

Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Conference Room 2, Walsall Council House

Thursday 8 December 2022 at 6.00 p.m.

Committee Members Present

Councillor A. Hicken (Chair)
Councillor T. Jukes (Vice Chair)
Councillor A. Garcha
Councillor L. Harrison
Councillor S. Nasreen
Councillor F. Mazhar
Councillor L. Rattigan
Councillor C. Statham
Councillor V. Waters

Portfolio Holder

Councillor S. Elson

Officers Present

Colleen Male	-	Director Childrens Social Work
Julie Jones	-	Group Manager
Rita Holmer	-	Head of Safeguarding and Localities
Jade Read	-	Group Manager
Nikki Gough	-	Democratic Services Officer

30/22 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor C. Horton.

31/22 Substitutions

There were no substitutions.

32/22 Declarations of interest and party whip

There were no declarations and no party whip of interest.

33/22 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)

There were no items to be considered in private session.

Minutes

34/22 The minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2022 were considered by the committee.

Resolved

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 3 November be approved as a true and accurate record.

35/22 Early Help Young Carers Support

The Group Manager presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The Committee was provided with a national and local overview of young carers. It was clarified that that young carers were children and young people under the age of 18 who provide regular and ongoing care and emotional support to a family member who was physically or mentally disabled or misuses substances. The Care Act 2014 outlined the requirements on Local Authorities in relation to young carers.

Members were given detail on the impact of being a young carer, particularly on their education and school life which had been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. A 'Young Carers Service Review' had taken place with the aim of understanding what young carers would consider a good service to look like, in response to this an action plan had been produced, which included:

- Raising awareness of young carers.
- Improve information available.
- Young carers champion programme and ID card scheme.

Other support to young carers was described and included provision of leisure passes, participation in Holiday Activity Fund programmes, and a young carers group. The Committee watched a video which had been produced by young carers describing the positives of being a young carer and how the young carers group provided support.

In Walsall, the service was supporting 205 young carers across various localities within the borough. In the future consideration was being given to rotating the location of the group to improve accessibility. An adult carer strategy would include a section around young carers.

A Member expressed concern that young children were missing out on experiences in their childhood and challenged what was being done to help this cohort. The Group Manager explained that this was included as part of the young carer assessment, it was determined whether any additional support could be provided to the family to mitigate the impact of caring. This took place in the home to ensure that the families' situation was taken into account. The young carers group provided direct support and leisure opportunities for the child.

In response to queries from members, further detail was provided on how young carers were identified, this included referral via school, adult social care, the hospital and from the GP. Part of the assessment included a strength based approach and reassurance to the young carer with a plan created. It was confirmed that school nurses provided emotional health and wellbeing support and played a strong role. Further work was being done with adult social care to improve the identification of young carers and to plan the transition into adulthood.

In response to further questions the Group Manager informed the Committee that £10,000 funding had been received for the young carers group to provide and plan activities for young people – this funding recurred each year. It was acknowledged that further work was needed with schools to increase engagement with the service.

Resolved

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the Group Manager contact the Mayor's Office to arrange for the young carers to group to have tea with the Mayor.

37/22 Private Fostering

The Group Manager presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The report provided detail on how Walsall Safeguarding partnership had delivered its duties and functions in relation to private fostering. The Committee was informed that a private fostering arrangement was one that was made privately for the care of a child or young person under the age of 16 by someone other than a parent or close relative with the intention that it should last 28 consecutive days or more. The Director stated that if a child was living outside of their family it made them vulnerable.

In Walsall there were 6 children in private fostering arrangements, all of which were teenagers and the reasons for this varied. Research suggested that there were a lot more children in these arrangements than is being identified, however this was typical across all local authorities. A private fostering toolkit had been developed, which provided a step by step guide for professionals. Awareness raising had taken place within the community to promote recognition of private fostering.

It was acknowledged that work needed to be done to improve the identification of private fostering arrangements in Walsall, a media campaign would be launched and training would be continued across the partnership. A Member expressed concern that the numbers were low, and asked if special guardianships would be considered for children living in these arrangements. The Group Manager confirmed that the arrangement was reviewed to secure the child's permanency.

In response to a Member query, it was confirmed that good engagement and understanding was held by designated safeguarding leads within schools (DSLs), and school admissions. Officers stressed that an awareness raising campaign within the community was needed. The Committee was provided with further information on DBS checks, and the reasons that these may be delayed – however whilst the service were waiting for DBS checks, police and partnerships checks (of private fosterers) were carried out.

Members suggested that the media campaign contained videos produced in different languages to ensure that it was accessible to all sections of the community. Further discussion was held on the ways in which awareness of private fostering could be improved.

Resolved

1. The progress made to date since the Ofsted recommendation was made in October 2021 was noted.
2. The Committee support the safeguarding partnership in driving accountability across the wider partnership and community in raising awareness of children who reside in Private Fostering arrangements.

Recommendation Tracker

38/22

The Committee considered the recommendation tracker.

Resolved

That the recommendation tracker be noted

Draft Letter

40/22

The Committee considered the draft letter to the Department of Education and considered its contents (annexed). After discussion, the Director suggested that the issue of profiteering was also addressed.

Resolved

That the letter be agreed subject to minor changes to be agreed by the Chair.

39/22 Areas of Focus 2022/23

In consideration of the areas of focus it was agreed that placement sufficient and transition from children's services into adult services would be deferred until the new municipal year. Members noted the committees work programme and the forward plan for Walsall Council and the Black Country Executive Committee. A discussion was held in relation to the prioritization of work items.

Resolved

That the areas of focus for the municipal year 2022/23 be noted.

40/22 Date of next meeting

The date of the next meeting was noted as 30 January 2022 at 6:00 p.m.

There being no further business this meeting was terminated at p.m.

Signed:

Date: