

## **CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**THURSDAY 18<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2021 at 6.00 p.m.**

### **Virtual meeting via Microsoft Teams**

*Held in accordance with the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020; and conducted according to the Councils Standing Orders for Remote Meetings and those set out in the Council's Constitution.*

### **Present:**

Councillor M. Statham (Chair)  
Councillor T. Jukes  
Councillor D. Barker  
Councillor H. Bashir  
Councillor B. Douglas-Maul  
Councillor A. Nawaz  
Councillor L. Rattigan  
Councillor M. Follows  
Councillor C. Statham  
Councillor S. Wade (Joined part way through)

### **Officers**

Colleen Male Director (Children's Social Work)  
Andrea Potts Director (Commissioning & Early Help)  
Katie Storer-Young – Principal Exploitation Reduction Officer -Walsall Council  
Rita Holmer – Head of Family Safeguarding and Localities  
Amrick Singh – The Programme and Implementation Manager (FDAC)

### **Partners**

Liz Murphy – Independent Safeguarding Chair  
Helen Matthews – CEO Street Teams  
Superintendent Claire Caddick -WM Police  
Clare Gallop – Director of Violence Reduction Unit  
Kudzi Mukandi –Dudley Walsall Mental Health Trust  
Nuala Waide – Walsall Healthcare Trust

### **Portfolio Holder**

Councillor T. Wilson

## **Welcome**

Following a change to the Committee's membership the Chair thanked Councillor L. Jeavons for his commitment to the Committee, and welcomed Councillor A. Nawaz to the meeting. At this point in the meeting, the Chair welcomed everyone, and explained the rules of procedure and legal context in which the meeting was being held. He also directed members of the public viewing the meeting to the papers which could be found on the Council's Committee Management Information system (CMIS) webpage.

Members confirmed that they could both see and hear the proceedings.

### 88/20 **Apologies**

There were no apologies received for the duration of this meeting.

### 89/20 **Substitutions**

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

### 90/20 **Declarations of Interest and party whip**

There were no declarations of interest for the duration of the meeting

### 91/20 **Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)**

There were no items to be considered in private session.

### 92/20 **Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2021 were considered by the Committee.

#### **Resolved**

**The minutes of the previous meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2021 were agreed as a true and accurate record.**

### 93/20 **Partnership update – exploitation**

The Head of Family Safeguarding and Localities presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The Committee were informed that there had been a significant amount of activity by Walsall Safeguarding Partners in response to exploitation. A strategy, which ensured all strands of exploitation were brought together, was being developed. A regional approach was also in the process of being developed, and regional activity was described.

The Director of the Violence Reduction unit addressed the Committee to describe the preventative approach to exploitation. Work was underway

to develop a systems-wide response to exploitation. A 'trauma informed' pilot had been operating at Walsall College, and this was being expanded to other education settings. This meant that staff, at these organisations, were trained on trauma. The Violence Reduction Unit were working with Partners across the region to collect data and develop a regional understanding of exploitation.

The Committee were informed that a robust exploitation pathway and all age exploitation assessment would be developed and agreed across the partnership, this would be launched in September 2020. A multi-agency missing and exploitation daily triage had been developed to bring together a range of practitioners to provide a coordinated response to preventing, identifying and responding to children and young people at risk of exploitation in Walsall.

The Committee were informed that the 'Exploitation Panel' met on a monthly basis and reported to the exploitation subgroup of the Walsall Safeguarding Partnership. Through this Panel, trends, networks and connections were identified which allowed multiagency actions to be taken. There had been fluctuations in the number of missing children reported during the national lockdowns. A range of different approaches to 'return home' interviews had been taken during this time.

It was acknowledged that the most vulnerable group of young people who went missing were 'looked after children'. It had been agreed that best practice guidance would be used to ensure that all parties were clear how to respond to this situation and to avoid it happening in the future.

The Principal Exploitation Reduction Officer provided information on the number of children at risk of exploitation in Walsall. Further explanation to these figures were provided. The figures were reviewed every three months, but they changed daily. There was a timely response to each referral and every child that is referred to the Panel was considered within 24 hours. The impact of the Covid pandemic was considered.

The Portfolio Holder for Children's Services thanked Officers and Partners involved for their ongoing commitment and collaborative approach.

The Independent Chair assured Members that children who were at risk of exploitation were well served by the provision of services from 'Street Teams'. Members were informed that community resilience work was taking place in the Borough and this would be vital to tackle exploitation. It was stressed that a strategic approach was needed to the sharing and mapping of data on exploitation. The 'all age exploitation strategy' was in development and this was a complex but critical piece of work. The Committee were informed that the partnership was seeking to understand the experiences of children who had used to services and a

proportion of cases would be reviewed to evaluate this. The Independent Chair stated that she had seen evidence that progress had been made, in tackling exploitation, with a clear direction set out in relation to future development of the Partnership.

Members asked a series of questions of Partners:

Q. We have heard about the need to increase the disruption response to tackle adult perpetrators of exploitation against children. Can you tell us what has been done to ensure that officers in all parts of the police force actively consider disruption at all stages?

The WM police representative stated that the focus of the Exploitation Panel had clearly been on disruption. Information and intelligence had been collated to progress the mapping and understand the current threat and risk to enable disruption activity. The terms of reference of the exploitation panel had been amended to assist this. A Strategic Management Group allowed lessons to be learnt to improve partnership working in the future. Lessons continued to be learnt from historical cases.

Q. What steps were being taken to improve the timeliness of notifications of children who go missing and when they return to the local authority in order that the return home interviews can be offered?

The Committee were assured that work was being done to tackle the delay, however it was noted that regionally Walsall performed well and it seemed that any previous issues had been rectified. Members were assured that the timeliness of notifications by the police was heavily scrutinised.

A Member asked if any looked after children were missing, and sought assurance that work was done with these children to ensure that they were not exploited. Officers confirmed that this was the case although this number fluctuated. Members were informed that looked after children may be in the care of the local authority due to their risk of going missing. Risk assessments needed to be undertaken to understand the action which would be in the best interests of the child. All efforts would be made to engage the child and disrupt any exploitation that is taking place. It was acknowledged that this was a cause for concern but it was considered daily to ensure that the partnership were doing everything possible to prevent and deal with this issue.

Q. We have read and heard about the development of the Exploitation Hub. What assurances can you give us that the indicative timescale to have an appropriate health representative as a member of the Hub will be met?

Officers stated that health colleagues had assured the partnerships that there would be health representatives within the triage by May 2021.

Q. What work was being done with children and young people & the wider community to raise their awareness about exploitation and how to seek help if needed?

The CEO (Street Teams) stated that a free programme was offered to schools and Pupil Referral Units. However this programme had been impacted by the Covid pandemic, as it was not considered appropriate to deliver the programme virtually. In response to a Member, the Committee were informed that all local state and faith schools offered the programme to its children. A Member commended the team and confirmed that it was a very effective programme.

Q. We have heard that some of our children and young people were treated as criminals and that their victim status was not always recognised. Can you tell us how you would address this issue?

Members were informed that it was entirely possible for individuals to be victims and offenders of a crime. It was acknowledged that they were complex cases, and often as investigations unravelled, victims and offenders were identified. It was stressed that it was important to focus on prevention, and that appropriate referrals were received to identify exploitation.

Q. Are you assured that children and young people in Walsall are being safeguarded from criminal exploitation?

The Independent Chair stated that in the last year she was assured that there has been a focus on exploitation (including county lines) within the partnership and there was a pathway to identify those young people. It was also stressed that it was important that data could be used to better identify connections. Development of regional and national mapping would provide further assurance.

Q. What do you consider to be the biggest challenge to the partnership in tackling exploitation of children in Walsall?

The Independent Chair acknowledged the complexity of exploitation, and described the challenges within this. A partnership strategy was important to progress exploitation work.

Q. In June 2018, NHS England announced the lifetime provision of mental health care for sexual assault victims. What therapeutic support was commissioned to provide support to current and historic victims of exploitation?

The CEO (Street Teams) stated that Street Teams had received external funding to provide therapeutic services to known historic victims. It was agreed that further information on commissioning of therapeutic support would be circulated to Members outside of the meeting, as the representative from the Mental Health Trust was experiencing connection issues.

The Chair asked if there were plans to roll out 'trauma training' for staff to all schools in the Borough. The intensity and cost implications of this training was described, however it was hoped that an incremental increase of this training would take place and webinars had taken place to describe the work that had taken place.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Director (Children's Social Work) stated that daily triaging of cases meant that a core group of professionals considered all incidents in real time and where further consideration of cases was needed this was arranged. New governance arrangements and pathways were allowing efficient and effective responses to exploitation. The next steps would be to improve the sharing of regional data and the picture of exploitation across the region due to the cross boundary nature of exploitation – the Committee were assured that Walsall was in a good position to develop this.

The Chair thanked all Partners for their continuing effort to keep children and young people in Walsall safe and protected from the risk of exploitation.

**Resolved (by assent):**

**Scrutiny noted and supported the contents of the report and the current activity to protect Walsall children and young people from the risk of exploitation, to pursue perpetrators and to disrupt their activities, including through prosecution.**

94/20

**Walsall Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report 2019-20**

The Independent Chair of the Safeguarding Board presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). It was noted that, there had been significant changes, in the period covered by the report. Safeguarding Boards were abolished and replaced with Safeguarding Partnership arrangements. Under the changes the Local Authority, Police and CCG had equal responsibility for multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, which were published with named agencies involved in the safeguarding of children. These arrangements had been reviewed and this would lead to further improvements.

The Committee were informed that the report identified that further work around the delivery of work around neglect and exploitation. The focus of the partnership tackling neglect had been reset and the approach felt positive. During the pandemic, extensive work was done to ensure and promote safeguarding during the pandemic. Members were informed that an audit had been completed of babies born during the pandemic, due to data indicating that safeguarding concerns had increased during this period. Positive assurance had been received about the approach in supporting children as a result of this audit.

The Chair thanked the Independent Safeguarding Chair for her Commitment to the Board and for the ultimate impact that this had made on safeguarding children in Walsall.

### **Recommendation**

**The committee noted the Walsall Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report 2019-20.**

95/20

**The Black Country Family Drug and Alcohol Courts (FDAC) programme: The First Five Months.**

The Programme and Implementation Manager presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The Committee were informed that the programme was part of the 'Right for Children' transformation programme, and was a collaboration between Sandwell, Walsall and Dudley. Its aim was to provide an alternative approach when working with families struggling with drug and alcohol abuse, to keep children within their care. A multi-disciplinary team supports parents to abstain from drugs and alcohol, this intensive support provides families with better more timely outcomes.

This programme was welcomed by Members, and it was questioned if this approach could break the cycle for families. There were other initiatives which worked alongside the FDAC, however if proceedings were needed the FDAC was the best approach. Consideration was being given to how families could be supported to deal with trauma that they had experienced. Evidenced based programmes would be followed.

A Member asked how successful Officers thought this approach may be in Walsall. Officers explained that this was the first FDAC in the region and it was hoped that it would be as much as a success in Walsall and the Black County as in other regions. This was a proven model and there was no reason to believe that this would not achieve similar outcomes. The Director stressed that the FDAC sat as part of a changing culture within the Authority and across Partners.

In response to questioning, the Committee were advised that initial feedback from staff and parents was very positive despite the launch taking place during the Covid-19 pandemic.

A Member asked for assurance that financial stability would be secure going forward. It was stressed that this model would produce savings across the partnership. The Portfolio Holder assured the Committee that work would be done to ensure the model was sustainable but stressed that the focus would also be on the outcomes for families.

### **Resolved**

**That the implementation of the Black Country Family Drug and Alcohol Courts (FDAC) Programme report was noted.**

96/20

**Forward Plans**

The forward plans were noted.

**Termination of Meeting**

The meeting terminated at 8.15 p.m.