

## **CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL**

TUESDAY 25 NOVEMBER, 2014 AT 6.00 P.M. AT THE COUNCIL HOUSE

### **Panel Members Present**

Councillor E. Hughes (Chair)  
Councillor P. Lane (Vice Chair)  
Councillor E. Hazell  
Councillor T. Jukes  
Councillor R. Martin  
Councillor K. Phillips  
Councillor I. Robertson (Substitute)  
Councillor H. Sarohi  
Councillor D. Shires  
Councillor C. Towe (Substitute)  
Councillor T. Wilson

### **Leader of the Council**

Councillor S. Coughlan

### **Non elected voting Members present**

S. Rayner (Lichfield Diocesan Education)  
L. Lukes (Parent Governor Representative)  
M. Ayodele (Parent Governor Representative)

### **Non elected non voting Members present**

D. Blackwell (Secondary Teacher Representative)

### **Officers Present**

David Haley - Executive Director (Children's Services)  
Lynda Poole - Assistant Director (Access and Attainment)  
Tony Griffin - Interim Assistant Director (Social Care)  
Dan Mortiboys – Senior Finance Manager  
Jane Bonner – Interim Head of Service for School Improvement  
Mike Morris – Group Manager (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities)  
Karen Marcroft - Head of Service - Quality Assurance & Performance Information  
Neil Picken – Senior Committee Business and Governance Manager

Prior to commencement of the formal business, the Chair noted that Dan Mortiboys, Senior Finance Manager, would be leaving the authority to take up a new position with the NHS. The Chair thanked Mr Mortiboys for his support and expertise over many years and wished him every success in his new position. These sentiments were echoed by the Panel.

#### 448/14     **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Russ Bragger, Councillors A. Andrew, C. Clews, S. Wade and B. Cassidy (Portfolio Holder for Children's Services).

#### 449/14     **SUBSTITUTIONS**

Councillor I. Robertson substituted for Councillor S. Wade and Councillor C. Towe substituted for Councillor A. Andrew.

#### 450/14     **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

There were no declarations of interest or party whip identified at this meeting.

#### 451/14     **MINUTES**

Members considered the minutes of the meetings held on 14 October, 2014.

##### **Resolved:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 October, 2014, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

#### 452/14     **QUARTER 2 FINANCIAL MONITORING POSITION FOR 2014/15**

The Senior Finance Manager presented a report summarising the predicted revenue and capital outturn position for 2014/15, based on the performance for quarter 2 (to end of September 2014), for services within the remit of the Children's Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel.

The Panel were advised that the capital budget was now staggered to reflect tensions between the school and financial year.

The Senior Finance Manager advised that pressures within the service related to the number of agency staff and large number of Looked After Children (LAC). Both matters were included as financial risks.

The Chair expressed concern that the budget was based on assumptions, such as the number of LAC, but it was clear that it wasn't deliverable. The service was demand led and it was important to set a realistic budget rather than setting unachievable budgets year on year. Further, he emphasised that when a budget is set, which incorporates savings, the Panel needed to be aware of the impact that would have on services and monitor them as savings took place.

A discussion ensued as to the use of agency staff. The Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that there had been a restructure of services which should assist in reducing the reliance on agency staff. Teams were being re-organised to ensure that efficiency was maximised. Processes were also being revisited to 'tighten up' them up

and to ensure that the correct checks and balances were in the system. Work was also being undertaken regionally to address the issue of agency staff. It was hoped that expectations from agency workers could be agreed to provide consistency between authorities.

A Member stated that it was important to recruit and retain social workers noting that Walsall was successful in recruiting newly qualified staff but not those already experienced in the role. The Interim Assistant Director (Social Care) advised that the second phase of the restructure would address this. It was clear that the Council had to live within its means and that work needed to be completed to ensure that managers were appointing social workers only when necessary. To this end, all requests to appoint agency staff were being signed off by the Interim Assistant Director (Social Care). Agency staff currently made up 33% of the overall workforce. The Panel were advised that an operating level of 10 – 15% of agency staff in the workforce would be preferable.

The Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that resources for children and safeguarding was an absolute priority. The service was well aware of the contribution it was required to make in terms of budget savings but were reassured that it had the Council's support in acting appropriately for the children and young people of Walsall. The Leader of the Council endorsed this point and stated that he felt confident that the Panel would help in the process of savings and monitoring any impact on services.

#### **Resolved:**

- | That the 2014/15 forecasted year - end financial position for services under the remit of the Panel, be noted.

#### **453/14 DRAFT REVENUE AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2015/16 TO 2018/19**

The Panel considered the draft revenue budget and capital programme for 2015/16 to 2018/19 for the Children's Services Portfolio. The following are the principle points arising from discussion at the meeting.

#### **Saving reference 13 – Children's Specialist Services – reduce by 25% over 4 years and remodel the delivery of short breaks for children with disabilities/special needs.**

The Panel held reservations about assurances that service delivery would be unaffected despite a budget reduction of 25%.

#### **Saving reference 22 - Children's Centre Services**

The Panel supported the work carried out by Children's Centres and acknowledged the importance of the services they delivered. Concern was expressed that the reduction of Children's Centres, together with a reduction in staff, would impact negatively on service delivery and lead to a reduction in support in some areas of the Borough.

Further concern was expressed in relation to the potential for the Government to clawback previous investment in Children's Centres if buildings are not used for their intended purpose.

#### **Saving reference 27 – Children's SEN School Assisted Transport and School Bus Passes**

The Panel sought clarity about how the saving would be achieved. Members were advised that the system would be reviewed to ensure that any elements of waste or duplication are removed. Further, consideration would be given to the provision of services within Walsall, compared with other local authorities, to identify any potential saving.

#### **Saving references 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36 and 37 – Youth Services**

The Panel acknowledged that a full review needed to be undertaken to ensure that services that will be delivered in the future will be those that children and young people want.

#### **Saving reference 41 – Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services - Withdraw funding for psychologist working in schools**

A Member expressed the view that this was required but accepted assurance that the Authority would meet their statutory duty. Services over and above this would be available through traded services between the local authority and schools.

#### **Resolved:**

**That the draft revenue budget and capital programme 2015/16-2018/19 for the Children's Services Portfolio be noted;**

#### **454/14 WALSALL SELF ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR HELP AND PROTECTION LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS**

The Interim Assistant Director (Social Care) presented a report detailing the performance and impact of services to children and families, especially those delivered by Children's Social Care, which were the subject of negative findings by Ofsted in 2012. The report focussed on:-

- The quality of partnerships and governance;
- Capacity, capability and culture; and;
- The quality and effectiveness of frontline practice.

Members were advised that work was planned which would realise further increases in the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of services to children and young people, including:-

- Further changes to "front door" arrangements for receiving new referrals;
- Strengthening the work of the Council's Corporate Parenting Board;
- Decreasing the reliance of the service on agency staff; and;

- Introducing a new system for the electronic storage and presentation of information about children's cases.

The Interim Assistant Director (Social Care) advised the Panel that there was an issue in relation to the high volume of referrals to the Multi Agency Screening Team (MAST). The number was disproportionate and more than just a reflection of need within the borough. The high number of referrals generated an increased workload when only one quarter of referrals turned into cases. The remainder resulted in no action. There was a need for improved signposting at the front door to ensure that people received the right help, in the right way. To address this, a new Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) would be introduced in April, 2015. The MASH would be an effective way of managing incoming work and would offer practical advice which may negate the need for initial assessments.

A Member asked why the number of referrals was so high to which the Head of Service - Quality Assurance and Performance Information advised that 24% of referrals came from schools. The largest group was listed as 'other' which included services such as probation and substance misuse.

In terms of reducing the number and costs of LAC, the Panel were assured that the thresholds in place were not set too low. A 'Challenge to Care' team was being established which would work with parents and children and young people to provide support.

MOSAIC, the new case recording system, was identified as an important tool which would help and support social workers in their roles. It would also provide better data which would provide greater assurance for managers and enable more accurate reporting. Members reported that they had attended a demonstration on MOSAIC and were hopeful that it would be a better tool for staff and managers.

In closing, the Interim Assistant Director (Social Care) advised members that the suitable accommodation and education, employment and training (EET) measures for care leavers were disappointing and needed to be addressed.

Members vocalised concern that more needed to be done to support care leavers with education and access to benefits. Members of the Care Leavers Working Group provided examples where care leavers were penalised when trying to access education as they would lose access to benefits. Further work needed to be undertaken with the Welfare Rights Team to improve the situation for care leavers that find themselves stuck between a rock and hard place.

The Interim Assistant Director (Social Care) acknowledged the situation and confirmed that services would support care leavers as well as they can.

The Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that demand for social services was increasing regionally and nationally. Due to the political context and heightened awareness through the media many agencies and bodies were risk averse and cautious to ensure that they are not accountable. In 2012 a decision was taken in Walsall to encourage all agencies to report through the MAST, however, that created a culture of dependency on the Local Authority. The matter was being looked at and mapping had been undertaken as to where referrals were coming from. It had become clear from the exercise that there was a lot of inefficiency. Partners would be asked to take more

responsibility and hold the risk rather than immediately transferring all cases to the Council. Work was underway with the Safeguarding Board to establish how this could be managed differently.

**Resolved:**

**That the report be noted.**

**455/14      UPDATE ON SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES  
REFORMS AND REVIEW OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**

The Panel received a presentation and considered a report [annexed] setting out the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Reforms and the Review of Special Educational Provision in Walsall. The report also detailed progress made within Walsall.

In terms of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Reforms the Panel were advised that they came into statutory effect on 1 September, 2014. This required Local Authorities to work in new ways to improve outcomes for children with special educational needs and disabilities. The reforms focused on how we listened to and engaged with families and ensured that parents and young people had more input in planning and influencing services and support. Joint commissioning and joint working to ensure services worked better were also a key component of the reforms.

A review of special educational provision in Walsall had not been undertaken since 2004. It is important that the right children are in the right place receiving the right provision and the Council needed to be certain that it identifies all SEN in a timely way.

A Member questioned how thorough the consultation had been as they were aware that members of staff at non- special schools were unaware of the process. It was asked whether placing statemented pupils in mainstream schools, which were under significant pressure, was the correct option given that Walsall had 7 good or our outstanding special schools which were better placed to provide the support required?

In response, the Group Manager (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) advised that the consultation would continue with schools into December. In terms of placing statemented pupils it was important to offer the right support at the right time. Pupils were placed based on a robust assessment and inclusive principles applied at all times. It was acknowledged that better use could be made of the outreach support offered by special schools to mainstream schools.

A discussion ensued as to the age group affected by the reforms together with the responsibility of the Council to provide support. The Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that if a child has a special educational need and a disability the Council has a responsibility to support them up to the age of 25. A group had been established to look at how the council helps individuals at the point of transition. Some Authorities had teams which provide a service from 0 – 25 whilst others provided 0 – 14 and then separate teams from 14 – 25. What was important, regardless of the system in place, was that the transition between services was seamless.

A Member sought clarity as to who was responsible for provision if a child was educated outside of the Borough? The Group Manager (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) explained that this was cause for dispute and offered to meet Members individually if they had any specific cases they wished to discuss.

**Resolved:**

**That the report be noted.**

**456/14      FOSTERING AND ADOPTION WORKING GROUP – INITIATION DOCUMENT**

The Senior Committee Business and Governance Manager advised that the Panel had previously agreed to establish a Fostering and Adoption Working Group. The Initiation document had been drafted [annexed] and was submitted for approval by the Panel.

**Resolved:**

- 1. That the terms of reference for the Fostering and Adoption Working Group be approved; and**
- 2. That Councillor P. Lane be appointed as Lead Member.**

**457/14      SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

The Panel considered a report [annexed] providing an update on school improvement.

Members were advised that the Education Challenge Board had considered the School Improvement Action Plan (SIAP) and made comment and amendments to the 6 priorities agreed.

A Member asked whether there was sufficient staffing capacity to deliver the SIAP?. The Assistant Director (Access and Attainment) advised that key roles had been lost as part of previous budget cuts which subsequently contributed to the Council receiving a poor Ofsted review. As part of the Improvement Strategy, these posts were now being put back into the structure to rebuild the service. Appointments to key positions were ongoing and confirmation was provided that an Interim Governance Manager had been appointed.

**Resolved:**

**That the amendments to the School Improvement Strategy Action Plan, as approved by the Education Challenge Board, be noted.**

#### 458/14 CHILDREN'S HOME VISITS

The Panel considered a briefing note [annexed] providing details about the five Children's Home within Walsall.

The Senior Committee Business and Governance Manager advised that Members had previously requested a structured programme of visits to the Children's Homes and requested five nominations. The Panel were advised that nominations would be sought at the start of each municipal year.

#### **Resolved:**

#### **1. That the following Members be appointed to visit a Children's Home:-**

- a) Councillor T. Jukes;
- b) Councillor K. Phillips;
- c) Councillor E. Hazell;
- d) Councillor T. Wilson;
- e) Councillor P. Lane;
- f) Lorna Lukes;

#### **2. That the Senior Committee Business and Governance Manager contact Members individually to allocate a Children's Home to visit;**

#### **3. That the appointment of Members to undertake a programme of visits be considered at the first meeting of the Panel, each Municipal Year.**

#### 459/14 WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN

Members considered the work programme and forward plan (annexed).

#### **Resolved:**

**That the work programme and forward plan be noted.**

#### 460/14 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was noted as 13 January, 2015.

The meeting terminated at 8.15 p.m.

Chair: .....

Date:.....