

## **Council – 14 April 2014**

### **Portfolio Holder Report of Councillor R Andrew, Children's Services**

#### **What we have done**

During 2013/14 we have progressed a comprehensive programme of improvement and change across Children's Services. This has positioned Walsall to deliver more efficient and effective services from 2014/15. Our approach has been driven by an absolute focus on securing the best possible outcomes for local children, informed by the parallel requirements of improving the quality and effectiveness of practice and service provision and tackling resource pressures at both a national and local level.

The reshaping of Children Services has been informed by some significant challenges. These include:

- An intensive focus on sustaining hard-won improvements to the quality of safeguarding and child protection services.
- Tackling a notable increase in the numbers of children and young people looked after by the local authority, with associated cost pressures.
- Integrating education and school improvement functions into the organisation following transition from a substantial outsourced contract in 2013.
- Ensuring smooth succession to a permanent and stable leadership team following a sustained period of interim leadership.
- Building the social work workforce, reducing agency staff and embedding good quality frontline practice.

Key characteristics of our reshaped service model include:

- Strengthened performance management and quality assurance, underpinned by robust and reliable data at both a strategic and operational level. This will inform analysis of impact and will drive decisions on how to make the most effective use of finite resources.
- Growing our integrated commissioning with a primary focus on improved outcomes, early help and preventative intervention to progressively reduce the demand for more resource-intensive support.
- A productive partnership with schools that reflects the changing role of the local authority in driving school improvement, including sustainable and impactful school to school improvement and educational attainment.

- Implementation of a bold workforce development strategy to improve the stability of operational staffing and the quality of frontline practice. There will be a specific focus on building a strong permanent workforce and reducing the reliance on agency staff – impacting on cost and efficiency.
- Movement towards a stable and permanent senior leadership team to drive forward sustained improvement and the implementation of increasingly challenging cost efficiencies.

## **Work in Progress**

Action being taken to progressively move the organisation towards a more efficient and effective service model from 2014/15 includes:

- Appointment of a new senior leadership team and wider workforce development including staff recruitment to key operational posts.
- Significant and continuing improvements in the quality and reliability of performance and qualitative data to inform strategic and operational decision-making and resource allocation.
- Strengthening of governance and partnership arrangements with a reshaped Local Safeguarding Board, a Children and Young People's Partnership Board with clear priorities and robust Scrutiny and Corporate Parenting arrangements in place.
- Rigorous implementation of the Strategic Improvement Plan for Safeguarding. Under the oversight of the Improvement Board a wide and highly effective programme of action continues to be undertaken to address the quality and effectiveness of frontline practice, the quality of leadership and governance, and the capacity, capability and culture of the organisation and the wider partnership.
- A programme management approach to tackling key resource pressures.

## **Key Developments within Service Areas**

### **Early Help**

#### **What we have done**

- We agreed with our partners an Early Help Strategy which is driven by the views and experiences of children, young people and their families. This has provided a strong platform for implementing our Early Help offer as a central element of Children's Services provision in Walsall.
- We have introduced a clear pathway between Early Help and the 'front-door' to children's social care, ensuring children and young people are getting a more timely offer of support when and where they need help.

- We have introduced a new model of delivery for Early Help which integrates Children's Centres within an area-based offer for local children and families.
- This new model of delivery, aligned to area partnerships will provide easier access to services across the 0-19 age range, reduces management costs and maximises resources for direct work with children and families.

### **What could have been better?**

- We are still experiencing a slow pace of engagement and uptake of the lead professional role across the full range of our partner agencies. This is a particular challenge around schools and health partners.
- We are continuing to work with performance and information colleagues to improve recording and reporting arrangements on the PARIS ICS system.

### **Looking ahead**

- Our key priority for 2014/15 is to embed the new Early Help Area Clusters and to ensure that the new arrangements work efficiently and effectively, with a demonstrable impact on improving outcomes for children and young people in Walsall.

## **Education, Learning & Young People's Support**

### **What's gone well?**

- Primary and secondary admissions rounds were completed in 2013 with 100% of children receiving one of their preferred primary schools or a primary school within 2 miles of their home.
- The authority's KS4 results for the percentage of students achieving 5+ GCSE A\*-C have remained above national for the 3rd consecutive year. This ranks Walsall 33rd in the country and in quartile band A.
- At KS5, the LA's results for points per candidate has improved for the second consecutive year, rising by 59 points to 701, and closing the gap to national to 23 points.
- The Education Business Partnership has delivered programmes to enhance employability and entrepreneurial skills to over 7, 500 pupils in Walsall schools and has supported over 2,500 students into work experience placements.
- The rate of reoffending is the lowest it has been since 2008/09.

- Walsall's performance with regards to reducing the numbers of young people in custody has got steadily better over the years with a near 50% reduction from October 2010.
- Walsall has made further reductions in youth related anti social behaviour including over 10% in the summer period of 2013 when compared to the previous year.

### **What could have been better?**

- The DfE introduced a new Early Years Framework for 2013. Walsall outcomes are 6% below the national average for making a 'Good Level of Development'.
- Since last year the number of primary and secondary schools judged to be good or outstanding has fallen across the authority.
- The challenge of ensuring young offenders have both suitable employment, training and education has always been challenging and with smaller more complex case loads this is becoming increasingly difficult.
- Further work is needed to address improvement performance in reduction of teenage pregnancy.

### **Looking ahead**

- Our 3 year Walsall School Improvement Strategy, launched at a high profile conference in January 2014, sets out how we will work to raise aspirations, expectations and achievement, so that every learner will experience a good or outstanding education.
- Integral to the Strategy is the Walsall Core Offer of School Improvement support to all schools, including academies, organised according to four support bands, using the most successful schools to support others, using Improvement Advisers to broker quality assured provision.

### **Priorities for 2014/15**

Expansion of 4 primary schools to help support the actual and projected increase in reception class size.

- Consider development of a not for profit organisation to deliver a range of young peoples' services.
- To continue to reduce the rate of reoffending, reduce the number of children and young people in custody and on remand, offending in looked after children and increase the level and standard of ETE for young offenders.

- Increase the number of pupils attending good and outstanding schools.
- Build leadership capacity through developing a strategy for school leadership development, talent management and succession planning.
- Improve schools' and pupil achievement through high quality school to school improvement support.
- Strengthen school governance and promote succession planning for governing bodies and raise awareness in the community of the importance of school governance.

### Specialist Services

#### **What's gone well?**

- The implementation of Multi-Agency Screening Team (MAST) on 8<sup>th</sup> April our front door to Children's social care and Early Help services and the reshaping of the Initial Response Service have led to significant improvements in the timeliness of Initial Assessments. Further work is needed at a strategic level to develop the MAST into a team that is owned and supported across partner agencies.
- Ofsted undertook an unannounced inspection of our Safeguarding services from 24<sup>th</sup> June to 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2013. This was only eight months on from receiving the Improvement Notice from the Department for Education. The inspection found Walsall Council to be 'Adequate' across the four main areas of judgement.
- The Improvement Plan is being implemented and is resulting in better and more consistent arrangements for the protection of children. We are not complacent, there is still much to do but we are now in a much better place to do it.
- A Social Work Health Check (SWHC) was carried out in November '13 giving us comparable data with the information gained from the SWHC from November '12. Headline results show a significant increase in the number of social workers who felt their case loads were manageable, an increase in those receiving monthly supervision and a general satisfaction with learning and development opportunities.
- We have continued to implement the delivery plan to improve services for disabled children. Action taken includes recruitment of permanent social workers, protocols for joint working arrangements with mainstream services, a bespoke training and development programme for staff, detailed case file audits and strengthened parent participation.

## **What could be better?**

- A comprehensive two-tier quality assurance and audit system is now in place across frontline services. Regular monthly reports are produced to inform practice improvements. The service needs to have a greater focus embedding the learning from audits and complaints.
- Our five LA Residential Children's Homes have all been inspected in 2013/14 and rated adequate or good. Our ambition is that all are good.
- Walsall's adoption scorecard highlights key performance indicators showing how swiftly we have implemented adoption plans for children over the last three years. The key exception areas for the authority are the time taken from children's entering care to when they move in with their adoptive family and the time taken between a child entering care and moving in with a foster family who then adopt the child. Initiatives to improve practice include additional capacity in the adoption team, a new pre court proceedings panel and a schedule for 'Family Meetings' supported by the Adoption Improvement Grant.
- The Transition and Care Leaving team (TLC) has settled under the management of a new permanent team manager in September 2013.
- A comprehensive action plan is now in place initially focusing on improving Pathway Planning for Care Leavers.
- Although significant efforts have been made to recruit permanent staff into Special Services with some success such as the appointment of a Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) and a Principal Social Worker it remains challenging to recruit experienced social work staff and team managers. However some extremely promising Newly Qualified Social Workers have been recruited and the task is now to support them through their Assessed and Supported Year in Practice and to retain their services as they become increasingly experienced and competent workers.
- The number of LAC has continued to rise during the year with resultant adverse effects on finances. A programme management approach is in place to reduce the costs of placements monitored on a weekly basis.

## **Looking Ahead**

- Successful recruitment to the permanent Assistant Director for Safeguarding is crucial in terms of maintaining momentum for improvement and embedding and sustaining progress already made.
- Children's Specialist Services is being reshaped in the spring of 2014 to ensure that it is fit for the purpose of supporting most importantly the journey of the child but also a career pathway and learning environment for staff.

- Improvements continue to be made to the children's information system in advance of a newly commissioned system going 'live' in November 2014.
- The new Ofsted framework for the inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers came into effect in April 2014. This presents local authorities with a higher bar and replaces the previous 'adequate' grading with 'requiring improvement' indicating quite rightly that only 'good' is 'good enough' for children.

**Councillor Rachel Andrew**  
**Cabinet Member**  
**Children's Services**

4 April 2014