

## **CHILDRENS SERVICES SCRUTINY AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE**

**Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> November at 6 p.m.**

**Conference Room 2, Council House, Walsall**

### **Committee Members Present**

Councillor A. Nawaz (Chair)  
Councillor B Allen.  
Councillor D. Barker  
Councillor J. Fitzpatrick  
Councillor M. Follows  
Councillor T. Jukes  
Councillor E. Russell  
Councillor M. Statham  
Councillor V. Waters

### **Portfolio Holders Present**

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

### **Officers Present**

D. Carter – Assistant Director (Social Care & Safeguarding Service Area)  
A. Potts - Assistant Director (Early Help and Commissioning )  
Irfan Mohammed – Lead Accountant  
M. Halliwell – Assurance Lead Officer

### **20/18 Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors S. Samra, and S. Neville.

### **21/18 Substitutions**

There were no substitutions related to this meeting.

### **22/18 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest for the duration of the meeting.

### **23/18 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)**

There were no items to be considered in private session.

## **24/18 Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2018 were approved as a true and accurate record.

## **25/18 Annual Complaints report**

The Chair stated that recently a high profile case had been reported in the press, he stated that he acknowledged that this could not be discussed in a public forum but asked Officers to confirm that the best interests of the child were now being met. The Assistant Director stated that Walsall Council and Walsall CCG were progressing and that the case was being handled appropriately. This was echoed by the Portfolio Holder.

The Lead Assurance Officer stated that the annual report covered the period of 1 April 2017 through to 31 March 2018 and reported on complaints made by, or on behalf of children and young people who received services from Children's Social Care in Walsall. It was a statutory requirement to produce an annual report and make it available to the public, staff and elected members. This provided a mechanism for the directorate to monitor the quality and effectiveness of services and of its complaints procedure.

The Committee were advised that there had been a small drop in the volume of complaints received, this was in line with efforts to direct some complaints to through the corporate complaints procedure. Similar reoccurring issues were raised through the complaints procedure such as communication, and lack of support. There had also been a significant rise in the number of compliments received.

In response to a member query, the Lead Assurance Officer explained that a learning capture form identified the action taken to respond to the complainant and captured learning in relation to the complaint.

A Member challenged why complaints received in relation to 'inaccuracies in reports/assessments' had increased. The Assistant Director stated that there may be many reasons for this, it may be due to a difference in perception or in fact a practice issue. The Committee were reassured that the Council were learning from these issues.

A Member challenged why a complaint may be closed as 'inconclusive' and the Lead Assurance Officer stated that where a decision could not be reached due to lack of evidence or a dispute an outcome may be termed inconclusive.

## **Resolved**

That the report be noted.

## **26/18 Draft Revenue and Capital Programme 2018/10 – 2021/22**

The Chair welcomed representatives from the FACE (Families and Carers empowered) group.

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report and stated that the report provided an extract of the draft budget proposals under the remit of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration.

Representatives from the FACE group were invited to address the Committee. The Committee were informed that the group would speak on the savings proposal: 'Review of residential short break provision for children and young people with a disability'. A representative explained that her Son had used the respite care at the Bluebells Centre between the ages of 7 to 18 years old. She stated that this was a vital service to allow the families of disabled children to experience some normality in their lives.

The Committee were informed that based on interactions with service users the FACE group considered there to be demand for this service and that the group could not understand why the provision was not being used to its full capacity. A representative explained that FACE was an advocate for parents, and it was clear that parents were not aware of the respite provision at Bluebells. The Committee were informed of the challenges of raising a disabled child. She suggested that the reductions in other services had impacted on this vulnerable group.

The FACE representatives stated that the reduction of the respite service might mean that families were no longer able to cope and lead to children being placed in local authority care, which would eradicate any savings made by reducing respite provision. The group expressed concern at the lack of available emergency provision for families in crisis, if the residential short break provision was reduced.

Members asked how many people used the respite provision at the Bluebells residential home. Officers stated that there were twenty-three families in total. Three of these families were from Wolverhampton, this was because the provision was underutilised. The Assistant Director stated there were significant periods where the provision was under occupied and that this might be because alternative respite provision was now offered.

Members challenged if families were aware of the service and questioned if the provision was being promoted. The Assistant Director explained that there was an assessment criteria which needed to be fulfilled to access the service as the provision was for children with complex disabilities. Due to Ofsted regulations and the degree of specialisms required for complex needs the provision needed to maintain this criteria.

The Assistant Director stated that previously overnight respite care had been the only provision, however; the alternatives had expanded to provide parents with more choice - these included a buddy scheme, and direct payments. The Committee were advised that this was also the case in neighbouring local authorities.

The Portfolio Holder stressed that no decisions had been made, that consultation responses would be considered and thanked the FACE group for their time and efforts.

A Member asked for the figures relating to the overall reduction in the respite budget. Officers stated that the figures included in the report related to the Bluebells residential

home only but that the budget for the whole respite service, including the cost of direct payments, could be circulated to committee members outside of the meeting.

A FACE group representative suggested that parents of children with complex disabilities who did not currently use the service should also be consulted on the proposal to review residential short break provision. Officers stated that the consultation process was flexible and welcomed the suggestion. The FACE group stated that they would be willing to facilitate a consultation session with this group.

In response to a question about emergency respite provision for children and young people with a disability, the Assistant Director stated that the service would ensure that support was offered in such situations.

Members considered the budget proposal 'review and reduce early help 0-19 model'. In response to a Member query, the Assistant Director stated that there was not a stand-alone youth services budget and that youth services had been incorporated within a broader 0-19 locality arrangements and budget. The Assistant Director explained that this saving largely related to vacant posts, which had been vacant for some time and would be deleted. A Member asked if there were any proposals to reduce the number of social workers. The Assistant Director explained that the recruitment and retention strategy required the use of agency workers to be reduced and for permanent social workers to be recruited. Currently agency workers made up around 24% of the social worker workforce. However the committee were informed that it was a delicate balance to ensure that the Council retained experienced staff to ensure the resilience of the service.

The Committee were informed that a Children's services policy saving proposal had been produced relating to a 'Review of contracts for perpetrator and counselling services.' (Appendix 3a). The Committee agreed to consider this its next Committee meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2018.

### **Resolved that**

1. That the draft revenue budget and efficiency plan 2018/19 – 2020/21 be noted.
2. The Committee held concerns about the reductions to the Children's Services budget. However, the Committee were encouraged by the openness of the Portfolio Holder to continue to engage with the FACE group to consult further on the policy proposals relating to the SEN respite provision.
3. The policy paper 'Review of contracts for perpetrator and counselling services' be considered by the Committee at the next Children's Services Scrutiny Committee meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2018.

## **27/18 Corporate Financial Performance – Quarter 2 Financial Monitoring Performance for 2018/19**

The Lead Accountant informed the Committee that the forecast overspend for Children's Services prior to any mitigating action and use of reserves was £1.622m. Corporate and earmarked reserves were being used to fund specific agreed items reducing the forecast overspend to £1.02m. The directorate has implemented an action plan reducing the net forecast revenue position to be on budget. The total capital programme for the services relating to this portfolio was £1.593m forecasted costs of £1.593m as at the end of September 2018.

Committee Members raised points of clarity on pay awards for agency workers, Officers confirmed that pay awards were for Local Authority staff only.

### **Resolved**

That the Corporate Financial Performance – Quarter 2 Financial Monitoring Performance for 2018/19 report was noted.

## **28/18 Work Programme 2018/19**

The Committee's work programme for 2018/19 municipal year was considered. It was clarified that knife crime would be covered under 'guns and gangs'. A Member asked for clarity when a CAMH item would be considered by the Committee, it was agreed that this would be progressed.

### **Resolved**

The Committee's work programme for 2018/19 municipal year was noted.

## **29/18 Forward Plans**

The forward plan of key decisions from Cabinet and the Black Country Executive Joint Committee were considered. It was requested that a report on the Regional adoption agency be circulated to Members.

### **Resolved**

The forward plan was noted.

The date of the next meeting was agreed as 11<sup>th</sup> December 2018. There being no further business the meeting terminated at 7.15 p.m.

Signed: .....

Date: .....