

Children and Young People's Scrutiny and Performance Panel

**Agenda
Item No.**

15 October 2013

Working in a Challenging Financial Climate to Support Children and Young People Looked After in Walsall

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Cllr R Andrew – Portfolio Holder for Children's Services

Executive Summary

This attached presentation provides an overview of work being undertaken to better support children and young people looked after in Walsall in a challenging financial climate. This will be presented to the Scrutiny Panel with further contextual information.

Recommendations

1. To discuss and note the scope and priorities for this project and agree how Scrutiny & Performance Panel will maintain an active overview.

Background papers

LAC Project Scoping Document (Internal)

DfE Data Pack: Improving Permanence for Looked After Children (Sept 2013)

DfE Children's Homes Data Pack (Sept 2013)

Resource and legal considerations

There is a clear statutory framework and moral driver for supporting children and young people who are looked after. This places a range of legal requirements on the authority and provides the basis for our service model and approach. There are significant resources invested in support to children looked after. The effective implementation of the LAC project has a potential for positive impact on resource pressures in the longer-term. Conversely, failure to deliver on the priorities identified for the LAC project presents a very real possibility of adverse impact through a significant increase in demand for support for children and young people looked after for 2014/15 and beyond. Most importantly, this project will impact directly on the care, protection and life chances of children and young people in Walsall.

Citizen impact

The continuous improvement of outcomes for children looked after by Walsall Council, aligned with wider improvement activity across the full range Children's Services provision will ensure the partnership works '*better together*' for children in Walsall so that they are safe, happy, healthy and with a bright future.

Performance and risk management issues

Failure to adequately deliver sustained improvements and value for money in support for children and young people presents risks to the quality and impact of service delivery for local people and will have a progressively adverse impact on the overall resource-base for Children's Services. Delivery of the workstreams in the Looked After Children project plan will be risk assessed and mitigated as appropriate.

Equality Implications

An Equality Impact Assessment has not been completed. The completion of an EIA and ongoing monitoring of the equality implications of the project will be a priority during implementation.

Consultation


There is on-going engagement on wider Children's Services priorities, including effective support to children and young people who are looked after, with partners at a strategic level at the Children and Young People's Partnership Board (C&YPPB) and the Health and Wellbeing Board. Dialogue between partners is productive, mutually challenging and impacts positively on better outcomes for children. Strong member oversight is in place with the Children & Young People's Scrutiny & Performance Panel and Corporate Parenting Group. Children and young people are actively engaged in shaping provision as set out in the Participation Strategy. This includes the involvement of Council For Kids and the Safeguarding Young Inspectors team in the design and review of local services. At an operational level the

Assistant Director Specialist Services works across the organisation and with our partners to ensure a relentless focus on securing the best possible outcomes for children and young people looked after. This includes close joint-working with the Assistant Director for Early Help and Targeted Services to strengthen a preventative model.

Directors briefings for Children's Services staff and partners are in place on a 6 weekly basis to ensure key messages are communicated and to provide regular opportunities to capture feedback and learning from those delivering the services. Regular visits to teams and services provide additional opportunities for feedback and feed-forward as do email updates.

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'Better Together For Children Looked After by Walsall'



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Walsall Council

Context – the Number of Looked After Children

- Numbers of Looked After Children have increased nationally & regionally
- Trend in Walsall is a significant increase over the last 10 years
- Numbers briefly reduced in 2011/12 (to **497**)
- Further increase in numbers in 2012/13 (to **c606**)
- Analysis of comparative national & local data suggests around **c560** would be the top end of the expected range in Walsall
- Independent analysis in Walsall predicts that this figure could rise to c800 by 2015 without action to address causal factors



Context – Our Capacity

- There are insufficient internal placements in Walsall to accommodate rising numbers of children looked after
- We are discharging fewer numbers of young people whilst admissions into care are rising
- Increasing numbers are putting pressure on social work caseloads
- Increased national focus on limiting use of placements outside of the local authority area, and emphasis on placements being 'good' or better. This impacts on Ofsted & regulatory judgements.
- Wider context: Child poverty is increasing, with a resultant impact on projected numbers of children and young people being looked after



Context – Finance & Resources

- Purchase of external independent resources is putting a strain on Children's Services finances. LAC numbers at the current levels will lead to overspend of c£1m in 2013/14
- We need to identify in-year savings for 2013/14
- The average cost of external placements is on a range from c£900 to £4500 pw
- 'Invest to save' proposals are being considered – including enhanced marketing capacity for the Fostering Service



Our Key Principles

- There is no 'quota' for the number of children looked after. If needs determine accommodation then this will be actioned.
- The primary focus of this project is on critically analysing the care journey for children and young people in Walsall. Tackling resource pressures remains an important context and backdrop for this piece of work.
- Internal resources are not inferior to external placements & no child should be placed externally if their needs can be met in-house.
- If a child's needs can only be met through a high-cost placement, they will be so long as value for money and cost-effectiveness can be evidenced.
- Action to reduce the number of children looked after in Walsall will be project-managed to avoid duplication, to manage risk and to avoid unintended consequences for vulnerable children and young people



Some Key Lines of Inquiry

- Are we sufficiently focused on preventing children coming into care throughout our practice – including the Early Help offer?
- Do we have good step-down arrangements from being looked after?
- Are our staff fully aware of the need to prioritise permanency for children, and our services shaped most effectively to achieve this?
- Are we getting value for money from agency and internal placements – and how do we know?
- Do we have too many children and young people accommodated under Section 20?
- How reliable is our data and evidence base for informing this change project?



Some National Messages From DfE Data

- Those children who were aged 13-16 when they became looked after were the group most likely to have 3 placements or more
- 20% of children placed with their friends or family had been in that placement for more than five years compared to 11% for those with other foster carers
- The longer that a child had been looked after in their latest period of care, the less likely they were to return home to parents or relatives when this period ended
- Children who were on care orders prior to going home were far less likely to return to care
- 43% of children with just a single placement during 2011-12 achieved 5+ A*-C grades at GCSE compared to 13% of those who had more than three placements



Workstreams for This Project

- **Foster Carer Recruitment**
Aim: To recruit 20 additional fostering households
- **Children on the Cusp of Care**
Aim: To increase preventative action to avoid accommodation
- **Already Looked After Children & Young People**
Aim: To reduce the number of children looked after by c50
- **Structural Change**
Aim: To achieve more efficient and effective working practices
- **Voice**
Aim: To ensure that children and young people are involved in shaping services
- **Children's Services & Public Health Project**
Aim: To research & identify joint change opportunities for reducing LAC numbers



Next Steps

- Project scope, priorities & membership agreed September 2013
- Project Board convened from October 2013
- Manage links to other related developments:
 - Adoption Change Project
 - Strategic Improvement Plan for Safeguarding
 - New Organisational Model for Children's Services
- Project Monitoring & Reporting



Better Together For Children Looked After by Walsall



Meeting our Commitments as Corporate Parents



Walsall Council