

CHILDRENS SERVICES Scrutiny AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

Thursday 10th December 2019 at 6.00 p.m.

Conference Room 2, Council House, Walsall

Committee Members Present

Councillor M. Statham (Chair)
Councillor T. Jukes (Vice-Chair)
Councillor D. Barker
Councillor H. Bashir
Councillor B. Douglas-Maul
Councillor L. Rattigan
Councillor C. Statham

Portfolio Holders Present

Councillor T. Wilson - Children's and Health and Well Being

Officers Present

Andrea Potts
Liz Murphy

Helena Kucharczyk
Nikki Gough

Assistant Director
Chair of Children's
Safeguarding Board
Head of Service
Democratic Services
Officer

31/19 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor L. Jeavons and Councillor M. Follows.

32/19 Substitutions

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

33/19 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest or party whip.

34/19 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)

There were no items to be considered in private session.

35/19 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were considered.

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 7th November 2019 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

36/19 Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report

The Committee were informed, by the Chair of the Safeguarding Children Board (The Chair of the Board), that the report provided an annual overview of the partnership performance in relation to safeguarding children and young people and of their delivery of the statutory Safeguarding Children Board arrangements. Ofsted had judged that the Board required improvements and needed to have a stronger line of sight on practice. In response to this, over the last year, the Board had improved the way it worked as detailed within the report (annexed). This included a regular programme of audits, observations of child protection conferences, identification of strengths, and development of good practice. It was noted that the number of referrals to the Multi Safeguarding Hub (MASH) that could be dealt with outside of statutory services had reduced. Members were informed that neglect was the biggest reason why children would have contact from a social worker.

The Chair of the Safeguarding Board stated that the Walsall 'Right for Children transformation programme' provided the opportunity to work differently. This included the move to a locality model, with a focus on connecting practitioners with communities. Practitioners would then get to know children and families well enough to enable them to become resilient and facilitate them to remain together as a family unit. The new Safeguarding arrangements meant that the partnership governance structure would be renewed which would strengthen leadership and accountability for the safeguarding agenda. The Portfolio Holder stated that although an education representative was not a member of the Board under the new arrangements, the Assistant Director for Access and Achievement would be included in the Leadership Group.

A Member asked how private fostering was identified and if the Authority were assured that, cases were being identified. The Chair of the Safeguarding Board described awareness raising exercises and partnership efforts to identify private fostering, stating that there were likely to be cases of private fostering that had not been identified; however, the authority was not an outlier with this. The Committee were assured that efforts had taken place to increase the identification of private fostering.

Members of the Committee noted that the Safeguarding Board had received an assurance report on the issues raised in the 2018/19 West Midlands Police Peel Assessment including the recording of exploitation. It was suggested that this would be explored further at the next meeting, during which exploitation would be considered.

In response to queries from Members, the Chair of the Board informed the Committee that the death of every child in Walsall was reviewed and that the Authority was not an

outlier in relation to this data. However, it was noted that the data on infant mortality indicated that this was an issue for Walsall.

The Chair of the Board responded to a question from the Committee to state that GDPR was not a barrier to partnership working. It was important that consent by parents to be referred be sought to ensure that relationships were built. It was stressed that this would not be the case if the child was at immediate risk or if a disclosure was made.

Resolved that;

- 1. Scrutiny notes and supports the contents of the report and the current activity to protect Walsall children and young people from the risk of abuse and neglect.**
- 2. Scrutiny will challenge the partnership on the outcomes for children and young people in Walsall in relation to preventing and protecting against abuse and neglect at a future meeting.**

37/19 Children's Data – an interactive session

The Head of Service stated that the report (annexed) summarised the session aims and provided an overview of key benchmarking data and current performance for children's services.

The Committee carried out an exercise, which indicated that data needed to be easily available to allow analysis to take place. It was also important to acknowledge that when dealing with data certain assumptions were made. The demographics of Walsall were described to set the context in which the data would be presented. There were some anomalies within the data, which suggested that it was not being recorded correctly or something was not being identified or reported. This information was used to identify where further work or investigations needed to be done.

Members were informed that there were 3004 'children in need' at 31st March (financial year 2018/19). The highest need for children in need in Walsall was abuse and neglect. However Members were also informed that family dysfunction was higher in Walsall in comparison to statistical neighbours. As this data indicated a higher trend than expected Officers would look into this area in more detail to understand if there was a genuine higher need in Walsall or if it was the way in which data was recorded. This was an example of when data prompted further investigation.

The Chair concluded that the report had been very detailed and had given the Committee an insight to the data, which was driving policy and decisions.

Resolved

That

- 1. The committee noted the Walsall 2018-19 performance in relation to children in need and child protection and how Walsall performed in relation to comparators.**
- 2. The committee noted the improvements that have been made in 2019-20 and the impact that this has had on performance this year.**

38/19 Areas of Focus

The areas of focus 2019/20 was noted.

39/19 Forward Plans

The forward plans were noted.

The date of the next meeting was agreed as 27th January 2020. There being no further business the meeting terminated at 7.50 pm.

Signed:

Date: