

Council – 19 September 2016

Portfolio Holder Children's Services Directorate

1. Introduction

The Children's Services Directorate is responsible for the Council's work with children and young people 0-19 (and up to 25 years for some students with Special Needs and Disabilities). It delivers targeted and statutory services to children and their families. In 2015/16 this was made up of 800 children from 440 families receiving targeted Early Help Services, 216 young people in the Youth Justice Service and 2,355 children in need of support and protection, including: 625 Looked After Children (84 of whom are being helped towards adoption), 409 children on Child Protection Plans and 110 Care Leavers. The Troubled Families Programme supported 795 families in Phase 1 and has a target to support 2,780 families by 2020.

The Service is managed in three service areas, Children's Social Care and Safeguarding, Early Help, Workforce Development and Commissioning and Access and Achievement. **Appendix 1** summarises the workstreams for each service area.

This report details work over the past year set out in 3 sections corresponding to each of the service areas.

2. Children's Social Care and Safeguarding

Over the last year the majority of the key performance indicators continue to show steady improvement. There is confidence that the Initial Referral and Assessment Service is identifying the right children needing intervention and protection by statutory social care services. The implementation in November 2015 of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and the new case management system Mosaic, are having a positive impact. Current performance shows a sustained reduction in referrals, re-referrals and good timeliness of assessments. The adoption service continues to increase the number and speed of finding children permanent, loving homes and Walsall is well engaged with the developments of a Regional Adoption Agency which is expected to be implemented in 2018.

Social Worker caseloads have started to reduce supported by additional financial investment. All staff are being trained in an approach to social work called 'Restorative Practice' which is underpinned by strong relationships and helping families address the issues and circumstances they face. A caseload guarantee is in place to reduce caseloads to 20 for qualified social workers and 15 for newly qualified. The aim would be to reduce this further to 15 cases as an average for all social workers. This enables better quality work and gives social workers the time to build a quality relationship with the family and really get alongside and support them. It also makes Walsall a more attractive place to

work and improves recruitment and retention. An improved training and development programme has been put in place for all social workers which is helping to improve practice. The programme draws on national recognised best practice.

A key challenge for the service continues to be in relation to the stability of the workforce and the budget position for children's social care. The Directorate experienced significant financial pressures during 2015/16 mainly due to the number and cost of Out of Borough Placements, Looked After Children and the cost of agency staff employed to cover vacant social worker posts. These pressures totalled £6.704m prior to any mitigating action and use of reserves. In year actions totalling £2.020m and the use of earmarked reserves of £0.200m were identified to partially offset these pressures, with a further £4.439m of corporate reserves allocated, as agreed by Cabinet during the year, resulting in a remaining overspend of £0.045m. As part of setting the budget for 2016/17 Council agreed corporate investment of £6.5m to offset the ongoing pressures, as set out above.

It continues to be difficult to recruit experience social workers and consequently there remains a heavy reliance on newly qualified social workers and agency social workers. There are currently 60 Agency social workers out of a social worker workforce of 174 (34%). Compared with other Local Authorities our turnover rate is low (17.03%) and therefore the workforce is more stable than might be expected. The Recruitment and Retention Strategy has been revised and focuses on improved marketing of Walsall as the employer of choice, reduced caseloads, excellent training and development, full engagement with national recruitment initiatives such as 'Front Line' and 'Step up to Social Work', a 'Grow Your Own' initiative and the offer of a market supplement in some areas of the service.

The number of Looked after Children (LAC) has increased and an action plan and individual child tracking process has been implemented. This aims to safely reduce LAC numbers, with a particular focus on more expensive Out of Borough residential provision. Officers are developing a model that will require a much more systemic approach drawing on other parts of the Council and Partners to address this challenge. This will strengthen the Council's Corporate Parenting role in the context of better Partnership Working. There are increased statutory responsibilities in relation to Care Leavers and there has been an increase in Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children during the year (currently 10 children).

The new client record system 'Mosaic' continues to embed and tablet devices will be rolled out from the Autumn to support mobile working. The quality of practice is being improved and key work is taking place to improve recording and reporting.

Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation and radicalisation continue to be a high priority for the Council. There is full engagement in the regional networks and Walsall was a national pilot for a Peer Review/diagnostic for CSE.

3. Early Help, Commissioning and Workforce development

Arrangements to better understand, co-ordinate, deliver and oversee targeted early help support to children and families have been strengthened to reduce the demand for statutory intervention and the significant costs associated with that demand.

The service has established a single access point for advice, guidance, information sharing and brokering of support (the Early Help Hub and Family Information Service). This is co-located and aligned to the work of the MASH.

A major piece of work has been to roll out an integrated locality working model for children aged 0-19 years based around school clusters and aligned to Children's Centres. The model has delivered coherent and more effective help to ensure that when children, young people and their families face challenges and need help, they can easily access the support without escalation. This work has been developed with all Partner agencies.

The range of Early Help support for families has been extended; a new Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy Service and a service for Perpetrators of Domestic abuse are supporting families impacted by domestic abuse, parental substance misuse and parental mental ill health. A comprehensive parenting programme is meeting a diverse range of parents needs including support to parents of children with autism and disabilities, support to families involved with Social Care and support to Dads in prison and their families. Trained professionals have compiled a comprehensive directory of services so they can provide more effective help and support to children, young people and families.

Recent audit and quality assurance work and a comprehensive review of the 1,000 children receiving early help has given strong assurance that the right families are being helped in the right way through targeted early help and prevention services.

There has been an increase in the take up of free early learning places for our most vulnerable 2 year olds and agreed plans to create more places in areas where there is unmet need. Current take up of places is 64% and a lot of work is taking place to encourage parents to take up their entitlement to a free place. Work is underway to ensure that by September 2017 eligible working parents will have access to 30 hours of early learning for their children rather than the current 15 hours.

The Workforce Development Team has increased the number of student social workers and developed a successful induction and training programme for them.

it has also enhanced induction for experienced social workers and managed all of the induction for Newly Qualified Teachers.

The team are helping the ongoing recruitment, development, support and retention of the social care workforce and improving the quality of social work practice.

The commissioning team continues to ensure robust commissioning, contractual and monitoring arrangements are in place across Children's services to deliver improved outcomes for children, young people and their families in the context of reducing resources. Notable achievements include the refresh of the LAC sufficiency strategy that will help increase our ability to care for children locally; the retendering of independent fostering placements; income generation through the innovative offer of surplus respite beds to a neighbouring local authority, the continued transportation of 630 children with Special Educational Needs and growth in personal budgets across a range of services

4. Access & Achievement

School Improvement

Ensuring children achieve and develop well in their early years continues to be a priority in Walsall. In 2016, 64% of children in Walsall achieved Good Levels of Development. Although Walsall achievement is 5% below the national average, the gap is closing each year. Disadvantaged children, particularly those in receipt of free school meals, are the group that achieve less well.

In 2016 the educational outcomes for children attending Walsall Primary Schools were closer to the national average and the gap is closing, with the initial data showing that 50% of children achieving the new expected standard in combined Reading, Writing and Mathematics. (*The national average was 53%*). At the end of July 2016, the number of Walsall Schools and Academies judged by Ofsted to be good or outstanding had improved to 76% but this is still 10% below the national average. Challenge and support to schools and Academies to ensure rapid improvement so that they are judged to be good or outstanding by Ofsted is a service priority.

Ofsted reported and recognised, following the Local Authority School Improvement (LASI) inspection in March 2016 that there has been improvement since the previous inspection and Ofsted agreed with our self-evaluation and priorities for improvement. The School Improvement Strategy sets out the strategic intent, with ambitious plans for improvement. The Education Challenge Board holds the Local Authority and Officers to account for delivery of these priorities and the Chair is held to account by the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee. Reports are also provided to the Children and Young People's Partnership Board.

We have re-designed the school improvement teams and governor support to become more efficient and address the need to move towards a sector-led school to school improvement models. School leaders will continue to be held to account for the performance of the school and if necessary the Local Authority will use its statutory powers of intervention to bring about improvements for children and young people.

14-19/25

The 14-19 Partnership Network includes schools, colleges, training providers and employers working together to drive up performance in results, improve the preparation of young people for the decisions they make at 14, 16 and 18, and improve their employability skills. The Partnership is focused on ensuring that Raising the Participation age to 18, will enable more young people to study and gain the skills and qualifications that lead to sustainable jobs, whether through school, college or with a training provider or employer and ensure that fewer young people are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). The revised Education Business Partnership model helped bring schools and employers closer together, and continues to support business so that the transition from learning to work is successful.

The 14-19 Partnership Network compiled a comprehensive action plan to address the following priorities:

- Improve attainment, achievement and raise aspiration across the 14-19 age range
- Provide high quality Independent Information, Advice and Guidance to all young people
- Skills Development for accessing apprenticeship and employment
- Reduce further the number of young people who are NEET by working alongside other Directorates on the Youth Employment Initiative/ IMPACT project

School Admissions

A fully online admissions process for the primary and secondary school admissions round has removed the requirement for parents to submit a hard copy of acceptance of their offer. In 2015/16 the Local Authority received 3466 primary admission applications of which we were able to offer 90% their first preference and 96% of all applicants being offered one of their preferred schools. We received 3052 secondary admission applications of which 77% were offered their first preference and 96% of all applicants offered one of their preferred schools. School organisation has recently expanded four primary schools to meet increasing demand for primary preferences in four primary planning areas.

We reduced the number of complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman in the 2015 admission round and to date no complaints have been investigated by the Ombudsman for the 2016 rounds. The Local Authority will consult on re-introducing co-ordination of mid-year admission from 2018 to improve safeguarding and access to education for Walsall children. We will implement a

revised Fair Access Protocol in the Autumn Term to improve access to education and inclusion for all children, including the most vulnerable. We will publish a five year sufficiency strategy detailing projected demand for school places for the next five years and will review 2016 projections and take appropriate action to ensure there are sufficient school places.

SEND Update

The Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Advisory Service which provides support to Visual and Hearing impaired pupils together with support for pupils with Specific Learning Difficulties has been successfully restructured and the Head of Service (SENDI) post has been recruited to. The budget on the short breaks provision has been reducing year on year for the last three years through careful management and more robust decision making processes. A revised home to school travel policy is currently being consulted on with a greater emphasis on promoting independent travel which will drive down costs and promote more independent young people and adults. A new SEND Board has been established with an independent Chair with the purpose of challenging and supporting better outcomes for all children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. The Inclusion Strategy has been revised and is being developed into a single overarching strategy.

Collaboration is taking place with Adult Services and other key partners to develop proposals to establish an All Age Disability Service. This will significantly improve transition from young people's to adult services. A Project Charter has been agreed to support this work over the coming 18 months.

Targeted Youth Support and Youth Justice Services

Walsall's Targeted Youth Support and Youth Justice Service was recognised as one of the top 20 services in the Country in 2014/15. The model has attracted interest from Ministers, civil servants, and other Local Authorities. The service continues to meet challenging key performance targets to reduce reoffending and custodial sentences. Historically Walsall has performed regional and national comparators in reducing first time entrants to the youth justice system for the last 5 years, however 2015/16 bucked the regional and national trend and this figure increased, although remains within our locally set target. Our data for 2016/17 to date suggests that the numbers of first time entrants are continuing to increase and further work to understand causality is being undertaken. The service achieved a saving in remand beds of around 50% in 2 years (£110,474), through the reducing custody and remands action plan which saw the costs halved, the number of nights halved and the number of episodes (and thus Looked After Children episodes) reduced by nearly 40%. We are on target to surpass these results in 2016/17.

A strategic multi agency statutory partnership board has been maintained which continues to scrutinise and challenge the work of the Partnership Service and is currently chaired by the local Police Superintendent.

Six hundred and sixteen core assessments were undertaken with young people in 2015/16. Around half triggered a need to assess for serious risk of harm to others as well as an assessment of vulnerability to the individual. This supports

regional and national trends that whilst the numbers in the youth justice system are reducing their complexity, risks and needs are increasing.

We are engaged in collaborative Partnerships across the Black Country to offer a better service to young people in Police Custody (at the new custody block in Oldbury), and in rationalising the operation of Youth and remand Courts. We continue to ensure that we are ready for a Her Majesty's Inspection of Probation (HMIP) inspection and that the service contributes, where appropriate, to wider inspection regimes.

The re-design of the Targeted Youth Service has been completed and the team now consists of 1 Senior Youth Worker, 4 full time and 10 part time workers. The service operates from Myplace Youth Provision and is aligned with locality working. The majority of the work is centred around vulnerable group. There are 4 centre based sessions a week plus many other activities for children and young people delivered across the Borough and now commissioned from local delivery partners.

Councillor Rose Burley
Cabinet Member Children's Services
September 2016

Appendix 1

David Haley – Executive Director – Children and Young People (Gwin Khatkar, Personal Assistant 01922 652035)		
Children’s Social Care and Safeguarding Service Deb Carter, 01922 652756	Early Help Commissioning and Workforce Development Andrea Potts, 01922 654599	Access and Achievement Lynda Poole, 01922 652895
<u>Quality Assurance of Safeguarding arrangements</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support to Walsall Safeguarding Children Board Assurance of Child Protection and Safeguarding arrangements Assurance of care planning for looked after children including Independent Reviewing Officer and advocacy services <u>Vulnerable Children, Looked After Children, Transition and Leaving Care</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial Response service for children in need of help and protection (MASH) Family Support and Safeguarding services Looked After Children Team Transition and Leaving care for Looked After Children <u>Corporate Parenting</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision of resources including Family Placement, and Residential Services Children’s Homes Fostering and Adoption recruitment and placement Commissioning Independent placements Contact & Family Assessment services Quality of Practice Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early Intervention and Preventative Services Integrated Workforce Development Locality Work – 0 -19 (25) Troubled Families, Think Family and Area Family Support Teams Parenting Support services Support to Walsall Children’s and Young People’s Partnership Commissioning support for social care, SEND and Early Help Contract Management and Governance Commissioning Intelligence and analysis Assisted Transport Short Breaks and respite provision 	<u>Youth Support Services</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Admissions and school place planning Youth Justice Service and Targeted Youth Support Engagement of young people and active involvement Information, Advice and Guidance for skills and careers (IAG) Parent Partnership Service for children with SEN Education Business Partnership <u>Education</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality, standards and performance of Schools and Academies Governors and school governance Traded services to schools Safeguarding in schools Elective Home Education Access and Inclusion Virtual School for Looked After Children <u>SENDI</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Services to children with special needs and disabilities and their families SENDI Assessment Team Education Psychologists SENDI Advisory Team <u>Walsall Adult and Community College</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 16-25 Learning and Adult Learning Apprenticeships and Traineeships Employer training