were particular issues in this area. Julia Hassall, Director of Children's Services, responded stating that it was not as difficult to recruit to an IRO post as it was to a Team Manager post however there are still a significant number of interim staff within the service.

Tracy Hayes, Vice Chair of the LSCB, had received a report at the last meeting of the LSCB which highlighted capacity and succession planning as issues for the service. Tracey Hayes was also interested in learning more about the support for staff wellbeing and psychological stress due to capacity and high caseloads.

**Action:** It was agreed that the IRO's Service will form a part of the workforce updated at the next board.

A member of the board asked what actions had been put in place to address cultural issues as a barrier to improvement. Julia Hassall stated that work is being completed at pace as Independent Reviewing Officers are not always as effective in challenging decisions. We are looking at how we develop greater independence of the roles and how we get better scrutiny and challenge. The Chair clarified that Independent Reviewing Officers are independent of the line management of Children's Social Care, not to the authority, and was interested in knowing what the actual practice issues are that they think they should be escalating.

In the report it stated that only one child had been taken off a Child Protection Plan within three months. Julia Hassall stated that reviews are happening on time but the DCS needs to be assured that they are not removed as a consequence of Ofsted raising this issue, and that practice must be needs led.

**Action:** It was agreed that a further report be provided to consider child protection plans. Ensuring that they are adequate and timely, how they are meeting the needs of children and contributing to reducing risk.

Gladys Rhodes White, Interim Strategic Lead for Improvement, outlined that very detailed work is taking place aligning issues from audits on the numbers on Child Protection Plans and Looked After Children with operational managers. Looking at themes, age profiles, issues of why they cannot remain at home. Both these areas have active internal scrutiny of Independent Reviewing Officers and frontline staff. Partners all need to be aware of what is going on behind the numbers. We are aware of themes around domestic violence and children coming into care because of this and neglect issues.

**Action:** Analysis on trends for CP and CLA will be brought back to a future Improvement Board.

The Chair stated that there has been a rise in the numbers of children who are the subject of a Child Protection Plans and asked how other agencies dealing with this increase; does it have an impact on schools, health workers?

Philippa Malcom, Chair of Wirral Primary Head Teacher Consultative Group, stated that younger children seem to be missing from the system, without health input and they are first being picked up when attending education at age 4/5 with real concerns.

Cllr Phil Gilchrist stated that as a part of his background research he had found mention of a National Checklist for IRO's, an IRO Annual Report and a child's charter and asked if these were in use in Wirral. Julia Hassall responded that similar arrangements were in place, every plan should be shared with the child, although from a survey carried out by the Children in Care Council there is more work to do to make sure that children do all know their plans.

The Chair suggested that one area to focus on that is a feature of outstanding authorities is Early Help and answering the question 'How effective is Early Help provision and arrangements'? The relationship of Early Help in intervening at an early stage requires a more detailed discussion.

**Action:** Early Help provision to be discussed at Improvement Board in February 2017.

The Chair would also be interested in looking in depth at the effectiveness of quality assurance, case file auditing and awareness of general practice standards as well as practice issue around the under-five age group.

### **Ofsted Action Planning Visit**

A brief update on the Ofsted Action Planning Visit, undertaken on the 1<sup>st</sup> November 2016, was provided to the Board.

The Improvement Plan is still a work in progress. There is the need for all partner's to own and contribute to the Improvement Plan. The Chair noted that it is difficult writing plans and being able to pin point what makes a difference.

**Action:** The updated Improvement Plan is to be provided at the December Improvement Board.

### **Three Month Improvement Action Plan**

In order to identify key activities for staff, partners and members of the Board a Three Month Action Plan, derived from the Improvement Action Plan has been developed and shared with the Board for comments. The intention is to update these plans following key points such as Ofsted Monitoring Visits, Peer Challenge results, Diagnostics and audits. Members of the Board were asked to comment on the approach and 3 month plan.

The Chair notes that this format will help inform the version of the overall plan, whether focused on key themes or relate to Ofsted recommendations.

Cllr Phil Gilchrist requested a baseline staffing establishment, noting that some offices have more agency staff than others, and an updated picture of how things have changed. It was agreed that this will form a part of the Workforce update at the next meeting.

It was agreed that this is a helpful approach to include in the next iteration of the Improvement Plan.

## **Progress against Improvement Plan**

An update on progress against the draft Improvement Plan was provided to the Board. Since the last meeting of the Board 11 actions were due to be completed, of these all actions are reported as being completed.

Members of the Board were asked to note progress against the actions and consider what assurance the Board requires in order to agree that actions are completed to enable them to be signed off.

The Chair stated that the key issues is one of impact, a focus on recommendations can address one situation however there may be bigger issues. For example action 7.4 'Implementing the First Response Team' in relation to Recommendation 7 'Strategy Discussions' does not tell you how effective this action has been for the child, just that the action has been completed on time. There is the need for performance indicators, quality assurance and feedback on quality improvements from partners such as police and health education to inform the impact of actions.

The Chair would like to see, in the next version of the plan, feedback from case file auditing such as impacts on families (did it go to conference or no further action, are thresholds met). Auditing will help evidence improvements alongside staff training events.

**Action:** Audit, performance indicators and actions need to be brought in together when re-drafting the plan.

It was noted that this needs to be a proportionate approach, as not all actions will require the same amount of evidence.

Cllr Tony Smith, Lead Member for Children's Services, enquired on progress towards the recruitment of a permanent Deputy Director of Children's Care Services. Julia Hassall explained that an advert had been placed, working with Penna, with a closing date of the 12<sup>th</sup> December 2016. The technical assessments for long listed candidates are due the week of the 16<sup>th</sup> December 2016. Members will then meet to shortlist candidates. Interviews will be held towards the end of January 2017.

## **Improvement Plan Performance Monitoring**

A report on performance was provided to members of the board, as well as providing the latest performance information it was also suggested that the Board focus on around 20 core indicators for improvement.

Cllr Phil Gilchrist stated it was hard to relate progress against the Improvement Plan to the Performance Report. The Chair noted that the board is in the early stages of

developing and for the board to be as effective as possible there is a need to have an understanding of core indicators and quality assurance activity attached to it. Core Indicators for Improvement should include the rise of children in care and repeat CP Plans to inform questions relating to the quality of practice, for children looked after what is the decision making on whether the child becomes looked after, what is the plan for permanence.

In relation to repeat CP Plans a steady state might be around 2-5%. The Chair recommended that a 'Deep Dive' audit be completed on repeat CP Plans in order to identify why there are so many.

**Action:** Quality Audit on repeat CP Plans to be added to QA schedule.

Cllr Phil Davies finds the data useful and enquired which were the critical ones that we need to look at on a regular basis and 'best in class' so we can see how far we are away from the figure. Kerry Crichlow responded that we would need a core group of indicators, also from time to time a wider group on specific issues, for example workforce would look at turnover, sickness levels, length in post required but only every six months as well as financial information.

Kerry Crichlow stated we can now provide accurate, timely and reliable data. Progress has been made to report the measures on the Improvement Plan. We can now report on 41 measures. The data tracker is aiming to give commentary and statistical neighbours where we have them. The Chair responded that it is very useful for the Improvement Board, but that will not be the only forum that will be scrutinising the data – would be useful to have a discussion about how effective Quality Assurance, both single and multi-agency, is in Wirral.

**Action:** Effectiveness of Quality Assurance to a future agenda.

Gladys Rhodes White stated a good example of groups scrutinising the data would be the Corporate Parenting Group – they will have robust oversight on some key tasks from the Improvement Plan on CLA and will feedback to the Improvement Board.

Tracy Hayes enquired around recommendation number 7 – progress regarding strategy meetings – do they include information from professionals. Kerry Crichlow replied that the information officers are looking and diving into records to check this is happening. She is working closely with the service to ensure journey is correct.

Julia Hassall stated that it would be best practice to have targets within the data tracker.

**Action:** Targets to be added to the Data Tracker

Cllr Phil Davies asked how key performance indicators are informing outcomes for children.

The Chair stated that basic practices issues were more important to address than key performance indicators such as education for looked after children, employment, fixed term/permanent exclusions.

Kerry Crichlow stated we will focus on outcomes of quality assurance and audit activity and will highlight good examples.

### **Any Other Business**

Julia Hassall wanted to alert members about a trial commencing on Monday regarding two brothers accused of child sexual exploitation against nine Wirral children. This is a five week trial.

Deborah Gornik stated at the last Board it was touched on engaging young people – how do we engage them in the process. We have a Young Peoples Reference Group to link to the Improvement Plan – we need to have a robust framework on how we engage young people. If they are happy to attend the next meeting they should be invited.

**Action:** Invite Youth Reference Group to next Improvement Board.