

CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

COUNCIL CHAMBER, WALSALL COUNCIL HOUSE

Monday 31 January 2022 at 6.00 p.m.

Committee Members Present:

Councillor A. Hicken (Chair)
Councillor H. Bashir
Councillor P. Kaur
Councillor K. Murphy
Councillor A. Nawaz
Councillor L. Rattigan
Councillor K. Sears
Councillor C. Statham

Portfolio Holder

Councillor T. Wilson

Officers

Colleen Male	- Director, Children's Social Work
Tony Meadows	- Interim Director, Commissioning, Procurement and Contract Management.
Zoe Morgan	- Head of Support and Protection
Phil Rutherford	- Strategic Lead for Youth Justice Services
Nikki Gough	- Democratic Services Officer

29/21 **Apologies**

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillors Flint, A. Hussain and Mazhar for the duration of this meeting.

30/21 **Substitutions**

Councillor Sears substituted on behalf of Councillor Flint for the duration of the meeting.

31/21 **Declarations of Interest and party whip**

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

32/21 **Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)**

There were no items to be considered in private session.

33/21 **Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 23 November 2021 were considered by the Committee.

Resolved

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 23 November 2021 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

34/21 **Childrens and Adults Transition**

The Head of Support and Protection presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The Committee were advised that 'transition' was the term used to describe the period of change from childhood to adolescence and into adulthood. As part of transition, key areas that young people were supported in were education, independent living, relationships/friends, and health and wellbeing.

A series of focus groups had been held to gather information on the best way to support young people transitioning, and to develop pathways to enable this to happen. The main cohorts of young people who were identified as needing support were children in the care of the Local Authority, children with a disability or special need, and children who were open to social care.

A toolkit had been developed to guide practitioners through this process and was currently in draft form. The toolkit had been broken down into stages to act as a trigger point for services to plan for the young person transitioning. The timescales for the completion of the toolkit were described to the Committee.

The Interim Director, Commissioning, Procurement and Contract Management informed the Committee that the transition arrangements were part of the adult social care transformation plan. Those services offered would be reviewed to ensure that they best met the needs of young people.

The Portfolio Holder acknowledged the concerns previously raised in relation to young people transitioning to adult services and thanked Officers for their work to improve this process.

A Member questioned how much work was done with local Housing Associations, The Interim Director described the work which had commenced to influence the support and housing need in the future and suggested that this could be set as a strategic aim. It was noted that Housing Associations were receptive to this work.

Officers were asked by a Member of the Committee, how feedback from focus groups would be translated into the toolkit/plans. The Head of Support and Protection stated that the focus groups were made up of multi-agency partners. The toolkit would draw out the actions from the focus groups to make it user friendly for practitioners – once embedded it would continue to evolve.

A Member asked for clarification that young people's opinion was sought and expressed concern that there should be a contact point for families to avoid confusion. Officers confirmed that young people had been involved in the development of the toolkit and guidance. Members stressed that there should be an accountable officer to enable effective communication from Elected Members. The Head of Support and Protection stated that the toolkit would be embedded into the work of children's and adults as part of service delivery, and as such would be subject to governance arrangements. This may depend on the issue identified, it was stressed by a Member that it should be clear to families and Members who they should contact. The Interim Director stated that the Authority would coordinate any issues through the Walsall Together Partnership, in addition the Portfolio Holder stated that this feedback would be considered and included in the work being done.

A Member questioned if this toolkit was recognised at other Authorities, in consideration of those individuals accessing cross border services to avoid young people 'slipping through the net'. Officers explained that although the toolkit was an internal document it did recognise cross border working and liaison with other authorities would take place.

Resolved

1. That progress and achievements to be endorsed and proposals moving forward to be supported.

2. That an update on Transitions from Children's to Adults services be provided to the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee in six months.

35/21

Youth Justice Peer Review

The Strategic Lead for Youth Justice Services introduced the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The Committee were informed that in 2019, an inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation of Walsall Youth Justice Service, and the partnership responsible for it, resulted in a judgement of 'Requires Improvement'. A programme of improvement activity had taken place to address the recommendations made by the Inspectorate. In 2021, the Youth Justice Board commissioned an independent specialist youth justice practitioner, experienced in undertaking peer reviews, to carry out a review of improvement activity, progress made, and critical areas of development to be addressed before the next inspection.

The review had considered four main areas (raised within the inspection), these were:

- Out of Court Disposal Models

The review concluded all issues raised by HMIP in relation to Out of Court Disposal Models had been successfully addressed and practice adjusted, ensuring a more robust and sustainable approach.

- Management of risk of harm.

The review concluded that the main issues relating to practice highlighted by HMIP have been successfully addressed through training and ongoing quality assurance arrangements. However, partnership commitment to working with high-risk cases required refreshment to take into account the range of structures in place to manage multi-agency engagement with this group of children.

- Victims and restorative practice

The review concluded arrangements put in place following HMIP findings, had not delivered the improvements required for victims of youth crime, however, the review endorsed the creation of a dedicated Victim Officer post within the Youth Justice Service, approved by the Board in November 2021.

- Use of performance and Youth Justice Board engagement.

The review concluded that the Board had responded decisively to many of the areas identified in inspection and could make best use of the strategic position; strengthening links with wider strategies, identify

opportunities to collaborate and seek cross cutting solutions, including mobilising resources where possible.

A Member asked for further information on the funding of the Youth Justice Board, in response the Portfolio Holder stated that it was funded through a partnership funding arrangement.

In response to challenge from a Member, the Strategic Lead for Youth Justice described findings that Black children were over represented in the Youth Justice system, and the main issue found was that young people with mixed heritage were the most over represented group. It was acknowledged that mixed heritage was vast and complex, and further work was planned to further understand this in more depth to allow practice to be changed. It was expected that disproportionality of Black and mixed heritage boys would be a priority going forward.

A Member questioned why this happened and what the specific issues in Walsall were, how it could be prevented and what challenges the young people faced. The Strategic Lead stated that data could be provided, it was suggested that the Youth Justice Service was a small part of the 'system' and young people had a significant amount of life experience by the time they entered the Youth Justice system. There was a need to prevent young people accessing the system to avoid negative life experiences. Alongside this were undiagnosed SEND, and undiagnosed mental health issues. Cultural issues around trust needed to be addressed, and it was stressed that the Youth Justice System could not address all of these issues, however influence on Partners could increase understanding and reduce discrimination. Members acknowledged that there was not a quick fix, and suggested that information should be analysed to challenge issues raised. The Strategic Lead stated that a steering group had been established, which was led by young people, to ensure that their stories could be raised and influence the offer to these young people.

Resolved

1. To note the findings and assurance provided by the review
2. To support the future priorities and areas for development identified
3. A Board Member to attend a future meeting of the Committee.

36/21

Areas of Focus

The Committee considered the areas of focus document.

Resolved

The areas of focus and forward plans were noted.

The date of the next meeting was 8 March 2022, 6pm.

Termination of Meeting

The meeting terminated at 7.15 p.m.

Signed

Date