

EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

20 JUNE 2017 AT 6.00 PM AT THE COUNCIL HOUSE

Committee Members present	Councillor C. Towe (Chair) Councillor T. Jukes (Vice-Chair) Councillor D. Barker Councillor A. Ditta Councillor J. Fitzpatrick Councillor M. Follows Councillor D. James Councillor A. Nazir Councillor T. Wilson
Portfolio Holders present	Councillor A. Nawaz - Children's Services and Education
Non-elected voting Members Present	Ms T. Tunnell (Parent Governor)
Non-elected non-voting Members present	Mr R. Bragger (Primary Teacher Representative)
Officers present	Mr D. Haley - Executive Director (Children's Services) Mrs. L. Poole - Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) Mr R. Hutchinson - Finance Business Partner - Adult Social Care and Children's Services Dr P. Fantom - Democratic Services Officer

46/17 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor E. Hazell and Mrs P. Welter.

47/17 WELCOME FROM THE CHAIR

The Chair opened the Committee's first meeting of the municipal year and welcomed all attendees. He noted that there were three new Members, namely Councillors Fitzpatrick, James and Nazir, and he welcomed them to their first meeting.

The Chair explained that it was his objective to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of future meetings. In order to achieve this, he proposed that the practice of officers providing introductory presentations to their reports should cease and that henceforth consideration of reports would commence with questions from Members. Accordingly, this would require reports to be succinct and to be made available to Members in sufficient time for them to formulate their questions. Support for this approach was expressed by all Members of the Committee.

48/17 **SUBSTITUTIONS**

There were no substitutions.

49/17 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

There were no declarations of interest or party whip for the duration of the meeting.

50/17 **LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985 (AS AMENDED)**

There were no agenda items that required the exclusion of the public.

51/17 **MINUTES**

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 4 April 2017, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record, subject to the amendment of the final sentence of the third paragraph of Minute 41/17 to read: 'The PLO was involved with the processes by which these two routes operated'.

A Member requested that it be recorded under Minute 36/17 that the Chair's reiteration of the need for stronger action to ensure that children who were at risk were kept on the radar and action taken to protect them had been supported by all Members of the Committee. He also updated the Committee on a number of actions that had occurred since the last meeting.

52/17 **CHANGE IN THE ORDER OF BUSINESS**

The Chair advised that item 8 would be considered as the next item of business.

53/17 **CORPORATE FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE – FINAL FINANCIAL MONITORING POSITION FOR 2016/17 (PRE-AUDIT)**

The Committee considered a report [annexed] that gave the corporate financial position and was informed of the final revenue and capital outturn position for 2016/17 (pre-audit).

The Chair emphasised the importance of having more accessible reports from officers that contained relevant information. He noted that a one page overview/summary report had been tabled and he invited comments on what should be included in such reports in future.

The Finance Business Partner indicated that the main report had followed the format previously used for quarterly reports and he drew Members' attention to the report's third recommendation. This sought feedback on the usefulness, design, length and level of detail of the quarterly monitoring reports, which, together with that received from other Scrutiny Committees, would be incorporated into the overall corporate position with regard to how information would be presented in future. Accordingly, Members expressed their preference that future reports should be more concise.

Having regard to one page summary, and the reference to the transfer of £1.706m from general reserves to Children's Services, without which there would have been an overspend variance of £2.052m, the Chair raised a question in relation to the amount held in corporate, service and general reserves. The information not being available, the Finance Business Partner undertook to provide this to Members.

Further to a question from a Member regarding performance levels against the budget and the central government funding for refugee provision, the Finance Business Partner confirmed that this information was contained in the report to be presented to the Corporate and Public Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Chair advised that the Members' question should be directed to that Committee.

Members enquired why during the budget setting process for 2017/18, there had been the removal of £1.175m of undelivered savings, with alternative funding being identified and £270k being carried forward for delivery during 2017/18. The Finance Business Partner explained how the budget process is undertaken, with undelivered savings being reviewed centrally and a new set of saving proposals produced for the next year to address funding gaps across the Council.

Members emphasised that the list of potential savings needed to be realistic, that there had not been a saving of £1.175m, and requested that a further breakdown be provided to the Committee by the Finance Business Partner. The Chair noted that whilst the service was demand-led, there had been significant overspends in a number of areas and that there should not be a reliance on money from elsewhere.

A Member requested clarification regarding the paragraph in the covering report that referred to Citizen Impact. It was confirmed by the Finance Business Partner that this was included in all of the finance reports and that he would include this observation in his feedback on the format of reports.

The table in the report indicating savings not achieved had shown an increase in vacancy management of £201,651. An explanation for this was requested by a Member, who also emphasised that the list of potential savings should be realistic.

The Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that the budget had been exceeded in most years and referred to the high demand on services, as demonstrated by the Scorecard provided with the report on Children's Social Care & Early Help – performance quarter 4 – report. He stressed the improvements with respect to looked after children and the discharge of care leavers, but added that there were more young people who were requiring support from the service. Whilst significant savings had been made where possible, referring to the vacancy rate, he pointed out that additional social workers were needed to increase both the quality of work delivered and to improve the response times.

Members noted this and that there had been year-on-year an increased call upon reserves and a reduction in services. Whilst there were fluctuations to demand, it was felt by Members that it would be preferable to have more realistic initial estimates and they reiterated the request that the Finance Business Partner provide further information with regard to the reserves.

With reference to the significant revenue variances, Members requested an explanation with respect to SEN transport and the delay in the saving of £250k. The Finance Business Partner pointed out that the delays had arisen due to the consultative process but that this had now been completed and the savings would soon be achieved. The Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) informed the Committee that delays were also attributable to the nature of the academic year and the impracticality of cancelling transport at short notice. Furthermore, there was also the cost of providing transport to Walsall children currently living outside of the Borough. In both respects, attempts were being made to reduce the costs incurred. The Executive Director (Children's Services) confirmed that consultation on the proposals had been agreed by the Cabinet, with the intention of increasing cost effectiveness and efficiency.

Resolved:

1. That the pre-audit outturn for 2016/17 year end for services under the remit of the Children's Services Directorate Management Team be noted;
2. That the pre-audit capital outturn for 2016/17 year end for services under the remit of the Children's Services Directorate Management Team be noted;
3. That the Finance Business Partner note the Committee's feedback on the format for future finance reports, that they be concise and shorter in length;
4. That the Finance Business Partner provide further information to the Committee with respect to general reserves and to vacancy management.

54/17 WALSALL CHILDREN'S SERVICES JOURNEY TO EXCELLENCE

The Committee received a presentation from the Executive Director (Children's Services) entitled *Walsall's Journey of Improvement to be Excellent: Children's Social Care and Safeguarding*. This featured an overview of context since 2012, a description of what had been done to improve infrastructure, to secure strong and purposeful leadership and to improve practice. Also detailed were some of the actions that had worked well to help and protect children, the areas for continuous improvement, and actions to help on the improvement journey. The activities to be performed during the Ofsted inspection were set out on a week-by-week basis.

The Executive Director (Children's Services) stated that he was positive about the role of elected Members in relation to Children's Services and the holding of officers to account by Members. He added that the position had been further improved in terms of infrastructure, the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and Early Help, which had strengthened the 'Front Door' model and led to less costly interventions.

In responding to a question from the Chair on whether phase 1 of the MOSAIC case management system had now been fully embedded, the Executive Director (Children's Services) stated that both phases 1 and 2 had been completed, with a movement to phase 3 currently being undertaken. He added that the emphasis was now on increasing familiarity with this system for all relevant staff.

Further to a question from the Chair on the percentage of agency staff within Children's Services, the Executive Director (Children's Services) confirmed that currently 28 per cent were agency employees. However, as a part of the improvements to infrastructure, there had been eight recent appointments to the Unit Model, and investment in the Practice Uplift Model, which were contributing to increasing consistency of practice.

Further to a discussion of looked after children, with it being noted that care leavers were to be monitored to the age of 25 years rather than 19 years, there was a question from a Member regarding whether any of the costs for care leavers were met by Adult Services. The Executive Director (Children's Services) acknowledged the increased costs and the impact on caseloads, and advised that the responsibility for care leavers resided with Children's Services; however, should care leavers have specific needs then Adult Services would share responsibility and a panel would determine the level of care to be provided.

The Vice-Chair raised the issue of advertising for foster carers owing to a reduction in the numbers of carers available. The Executive Director (Children's Services) referred to the costs arising from using independent foster carers owing to the difficulties experienced in recruiting foster carers.

A Member referred to Citizen Impact and the necessity for there to be, as far as possible, a positive impact. The Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) advised that Citizen Impact was carried out on all budgets and Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs) were used to measure which people were affected by measures and what could be done to mitigate. Consideration of the impact on service users was raised by Members, who stressed the importance of qualitative as well as quantitative data to elicit views and to improve services.

The Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that 31 permanent full-time social workers would commence employment during the next two months. This would reduce reliance on agency staff, with 28 per cent of social workers being agency employees, to 17 per cent, which was close to the national average. Further to questions on the recruitment strategy, the Executive Director (Children's Services) referred to the high profile local and national recruitment campaign, 24 hour recruitment micro-site, the training and development for graduates attaining first-class or upper second-class honours degrees, for newly qualified social workers, and for social workers being brought into Early Help from other areas of practice. In response to questions from Members on social worker caseloads, the Executive Director (Children's Services) advised the caseload for social workers working with looked after children was currently 15 cases, whereas for safeguarding families it was 18/19 cases, and for children with disabilities it was 18 cases.

It was reported by the Executive Director (Children's Services) that progress was being made in respect of the number of children placed for adoption. A Member

enquired about the timescale for adoption, with the Quarter 4 Scorecard indicating that the average time between receiving court authority to place a child and deciding on a match to a family, currently stood at 205 days. Further information on this would be provided to Members.

Acknowledging the issues concerning the retention of staff, a Member pointed out that it was a common criticism that people accessing the service had to see so many social workers. Improvements being made, the Executive Director (Children's Services) recognised that there remained too many transition points. However, he informed the Committee that upon receiving confirmation of the Ofsted inspection, four agency staff had given their immediate notice, and he reassured the Committee that a review had taken place of the work they had completed.

Members received information regarding the 'Mocking Bird' project on foster care support, which was a peer-mentoring scheme from which the initial feedback had been very positive. There was also discussion in relation to the Limes Children's Home and the bringing back to Walsall of two young people who had been receiving care out of Borough. The Chair reminded the Committee that this replicated similar arrangements at the Redruth Road Children's Home.

The Executive Director (Children's Services) provided an explanation to Members of the four week Ofsted inspection timetable, and the activities that were to be undertaken by the inspectors during each of the weeks. The final judgement would be communicated on the Thursday of the fourth week and it was envisaged that the inspection report would be received six weeks thereafter.

The Vice-Chair drew the Committee's attention to the recent appointment of a number of capable officers in Children's Services, whom it was anticipated would be of great assistance in taking the service forward.

55/17 CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE REPORTING – END OF QUARTER 4 (APRIL 2016 TO MARCH 2017)

A report was submitted [see annexed] detailing the performance of Children's Services to the end of Quarter 4 (April 2016 to March 2017). This included information regarding the key indicators, the areas of good performance and areas for improvement.

Reference being made in paragraph 1.1 of the report on Early Help to the number of early help assessments having reduced because the use of 'Family Star' had increased, clarification of this term was requested by the Chair. The Executive Director (Children's Services) explained that this was an assessment tool utilised when it was evident from a range of indicators that children and families required a lower level of support and it was not necessary to undertake a full assessment.

Within the same paragraph, a Member drew attention to the increase in early help interventions due to disengagement, resulting in cases being stepped up/referred to children's statutory social care. The Executive Director (Children's Services) stated that whilst many families engaged well, there were some that did not wish to engage

and in cases where progress was not being made then a referral or stepping up of the case would be carried out.

The Vice-Chair highlighted concerns regarding placement stability, indicating that this would be a matter she would raise with the Corporate Parenting Board. The Vice-Chair also informed the Committee of the pleasing news that two of Walsall's looked after children had now commenced university studies.

With reference to care leavers' accommodation, and it being noted that ten young people had been placed in custody, the Executive Director (Children's Services) referred to the provision of support programmes by the Youth Offending Services and the Transition to Leaving Care Services. Particular emphasis was being given to breaking the history of criminality and he stressed that there were low numbers of Walsall care leavers in the criminal justice system.

A concern being raised by a Member in relation to the inputting of information onto MOSAIC by social workers, the Executive Director (Children's Services) pointed out that increased use was being made of mobile devices that had been configured to include packages appropriate to the needs to children. He noted that this represented a key element of corporate investment in technology.

The Chair sought clarification on the recruitment of three new Group Managers, as detailed in Section 5.2 of the report. The Executive Director (Children's Services) confirmed that these appointments were to replace staff leaving the Authority and, therefore, were not new posts. Further information was also provided in relation to the 'Owning and Driving for Performance' programme, which was a two-phase leadership and development programme that had provided training for 125 managers in Children's Services.

Having regard to care leavers aged 18-21 years, the Executive Director (Children's Services) advised Members that action plans were in place for every young person and, although the report stated that 50 per cent were not in education, employment or training (NEET), recent data indicated that this rate had reduced considerably.

Resolved:

That the contents of the report, together with the strengths, areas of improvement and actions being taken to address them, be noted

56/17 AREAS OF FOCUS 2017/18

The Committee considered the areas that it wished to focus on during the ensuing municipal year and which would be incorporated into the Committee's work programme for 2018/18.

Members had received a presentation on services (Minute 54/17 refers) and the following is a summary of the discussion in relation to the items to be included in the work programme.

The Chair highlighted the importance of the Committee receiving a report on Academies, and it was agreed that this should be scheduled for the September meeting, and he emphasised the importance of inviting representatives from Willenhall E-ACT to attend the meeting. This proposal was supported by all Members of the Committee and the Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) advised that the Education Challenge Board had re-established the Raising Achievement Board (RAB) meetings, which would be attended by the local authority.

A Member raised the importance of making the services provided more accessible to users via digital and 24-7 working. A request from a Member for an overview of children's homes would be incorporated within the item on looked after children and leaving care processes and procedures.

The Executive Director (Children's Services) also drew Members' attention to the importance of considering proposals for the expansion of primary school places. In terms of the areas for continuous improvement, he also referred to the RISE agenda, which comprised the following four elements:

- Reduce the number of looked after children safely
- Improve practice
- Skilled and stable workforce
- Early help, early on

Resolved:

1. That the following areas of focus be incorporated into the Committee's work programme for 2017/18:
 - Looked After Children and Leaving Care processes and procedures
 - Pupil premium
 - Young homeless team
 - Academies (including Willenhall E-ACT)
 - Educational achievement
 - Children's mental health and CAMHS
 - Feedback from visits to children's homes
 - Finance reports - quarterly reports
 - Children's service performance - quarterly reports
 - Annual complaints report
 - Annual safeguarding board report
 - Corporate parenting board report
 - ECB/SENDI board reports
 - Food banks
 - RISE agenda - quarterly reports
 - Child sexual exploitation
 - Missing children
 - Update on the 5 year sufficiency strategy plan
 - Teacher supply and recruitment
 - UK Youth Parliament
 - Question Time

2. That in relation to the UK Youth Parliament and Question Time, the following Members agreed to participate in any events or working groups to be arranged:
 - Councillor C. Towe
 - Councillor T. Jukes
 - Councillor D. Barker
 - Councillor T. Wilson

3. That the following Members agreed to undertake visits to the children’s homes indicated and to report back on these visits:
 - Lichfield Road: Councillor T. Wilson
 - Spindle Tree Rise: Councillor T. Jukes
 - Redruth Road: Councillor D. Barker
 - Bluebells: Councillor J. Fitzpatrick
 - Hilton Road: Councillor M. Follows

57/17 FORWARD PLANS

Members considered the Forward Plans of the Council and of the Black Country Executive Joint Committee.

It was noted by the Chair that Council’s Forward Plan of Key Decisions included the assisted transport and taxi service, and that approval had been given to commence procurement with the contracted to be awarded in September 2017.

Resolved:

That the Forward Plans be noted.

58/17 VOTE OF THANKS TO EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (CHILDREN’S SERVICES)

The Committee noted that Mr D. Haley, Executive Director (Children’s Services), was to leave the Authority in order to take up the position of Director of Children’s Services at Swindon Borough Council. The Chair and Members joined in offering to Mr Haley their best wishes for his new role and their appreciation for all that he had achieved at Walsall Council since his appointment in 2014.

59/17 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was 5 September 2017.

The meeting terminated at 7.43 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....