

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

TUESDAY 14 APRIL, 2015 AT 6.00 P.M. AT THE COUNCIL HOUSE

### **Panel Members Present**

Councillor E. Hughes (Chair)  
Councillor P. Lane (Vice Chair)  
Councillor M. Bird (Substitute)  
Councillor E. Hazell  
Councillor T. Jukes  
Councillor R. Martin  
Councillor E. Russell (Substitute)  
Councillor H. Sarohi  
Councillor D. Shires  
Councillor S. Wade

### **Portfolio Holder**

Councillor B. Cassidy

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

S. Raynor (Lichfield Diocesan Education)

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

D. Blackwell (Secondary Teacher Representative)  
R. Bragger (Primary Teacher Representative)

### **Officers Present**

Paul Sheehan -	Chief Executive
David Haley -	Executive Director (Children's Services)
Lynda Poole –	Assistant Director (Access and Attainment)
Tony Griffin -	Interim Assistant Director
(Social	Care)
Andrea Potts -	Assistant Director (Early Help, Children's Commissioning and Workforce Development)
Carol Boughton -	Head of Service (Safeguarding)
Nicola Hart -	Early Years/School Ready Lead Advisor
Sue Morgan -	Strategic Lead – Early
Intervention	and Family Support
Neil Picken –	Senior Committee Business
and	Governance Manager

### **In attendance**

Assistant Chief Constable Carl Foulkes – West Midlands Police  
Chief Inspector Martin Hurcomb – West Midlands Police  
Robert Lake – Independent Chair – Walsall Safeguarding Children Board  
Steven Rimmer – West Midlands Strategic Lead, Preventing Violence against Vulnerable People

#### 485/14     **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors A. Andrew and K. Phillips.

#### 486/14     **SUBSTITUTIONS**

Councillor M. Bird for Councillor A. Andrew

Councillor E. Russell for Councillor K. Phillips

#### 487/14     **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

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

#### 488/14     **MINUTES**

Members considered the minutes of the meetings held on 24 February, 2015.

##### **Resolved:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 February, 2015, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

#### 489/14     **CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION**

The Panel received a report [annexed] which provided an overview of the issue of child sexual exploitation (CSE). This included information regarding the national and regional response activity for this significant priority. The report also outlined Walsall's response to this issue, led by the Walsall Safeguarding Board and its Partners.

The Executive Director (Children's Services) introduced the report emphasising the challenge of detecting CSE as it becomes driven deeper underground as public awareness increases. It was a complex and challenging task but all possible efforts were being made in Walsall to ensure that children and young people in the Borough are protected and supported and perpetrators are identified and convicted.

The Chief Executive confirmed that the whole organisation was alert to the scale of the challenge. Members of the council were right to seek reassurances of where the council was and where it is going in terms of identifying and tackling CSE.

He explained that he had required the Independent Chair of the Safeguarding Board to ask each agency on the Board to revisit historic records and cases in order to

satisfy the Board that there were no legacy issues such as those uncovered in Rotherham. Each agency had subsequently reported back to Board who had been satisfied as far as could be ascertained that there had been no Rotherham type of 'cover up' or conscious practice of ignoring issues that had been reported.

In order to cross check any findings from the Walsall Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB), the Chief Executive and Executive Director (Children's Services) had also met a group of front line social work staff. They were asked if they had any concerns about either current or historical practice in the Council or other agencies. In particular, staff were encouraged to discuss whether there had ever been practice concerns by front line staff which had not been acted upon by senior managers. Staff within social services had advised that they felt assertive and would have acted should any form of suppression occurred. The Panel were assured that all staff were empowered to escalate matters to a senior level, even directly to him as Chief Executive and that staff within Social Care felt this was the case.

In closing, the Chief Executive advised that the Council and Partners through the Safeguarding Board had undertaken a thorough check to ensure that there were no historic cases of CSE to pursue.

The West Midlands Strategic Lead (Preventing Violence against Vulnerable People) addressed the Panel to set the regional context. It was explained that in Walsall there was a clear desire and action amongst Partners to work collectively within Walsall and across the region to tackle CSE. He advised that:-

- There was an operating standard in place across the region for all Partners to work to when assessing risk, analysing threats and taking appropriate action;
- The 'See me, hear me' website was operational and sought to raise awareness of CSE, signpost to help and resources and communicate future campaigns and events;
- The Child Sexual Exploitation and Missing Operations Groups (CMOG) was the primary mechanism for bringing together intelligence from all Partners noting that Walsall was one of the better operated groups with a strong Chairman and good input from the voluntary sector and the councils children's services directorate;
- The contribution of Health Partners at CMOG could be improved;
- The role of the Scrutiny Panel was key in ensuring transparency was both important and helpful.

The Head of Service (Safeguarding) commented that Walsall had a dedicated Police investigation team comprising of a CSE Co-ordinator post and three Detective Constables. She endorsed the work of CMOG and assured Members that individuals remained as an identified victim/potential victim until every Partner was satisfied that all work had been completed to remove the risk to that individual.

In terms of numbers, the Panel were advised that CMOG considered twenty four individuals in March and twenty three in April at risk of CSE. Many of those individuals were the same each month, although there was movement and fluctuations as risks rose and fell. It was crucial in every case that time was invested to gain the trust of the child or young person as this was the key to retrieving

information which could identify perpetrators and lead to a prosecution. The Panel were advised that this was complicated as young people often did not feel that they were being victimised and saw the perpetrator(s) as a friend(s).

The Independent Chair of the WSCB addressed the Panel advising that CMOG was a sub group of the WSCB. He also advised that schools were often first to identify potential risks so training within schools was important to ensure that staff were able to spot signs and know where to report issues of concern. The Panel heard that the Chief Executive chaired a 6 weekly assurance meeting of the WSCB, attended by the Director of Children's Services, Cabinet Member (Children's Services), the Independent Board Chair, senior Health and Police representatives and an independent member to provide external challenge. The Independent Chair also commented that information from some Health Practitioners could be improved. In terms of the Council, he stated that it was positive that two thirds of elected Members had undertaken CSE awareness training. In closing he stated that the WSCB was charged by the Government to ensure that the Council and its Partners were doing all they could to tackle CSE and he assured Members that this was the case in Walsall. This was not to say that there wasn't a problem but to confirm that everything was in place to deal with issues when they were discovered. He was also re-assured that Scrutiny was undertaking its role by considering the matter and calling Partners to account.

The Assistant Chief Constable advised that collaborative working with Partners was an integral part of increasing intelligence and knowledge and confirmed that it was his view that this was good in Walsall. It was the general view that Walsall was at the forefront of shaping services to address CSE. He confirmed that there was dedicated Police support in Walsall to address CSE and that he would like to see these replicated across the region.

The Chief Inspector advised that significant progress had been made in relation to CSE and that services were unrecognisable to the infrastructure in place two years previously. He re-iterated that Walsall was in a strong position. Reports of CSE had risen significantly over the last few years which demonstrated that awareness had increased. He was proud of the dedicated Police resource and co-location of teams in Walsall. It was acknowledged that all agencies previously failed to 'join the dots' but there was now a significant step forwards in intelligence which enabled joint working in Walsall. In closing, he assured the Panel that Walsall was in as good a position it could hope for.

The Chair asked whether all children and young people under the Councils care were protected from CSE? The Head of Service (Safeguarding) advised that there were a number of young people that were Looked After Children (LAC) by the council discussed at CMOG. As of March, 2015 there were twenty four individuals that were being discussed at CMOG, of these, eight were LAC. Two of the eight were not looked after in Walsall. Of the remaining six, they were already LAC when the council became concerned that they may be at risk of CSE. A lot of work had been carried out with the individuals as often they did not see themselves as victims, instead considering the perpetrator(s) as a friend(s). Each had a support plan and every effort was made to develop their understanding of CSE in order to influence any decisions they may take. It was important to gain young peoples' trust so that

they would open up and provide intelligence which can be used to pursue matters legally. In closing, Members were advised that it appeared that LAC were not being specifically targeted by perpetrators in Walsall.

A Member asked for a more detailed breakdown of the number of children considered by CMOG to gain a better understanding of the issues faced.

In response, the Head of Service (Safeguarding) advised that twenty three individuals were discussed in April, 2015 and twenty four in March. Of the twenty four:-

- Four were from surrounding areas and concerns reported to the relevant Local Authority;
- One was a London Borough Child placed in Walsall;
- Six were on Child Protection Plans;
- Eight LAC (two of which were placed out of borough);
- Five were children considered at risk following contact from concerned parents who continued to work with the Council to mitigate any future risk.

Since June, 2014 the Safeguarding Board was aware that a total of seventy seven children had been identified and deemed 'at risk' of CSE.

The West Midlands Strategic Lead (Preventing Violence against Vulnerable People) addressed the Panel. He explained that data reporting had improved significantly since June, 2014 as data became shared at source and all Partners had taken a more pro-active approach. It was explained that some data was missing, for example, information from mental health services. This would enrich the data set further and so the number of children and young people identified as 'at risk' could be higher than presently known.

A Member of the Panel questioned how effective officers were at raising awareness within Schools both with students and staff? The Panel were advised that every effort had been made to get information into schools, for example, every designated teacher had been afforded training on a number of occasions and information was available on the school newsletter – The LINK.

At the invitation of the Chair, the Portfolio Holder (Children's Services) asked the Executive Director (Children's Services) to explain to the Panel what was in place in relation to children missing school? The Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that there hadn't been a systematic approach with registers. He had made it clear to schools that there was an expectation that they would be in a position to know where every single child is, everyday, and that registers would be completed by 9.30 a.m. each day. All schools should know if a child isn't at school and where they are. When a child is missing from home and education it is clear that they are more at risk. A Member stated that it was important to ensure that children were not in school, after turning up late, before contacting parents.

A separate Member referred to the Troubled Families Partnership which had been established to address truancy and irregular attendance through truancy patrols and asked how effective it had been. They also expressed concern that some students slipped out of school shortly after registering.

The Assistant Director (Access and Attainment) advised that many schools had electronic registers and pupils were required to register at each lesson which deterred truanting as it was more difficult to simply register in the morning and leave. Pupil Sweeps commenced in March, 2015. This was a joint initiative between the council and police to patrol areas returning pupils truanting to school. A further update would be provided to a future meeting of the Panel.

A Member stated that awareness of CSE was much higher and suggested that CSE was endemic within the Pakistani community. He continued stating that some communities did not wish to become integrated and hid issues very well. He asked what efforts were being made to engage with the Pakistani community and stated there was a need for police officers from a black and minority ethnic background to engage with the Pakistani Community. In closing he asked how long funding for the CSE Coordinator Post would be available? In response to this, the Independent Chair – Walsall Safeguarding Children Board advised that the post had been appointed on a twelve month, fixed term contract after securing funding from the Walsall Safer Community Partnership. A Member suggested that the Panel make a recommendation to Cabinet that the post of CSE Coordinator should continue to be funded after the initial fixed term contract expires. This was supported by the Panel.

In terms of working with Asian/Pakistani communities the Chief Inspector advised that efforts were being made to open up and engage with communities and that a Partnership approach was required. The challenge of CSE was recognised and it was important to work with all communities.

A discussion ensued on the impact of social media and the internet. A Member explained that within the school at which he was a school governor use of mobile phones was banned. This followed incidents of children taking photographs of other children using the bathroom. There was a need to get Headteachers on board to highlight the dangers of social media.

Referring back to the numbers of children at risk of CSE, a Member expressed concern that the figures were now much higher than they were a few years ago. They also questioned what work was being undertaken with taxi drivers? The West Midlands Strategic Lead (Preventing Violence against Vulnerable People) advised that the original figure of seventeen was established prior to the partnership framework being put in place. The initial baseline figure had been established from ad hoc data sets which were now very different. He acknowledged it had originally been an underestimate but stressed that the current figure was much more accurate as there was a greater confidence in the data. In terms of taxi drivers there was regional level engagement with taxi drivers, licensing officers, safeguarding teams and the Police. A working group had been established to make recommendations to Chief Executives about Licensing Committee Functions. It was important to collectively engage as taxi drivers were a part of the solution acting as 'eyes and ears' whilst reporting any suspicious behaviour.

A Member of the Panel questioned whether work was being carried out at Universities to raise awareness and gather intelligence? The Assistant Chief Constable explained that he would hold a discussion with the coordinators to ensure

that all available opportunities to gather intelligence and raise awareness were maximised.

At the invitation of the Chair, the Portfolio Holder (Children's Services) referred to recent training on CSE for Members. Whilst encouraging that two thirds has attended it was her view that this was not enough. She commented that all Members of the Council should attend. In consultation with the Clerk to the Panel, it had been agreed that further sessions would be provided in the new Municipal Year. Panel members were asked to engage all Members to encourage them to attend.

A Member commented that the Police were often criticised but he felt that they were doing the best possible job with the resources available to them. He asked how many active cases in Walsall and how this compared to other areas? In response, the Police advised that it was difficult to quantify precisely as each case had to be in context. That said, they were actively policing 27 young people and 31 offenders.

In closing, the Chair stated that a huge amount of assurance had been provided. He recommended:-

1. That Cabinet be recommended to fund the post of 'Child Sexual Exploitation Coordinator' after the initial fixed term contract expires;
2. That a report on 'Trauncy Sweeps' be added to the 2015/16 work programme.

These recommendations were supported by the Panel.

#### **Resolved:**

1. That Cabinet be recommended to continue to fund the post of 'Child Sexual Exploitation Coordinator' after the initial fixed term contract expires;
2. That a report on 'Pupil Sweeps' be added to the 2015/16 work programme;

#### **490/14 DEVELOPMENT OF 0 – 5 INTEGRATED EARLY YEARS/SCHOOL READY STRATEGY**

The Panel received a presentation on the development of a 0- 5 Integrated Early Years/School Ready Strategy (annexed).

The Assistant Director (Early Help, Children's Commissioning and Workforce Development) gave an overview of the strategy explaining why it was required. She then introduced the Early Years/School Ready Lead Adviser who had recently been appointed.

The success of day nurseries was highlighted with a high number of day nurseries rated good or outstanding. In terms of challenges, it was highlighted that only 53% of children aged 0 – 5 had a good level of development whereas the national average was 60%. There was a drive to co-ordinate improvements in services in future as many agendas crossed over. It was hoped that social and health risks would be reduced.

To deliver the strategy all key agencies were involved. It would also be aligned with the Early Help/School Ready Strategies. Scrutiny had a role in monitoring the strategies delivery.

The Strategic Lead – Early Intervention and Family Support explained that Walsall's performance was below the national average. Children's Centre provision in Walsall was good and so work needed to be carried out to understand why there was a gap between vulnerable early learners and their peers.

A challenging area was health. Walsall ranked significantly worse than the national average in a number of key health indicators that impact on Early Years and school ready including:-

- Infant Mortality;
- Smoking in pregnancy;
- Breastfeeding;
- Low birth weight;
- Childhood obesity.

Commissioning of Health Visitors, would become the responsibility of the Local Authority in October, 2015 providing opportunity for further development and alignment. Work was being undertaken with public health to achieve a smooth transition and milestones were being reached.

A Panel Member asked for clarity on the review of the virtual school. It was his understanding that it was undergoing a restructure and that the salaries of posts had been reduced. This suggested that it would be difficult to recruit qualified teachers. In response, the Assistant Director (Access and Attainment) advised that a restructure was taking place and there was not a requirement to protect salaries. At present, there was a qualified Headteacher and a number of teachers in post.

The Early Years/School Ready Lead Adviser reported that they were working in partnership with the Virtual School. They were trying to draw down Pupil Premium funding to maximise resources for children. Work was also being undertaken with the Virtual Head to ensure that plans for children were robust and regularly monitored.

The Chair sought clarity on the risk of qualified teachers leaving positions once the restructure, and lower salaries, was implemented.

In response, the Assistant Director (Access and Attainment) advised that Walsall was fortunate to have ten teaching posts in the virtual school. The impact of the Virtual School on the outcomes for children needed to be challenged to ensure that it was working effectively.

A Member of the Panel recommended that a presentation on the work of the Virtual School, delivered by the Virtual Head be considered at a future meeting. This was supported by the Panel.



In response to a question on engagement to inform the restructure, an explanation was provided setting out the process to date. This had included meetings with head teachers, attendance at groups and various forums. The draft strategy was being shared to gather as many views as possible. The Assistant Director (Early Help, Children's Commissioning and Workforce Development) advised that it was part of the Early Years/School Ready Lead Adviser to facilitate better engagement with all schools.

Addressing the two year old free educational nursery place offer, a Member asked whether there were sufficient places available. They were advised that there were 2199 places needed and 69% had been taken up. A strategy was in place to develop the remaining places and it was planned to have as near to 100% as possible in places by September, 2015.

**Resolved:**

That the Virtual Head attends a future meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel to provide a presentation on the Virtual School.

**491/14 CHILDREN'S CENTRES**

A report was submitted (annexed) providing a response to a petition received from users of Birchills and Alumwell Children's Centres in response to a redesign of Children's Centres to deliver budget savings of £1.85m approved at Council on 26 February, 2015.

The Assistant Director (Early Help, Children's Commissioning and Workforce Development) advised that proposals had been changed to retain the service and focus on children aged 0 – 3 with a priority on vulnerable groups.

Each of the Children's Centres had been visited to provide reassurance that they would remain open as delivery outreach services across the Borough. The petitioners had attended and were satisfied with the assurances given.

**Resolved:**

That the response to the petition be noted.

**492/14 CARE LEAVERS WORKING GROUP**

The Interim Assistant Director (Social Care) presented a report (annexed) providing an update of progress against recommendations arising from the Care Leavers Working Group report.

He advised that the Department for Education (DfE) had recently visited the Authority and had met with care leavers as part of the programme. He received feedback from them on the review and left with a positive view.

In terms of accommodation, the Panel were advised that a number of moves had taken place and that Members had revisited young people in their new homes. It was explained that accommodation wasn't perfect and there was a need to manage young people's expectations. Every effort was being made to make all accommodation a safe environment and young people had commented that they were now happier in their new accommodation.

'Staying Put' arrangements were improving, however, it was important to note that where these arrangements were put in place it reduced the capacity for Foster Care placements.

At the invitation of the Chair, the Portfolio Holder (Children's Services) advised that she was delighted that huge steps had been made following a very good example of scrutiny work. As mentioned, the DfE had talked about the review. It had also been discussed at the 'Moving on' Working Group which was a sub-group of the Corporate Parenting Board. In terms of accommodation, it was important to remember that some young people would never be happy and accept what was provided. A lot of support was given to young people but some will not engage. There was a need to manage expectations.

A Member of the Panel strongly objected to this statement. Reflecting on her recent visit to a young person's accommodation, she stated that the new accommodation was much worse than his previous home, which she also visited. The young person concerned now lived in shared accommodation which, whilst good for some young people, was not working out in this case. The standard of accommodation was also poor. Concern was expressed at the amount of notice provided to the young person of his move date which was just a few days. Further, it was felt that more should be done to assist young people when entering into housing agreements. A different young person had also been visited who was happier in shared accommodation although there was a significant age gap with her house mate.

A further two Members updated the Panel on their experiences when re-visiting young people which were positive although the young people concerned still struggled with managing finances.

A Member asked whether progress had been made in relation to out of hours support. The Assistant Director (Social Care) advised that young people wanted someone to talk to and a softer approach needed to be developed. It was a piece of work that would take time as often a different approach was required for each individual.

The Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that it was important to follow up the working group's findings until the Panel were satisfied that the recommendations had been implemented. It was suggested that a further report be considered at a future Panel meeting.

The Chair suggested that Members should also meet with young people to ensure that they hear their views on the services they receive.

There was a general consensus that the work of the Personal Advisers in Walsall was excellent, often involving staff going above and beyond their role to assist young people. The Panel requested that the Assistant Director (Social Care) pass on these comments to the staff concerned.

In closing, a Member of the Panel suggested that the Senior Committee Business and Governance Manager forward details of Charities he managed to the Assistant Director (Social Care) for inclusion on the soon to be launched New Belongings Website. These charities would be able to assist young people with their education costs and also various goods.

**Resolved:**

1. That the Senior Committee Business and Governance Manager forward details of Charities he managed to the Assistant Director (Social Care) for inclusion on the soon to be launched New Belongings Website;
2. That a further update report be submitted to the Panel in the 2015/16 Municipal Year.

**493/14      FEEDBACK FROM CHILDREN'S HOME VISITS**

The Panel received feedback from Councillors that had attended visits to Children's Homes.

Feedback was overwhelmingly positive with good environments and caring staff reported as common themes across all homes. One Member reported that there appeared to be a lot of red tape involved with taking children on holiday and suggested that this could be considered further.

The Executive Director (Children's Services) welcomed the feedback and stated that Members should be proud of the outcomes delivered in Children's Homes.

**Resolved:**

That the feedback be noted.

**494/14      WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN**

The Chair took this opportunity to thank the Portfolio Holder (Children's Services) for her excellent contribution to Children's Services both as Portfolio Holder and previously as Chair of the Children's Services Panel.

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

**Resolved:**

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

495/14     **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next meeting would be approved by Council in June, 2015.

The meeting terminated at 8.45 p.m.

Chair: .....

Date:.....