

**Name**  
**Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**Agenda**  
**Item No.**

**23 November 2021**

**8a.**

**Children's Services Performance and Benchmarking Information for children in need (including an analysis of the Impact of Deprivation)**

**Ward(s):** All

**Portfolios: Councillor Wilson – Children's and Health and Wellbeing**

**1. Aim**

The information in this report has been produced to provide scrutiny committee with an overview of children's service performance information in relation to children in need and child protection including 2020-21 benchmarking data. Please note that the benchmarking data for children in care and care leavers is due to be published in December 2021 and overview of this data will be provided following publication.

The report also responds to a referral from audit committee to ensure that scrutiny has an overview of the impact of deprivation on children's needs in Walsall.

**2. Recommendations**

That Scrutiny Committee receive the Children in Need - Performance and Benchmarking report for assurance about improving performance in relation to children social care for children in need and child protection.

That Scrutiny Committee receive the analysis on the Impact of Deprivation on children's needs in Walsall to note the impact that deprivation can have on the needs of children and demand within children's services.

**3. Report detail – know**

**Performance and Benchmarking Report** - A detailed performance and benchmarking report has been included at Appendix A.

This report presents the performance and benchmarking data in relation to Children in Need, including child protection for 2020-21, compared to national, regional and statistical neighbours. This data is used to the relative performance of Walsall against the comparison group for a range of key indicators.

Walsall's statistical neighbours are: Bolton, Derby, Dudley, Kirklees, Peterborough, Rochdale, Sandwell, Stoke-on-Trent, Tameside, Telford and Wrekin.

The metrics are based on data that was submitted via the Children in Need Census in June 2021 and published by the Department for Education in November 2021, which relate to Children in Need and Child Protection. Where available up to date information as at the end of September 2021 has been included.

This report is not a checklist against which Walsall measures performance. These statistics tell only part of the story, and what makes a successful outcome will vary hugely for individual children and young people.

Performance in relation to children in need is improving and is good compared to national, regional and statistical neighbours. Headlines include:

- Demand at the front door is increasing with the number of contacts increasing by 18% in the two years between 2018-19 and 2020-21, however, the number of referrals for children's services where assessment is required has reduced by 34% over the same period.
- Repeat contacts are higher than comparators, but are reducing.
- Assessment timeliness is good with the vast majority of assessments being completed with 45 day targets.
- The number of children who are the subject of child protection has reduced by half over the past two years and is significantly lower than comparators. Where children are subject of child protection enquiries or a plan, decisions and reviews are timely and children have the opportunity to ensure their voices are heard.

**Deprivation Analysis:** An analysis of deprivation in Walsall shows that deprivation levels are high but that it is uneven across the Borough. There are extremes of deprivation, with central and western areas typically much more deprived than eastern areas, although pockets of deprivation exist even in the more affluent parts of the borough.

- 44 out of 167 neighbourhoods (LSOAs) are now amongst the most deprived 10% in England compared to 34 in 2015.
- The 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation now ranks Walsall as the 25th most deprived English local authority (out of 317), placing Walsall within the most deprived 10% of districts in the country (33rd in 2015, 30th in 2010 and 45th in 2007).
- Walsall fares particularly badly in terms of income (16th), education, skills & training deprivation (11th) and employment (38th) and many of the issues that challenge the borough match the geography of deprivation.
- The high and increasing levels of child poverty puts additional demands on services. Walsall ranks 19th for income deprivation affecting children index (IDACI 2019) with the Borough's relative deprivation increasing over time (27th in 2015).

- 1 in 3 (29.9%) aged under 16 years are living in low income families, higher than the national average of 20.1% (HMRC, 2016).
- Need in relation to Early Help, Social Care and Youth Justice Intervention demonstrates a correlation between deprivation and higher numbers with exclusions from school also being generally higher for children and young people who live in areas of higher deprivation.

**Children who go missing:** A brief overview of data and analysis in relation to children who go missing has been produced at the request of the committee. Key headlines are:

- The number of children who are going missing has increased from 233 to 288 on a rolling 12 months basis - an increase of 20%. It should be noted that while the target for this indicator is for it to decrease, the 2020-21 out-turn included lockdown where fewer children went missing due to the unique circumstances of the pandemic. Therefore although we are reporting an increase in this measure, this in the context of reductions in missing incidence in the previous year due to the pandemic and restrictions that were in place.
- Each child that is reported as missing living in Walsall who the council has responsibility for is offered a return home interview to understand the context of the missing incidence. Every missing incidence is considered at a multi-agency Daily Exploitation Triage meeting and follow up action taken as appropriate. Exploitation triage continues to develop and includes partners from Children's Services, force CID/an exploitation officer, Street Teams and representative from education in order that a triangulated understanding of the exploitation risks are known and a holistic response to addressing complex needs is provided. This includes working with third sector voluntary organisations around service delivery. It is therefore positive that every missing incidence is reported into Children's Services so that we can ensure that there is an appropriate response based on the age, needs and safeguarding concerns in relation to the young person.
- The All-Age Exploitation Strategy was approved at the Walsall Community Safety Partnership and the aims outlined in the strategy will continue to be embedded into practice.
- Between 01st October 2020 and 30th September 2021 80.7% of children were offered a return home interview, 72.4% of children and young people accepted the offer of a return home interview and 73.2% of return home interviews conducted were completed within 72 hours. This is an improving picture.

#### **4. *Financial information***

High levels of deprivation result in a higher demand for needs based services as well as increased reliance on benefits and free school meals at a higher cost to the public purse.

Increasing deprivation levels can also affect the long term outcomes of children with poorer education and health outcomes, reducing the ability for those children to maximise their potential economic impact through work resulting in a long term reliance on and need for additional support.

Performance information is continually used to ensure that services are performing effectively and efficiently and to target area for improvement.

## **5. Reducing Inequalities**

Deprivation is a key source of inequality for families across Walsall. By understanding the impact of deprivation, services can be developed and targeted appropriately to ensure that there is equity of opportunity for all children across the Borough.

By regularly monitoring performance information we can ensure that the most vulnerable children in Walsall are receiving the support that they need to improve their outcomes.

## **6. Decide**

An understanding deprivation across the Borough and its impact on long term outcomes and short term need for children and families can be used to plan the development and implementation of services to ensure that they are effective by being appropriately targeted to need. This will ensure that the right families are supported and that there is the highest possible value for money, while increasing opportunity.

Data and analysis, including performance monitoring, is a key tool, not only in decision making but in monitoring progress and impact.

## **7. Respond and Review**

Performance monitoring is embedded within Children's Services with key indicators being monitored on a regular basis and used to inform decision making and review the impact of initiatives. Regular reporting is supported by deep dive analysis which is updated periodically.

Ongoing updates can be made available to Scrutiny or other areas of focus explored through analysis as required.

## **Background papers**

None

## **Author**

Helena Kucharczyk  
Head of Performance Improvement and Quality  
 01922 652821

✉ [helena.kucharczyk@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:helena.kucharczyk@walsall.gov.uk)