

CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

THURSDAY, 8 MARCH, 2012 AT 6.00 P.M. AT THE COUNCIL HOUSE

Panel Members Present

Councillor B. Cassidy (Chair)
Councillor E. Hughes (Vice-Chair)
Councillor K. Chambers
Councillor T. Jukes
Councillor R. Martin
Councillor A. Paul
Councillor D. Shires
Councillor R. Thomas

Non elected voting members present

S. Rayner (Lichfield Diocesan Education)

Non elected non-voting members present

D. Jones (Primary Teacher representative)
R. Bragger (Secondary Teacher representative)

Portfolio holder present

Councillor R. Andrew - Children's Services

Officers Present

Louise Hughes, Assistant Director, Children's Services
Michelle Whiting, Assistant Director, Children's Services
Dan Mortiboys, Service Accounting and Financial Reporting
Denise Faulconbridge, Managing Director, Walsall Children's Services - Serco
Frank Barnes, Assistant Managing Director, Participation, Serco
David Porter, Head Teacher Adviser
Matt Underhill, Scrutiny Officer

168/12 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received for the duration of the meeting from Councillor Bennett.

169/12 SUBSTITUTIONS

None.

170/12 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

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

171/12 MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting were noted.

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 26 January 2012, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

172/12 CHILDREN'S SERVICES - NEW OPERATING MODEL (NOM)

The Assistant Director Children's Services introduced the briefing. The following is a summary of the briefing and subsequent discussion:

- The two front line teams that constitute the NOM were currently undertaking a review, it was proposed that practitioners would attend the next scrutiny meeting to discuss their work with the Panel;
- The purpose of the NOM was to seek to make a difference for the most vulnerable children and their families. The NOM offered support to families as part of the intervention effort to minimise the risk of young children becoming vulnerable and requiring more specific and costly support;
- The NOM is delivered using a multi-agency approach which included children's social workers, adult social workers, family support workers and health visitors. The key activity was working with families and engaging with children who were at significant risk of becoming vulnerable;
- Senior officers had recently spent time with those colleagues delivering the NOM to gain an understanding of the kind of work that they undertake. It was apparent that families often welcomed the intervention support that was provided. It was noted that while challenges remained in tackling a range of complex issues for many families, the approach taken was proving successful and minimising the number of instances where crisis point was reached and when it would become necessary for children to go into care;
- It was highlighted that this was an ongoing transition into a new area of work and efforts continued to build capacity within teams. It was also explained that multi-agency teams would be placed within different areas of Walsall identified by need, with some localities having more than one team. It was further explained that finance of the new arrangements required a shift away from the current approach where half of funding was staff costs with the other half placements. However, this had been necessary to ensure that intervention with young children and families occurred at a sufficiently early stage. It was also pointed out that financial modelling work had been undertaken to understand the type of savings delivered, while the efficient working arrangements with a range of partners had also minimised costly delays in coordinating a multi-agency approach;
- Following a Panel query it was explained that the system identifies children and their families based on a level of need. The NOM was flexible and able to shift a particular type of resource to a particular area of Walsall dependent on what specialist support was required;
- In response to a Panel query regarding the issue of truancy, the Assistant Managing Director, Participation, Serco explained that systems were in place to address this issue, including monthly multi-agency meetings.

Resolved

- (1) That the Panel receive guidance regarding the current levels of truancy at Walsall schools;
- (2) The Panel receive guidance on the Vanguard Systems Thinking methodology;
and
- (3) That the report be noted.

173/12 QUARTERLY 3 FINANCIAL MONITORING 2011/12

The Service Accounting and Financial Reporting Manager introduced the report (annexed). The following is a summary of the briefing and subsequent discussion:

- It was highlighted that currently an underspend of £0.586m was anticipated the Directorate for the end of 2011/12. It was noted that this was the best position for a number of years;
- It was explained that the Capital planned spend was within budget, while Prevention and Targeted services had contributed to the underspend through a combination of less successful projects from 2010/11 not being continued into 2011/12 and vacant posts being held open. While in relation to Specialist Services the number of Looked After Children (LAC) had reduced from 513 to 483. However, this had been offset to some extent by agency staff covering social worker posts, although this was reducing steadily. It was noted that the underspend position could come under pressure if there were a rise in the number of LAC.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

174/12 CHILDREN'S SAFEGUARDING SERVICES

The Assistant Director Children's Services introduced the report (annexed). The following is a summary of the report and subsequent discussion:

- It was highlighted that the number of LAC had recently been reduced by 16% through good practice. This had been achieved through relentlessly looking at every child in the system and seeking to employ a range of permanence options including adoption and special guardianship;
- It was also noted that the CIPFA Looked After Benchmarking Club 2011 indicated that Walsall was one of the highest performing authorities in most areas and was delivering a lower cost of £665 per child, compared to the average of £777;
- Much of the recent success was a consequence of the work put in over the last eighteen months. For example, instead of spot purchasing a procurement

framework agreement had now been put in place which enabled specific standards to be set out. It was also noted that only a small percentage of children were placed as LAC with the rest remaining with their families;

- There was also good performance witnessed in terms of reviews happening within timescales. It was also confirmed that all LAC and children with a protection plan had been allocated a social worker;
- It was explained that in relation to assessments performance of over 90% had been achieved in the completion of assessments within 10 days. While performance of initial assessments within seven days had improved significantly;
- Further recent success includes a 50% reduction in the number of agency workers, with it anticipated that there will be very few in the next financial year. This was a consequence of it being possible to retain staff, following Pay and Grading, meaning that it had become possible to improve standards within the workforce through consistent training;
- It was also explained that the number of agency staff would be reduced when sixteen Newly Qualified Social Workers completed their training period and would then be able to take on larger case loads;
- Following a Panel query it was explained that a capital funding bid had been made to enable investment in technology that would allow social workers to work remotely and make the most efficient use of their time. This would include the use of software with appropriate fire wall protection;
- It was explained that a Peer Review of Safeguarding Services was currently underway in which a number of Panel Members were participating.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

175/12 2011 WALSALL PUPIL RESULTS, SCHOOL OFSTED PERFORMANCE AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

The Managing Director, Walsall Children's Services – Serco and the Assistant Managing Director, Participation, Serco introduced the report (annexed). The following is a summary of the report and subsequent discussion:

- It was explained that in relation to Foundation (Early Years) Stage Walsall children were performing below their statistical neighbours and national levels. The outcome was similar to last year and it was acknowledged that this was an area of concern and further improvement was required. Action taken to address this issue included a visit to a better performing area and the introduction of a tracking tool. It was also intended to continue working with the better performing authority;
- In relation to Key Stage 1, in Reading Walsall was performing above average for both its statistical neighbours and nationally. In Writing, Walsall was performing above the Black Country Average and its statistical neighbours, but below national levels. This was also the position for Maths. It was acknowledged that Maths is a key area of focus for future improvement and was an area identified as requiring more support;

- In relation to LAC performance at Key Stage 1 has been significantly above local and statistical neighbour as well as national performance levels. It was also explained that the virtual school continued to be used to provide targeted support for children. Following a Panel query it was explained that statistical neighbours were based on a range of indicators including deprivation, free school meals and ethnicity;
- In relation to Key Stage 2 it was explained that in the key area of English and Maths Combined Walsall was performing better than all comparators. However, in Maths Walsall was below the national performance level and this was a major area of focus for improvement activity. In relation to LAC Key Stage 2 performance, Maths and Combined English and Maths was below all comparators and this was an area of focus for improvement;
- In relation to Key Stage 4 5+ A*-C GCSEs, including English and Maths, continued improvement has been witnessed, with results above those of comparators except at national level. Results for 5+ A*-C were above those of all comparators;
- It was explained that Key Stage 5 represented a complex picture in terms of measuring performance. It was necessary for Walsall children to achieve a good average points score to enable them to achieve the points score required for their chosen destination e.g. university;
- It was also explained that different qualifications generate different points scores, for example, A-Levels have a higher points value than vocational qualifications. This has resulted in the Walsall average points score, which includes Walsall College, where it has previously been agreed A-Levels would not be provided, of 623, while the Walsall average for schools only was 750. This meant that Walsall might appear to have deceptively poor performance when comparator analysis was undertaken. However, it was emphasised that young people were performing well and gaining a range of valuable vocational qualifications at the college;
- There was general agreement that there was a need to raise local aspirations. The Assistant Director Children's Services emphasised that the most important assessment was the trajectory of performance over time and ensuring that young people were successful in taking a pathway to employment. She also highlighted the need for improvement activity to include a focus on SEN. Officers from Serco explained that there had been good participation from academies in relation to SEN, including Shelfield, with a focus of bringing pupils back into the main stream;
- Following a Panel query it was explained Walsall's success in being the 8th most improved area in relation to Key Stage 4 had been achieved through the use of the Diagnosis, Support, Impact, Next Steps (DSIN) process. This approach followed on from the Service Improvement Programme (SIP) which concluded at the end of the last academic year. The activity includes schools making use of performance data, as well as engagement with staff to determine what support needs to be provided and how it will be acquired. There was also a rigorous approach to challenge and support. It was highlighted that while Ofsted had brought in a new framework there were no schools in Walsall that were in special measures, while this was not the case in other areas. It was also explained that at Key Stage 4 Walsall was nationally in 3rd quartile for performance;
- In relation to a query regarding the high level of conversion to academy witnessed in Walsall schools it was explained that there were two types of

academy. The first being in conjunction with a sponsor and this tended to be poorly performing schools, with the sponsor to provide key support for the improvement journey. The second type of school was typically high performing but wanted the flexibility and freedom that being an academy offered. It was emphasised that Serco would continue to work with schools, including providing the opportunity for traded services to be purchased. However, more often sponsors themselves brought in their own challenge and support and other resources, including HR and finance. The Assistant Director Children's Services highlighted that the academy sponsor E-Act had sought to develop a strong partnership relationship with the council, in spite of this not being a statutory requirement;

- The Chair highlighted the significant level of deprivation and need in some parts of Walsall, including having the 4th most deprived ward in England and that it was important to ensure that the schools received the required support.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

176/12 SAFEGUARDING SERVICES FOR DISABLED CHILDREN WORKING GROUP REPORT

The Assistant Director, Children's Services, introduced the report (annexed). The following is a summary of the report and subsequent discussion:

- It was explained that the working group had considered a number of issues as part of its activity. This included receiving guidance regarding the significant investment in the New Eldon facility which has just begun to be constructed, as well as the existing facilities that provide a range of short breaks. Officers also provided guidance in relation to the process of assessment of children with a disability. This had included consideration of range of complex legislation, as well as some of the key issues for children, young people and their families;
- It was noted that the working group had sought to triangulate the evidence they received from officers with the views of parents that they also met. In addition, members of the working group also undertook site visits to short break facilities where they had the opportunity to meet some of the children and young people, as well as discuss key issues with staff. The working group had also been interested to learn about the use of mentors and buddies to help service users in accessing mainstream provision;
- The working group had learned that the council had a range of specialist services to respond to those children with very special needs. This was very important in being able to provide parents with a break. The working group had been moved when hearing the stories of parents who highlighted the sense of isolation that could be experienced when dealing with a child with behavioural problems. The working group had highlighted the need for improved training of those participating in the buddy system. The importance of involving parent and children in the design and commissioning of services was also emphasised;
- The Members who had participated in site visits explained that they had witnessed a very happy and supported environment for the children;

- The Chair highlighted the importance of addressing the transition period from Children's Services to Adult Social Care which occurred when a child turned 17. She emphasised the need for effective engagement between the two directorates. The Assistant Director, Children's Services agreed and explained that, in conjunction with her counterpart in Adult Social Care, arrangements were in place which meant that should a young person nearing 17 not have a transition plan addressing this would be a matter of priority. However, it would be crucial to develop a whole life system.

Resolved

- (1) That officers commissioning or delivering services ensure that appropriate consultation with disabled children and their parents informs decisions;
 - (2) Officers continue to support groups for parents with disabled children;
 - (3) The outcome of the working group's work is shared with parents;
 - (4) Children's Services and other council services, including adult social care, work effectively to effect smooth transitions when children reach the age of eighteen;
 - (5) Children's and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel receive a progress update during the next municipal year;
 - (6) Further attention be paid to the training of helpers and volunteers working with children with a disability to create a more consistent workforce;
- and
- (7) That the report be noted.

177/12 WORK PROGRAMME 2011/12 AND FORWARD PLAN

The Panel considered the work programme and Cabinet's Forward Plan.

Resolved

That the work programme and Forward Plan be noted.

SUMMARY OF ITEM CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE SESSION

178/12 EDUCATION DEVELOPMENTS

The Panel received a presentation from the Assistant Director, Children's Services

The Panel noted the report.

[Exempt information under paragraph of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended)]

179/12 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chair informed Members that the date of the next meeting would be 19 April 2012 at 6:00 p.m.

The meeting terminated at 7.55 p.m.