

**Children's Social Care  
Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**Agenda  
Item No.**

**10 DECEMBER, 2019**

**7**

**Children's Data – an interactive session**

**Ward(s)** All

**Portfolios:** Cllr T Wilson – Children's Services

**Executive Summary:**

This report is a covering report for an interactive session and presentation which will be delivered to members during the committee meeting. The presentation will be circulated following the committee, however, this report summarises what the session aims to achieve and provides an overview of key children's benchmarking data and current performance.

The aim of the first part of the session is to provide a practical example of why it is important to have access to good quality data and information to inform decision making and to enable performance management.

The second part of the session will be a presentation which outlines Walsall's performance in relation to children in need and child protection in 2018-19 and how that performance is benchmarked against our statistical, regional and national neighbours. It also outlines what changes and improvements have been made to the service and the impact that these changes have had on services and outcomes for children and families by providing the current performance position against key indicators.

**Reason for scrutiny:**

This report, presentation and interactive session have been prepared for scrutiny to provide members with an overview of how data should be and is used for performance management and decision making and also provide an overview of children's performance data for 2018-19 in relation to children in need (CiN) and child protection (CP), benchmarked against comparators, and where performance is currently. At the request of the chair, the session will be interactive.

**Recommendations:****That:**

- 1. The committee participate in the interactive session which demonstrates the importance of data in decision making and performance management*
- 2. The committee notes the Walsall 2018-19 performance in relation to children in need and child protection and how Walsall performed in relation to comparators.*
- 3. The committee note the improvements that have been made in 2019-20 and the impact that this has had on performance this year.*

**Background papers:**

There are no background papers related to this report.

**Resource and legal considerations:**

There are no resource and legal considerations relating to this report.

**Council Corporate Plan Priorities:**

This report links to the following Corporate Plan Priorities:

**Children have the best possible start and are safe from harm, happy, healthy and learning well.**

Right children looked after, for the right length of time in the right placement

**Citizen impact:**

This report, presentation and interactive session has no direct impact on the citizens of Walsall, however, it does highlight the importance of using data in decision making and performance management and covers data in relation to demand for children's services and performance in relation to children on child in need (CiN) and child protection (CP) plans.

## **Environmental impact:**

There is no environmental impact to this scrutiny exercise.

## **Performance management:**

This report, presentation and interactive session is a key report for the council to understand how data can be used effectively in managing performance and provides an overview of the 2018-19 children in need and child protection performance, benchmarked against Walsall's comparators.

## **Reducing inequalities:**

This report, presentation and interactive session seek to highlight and understand inequalities by providing performance information relating to services for some of the most vulnerable children in Walsall. It also outlines the importance of having a strong understanding of data in decision making in relation to services for those groups.


No Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out.

## **Consultation:**

There has been no previous consultation in relation to this report.

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## **1. Report**

1.1. This report supports what will be an interactive session and presentation that will be delivered to the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2019. The presentation will be circulated following the session.

1.2. ***"Data!data!data!" he cried impatiently. "I can't make bricks without clay."***  
Arthur Conan Doyle, The Adventure of the Copper Beeches

***"It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts."***  
Arthur Conan Doyle, A Scandal in Bohemia

Data and information is as vital to children's services, working to make a difference to the lives of children, young people and families as it was to Sherlock Holmes, working to solve crimes.

- 1.3. There is a Quality Assurance and Performance Framework used in Children's Services which underpins the ways in which we use data and information across the service. It outlines how we demonstrate that the work we do is improving outcomes for children, young people and families, how decisions making about future strategy and direction of our children's services are evidence-informed and how performance is monitored to ensure that children and families receive the best possible service and that their outcomes are improving.
- 1.4. The first part of the session will be interactive and will explore the importance of having access to accurate and good quality data and information in and consider the implications of when it is not available.
- 1.5. The second part of the session will outline some key children's services data, with a focus on 2018-19 performance in relation to Children in Need (CiN) and child protection (CP), benchmarked against comparators<sup>1</sup>, and where current performance stands for these key indicators. A summary of this data is below.

## **2. What we have done in 2019-20 and its impact on performance**

- 2.1. Significant changes and improvements have been made at the 'front door' of children's services in the past six months, including:
  - The launch of Right Help, Right Time – this is the multi-agency document that describes which services are available for children and families who require additional support and the levels of need that are required to access those services - from universal services or targeted Early Help through to statutory Social Care services. It has been developed with our partners and ongoing training and awareness is being provided to staff across the whole of the Walsall Safeguarding Children Partnership.
  - External reviews from Camden and Hertfordshire whose recommendations have resulted in an action plan, much of which has already started to be implemented and is demonstrating results.
  - A change in management and stabilisation of the workforce.
- 2.2. These changes are already starting to have an impact on performance and these improvements can be seen in the data from August onwards, including:
  - Reductions in referrals
  - Improved timeliness of assessments
  - Reductions in the number of children in need requiring statutory services
  - Reductions in the number of section 47 enquiries
  - Reductions in the number of children becoming subject of a child protection plan.

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<sup>1</sup> The 2018-19 data and benchmarking comes from the CiN Census statutory return which is submitted to the Department for Education (DfE) in June of each year. The DfE then publish the benchmarking data in November 2019.

2.3. Further improvements are continuing to be made and will continue over the coming months. These will include:

- The implementation of our locality model, as part of our Walsall Right 4 Children transformation programme, which will support and improve the way we work with children and families within their communities.
- The implementation of the Family Safeguarding model, as part of our successful bid, with partners, to be part of the Strengthening Families, protecting Children programme. This model will significantly enhance our locality model which will improve the services and support we are able to offer to children and families in Walsall.

2.4. The impact of these changes on the outcomes for children in Walsall will continue to be monitored through our performance data.

2.5. We are also exploring further through data analysis and audit, a number of areas where the data and benchmarking information is highlighting anomalies in Walsall's performance. This will enable us to assure ourselves that required improvement actions have already been identified or are in train, or where this is not the case, identify where improvement actions needs to be developed. Where this is the case, it is highlighted in the relevant sections below.

## **Context**

### **3. Demographics**

3.1. Key demographics relating to Walsall's child population

- 24.1% of the population are aged 0-17
- In the Indices of Deprivation Affecting Children (IDACI), Walsall is the 27<sup>th</sup> most deprived council with 23% of neighbourhoods in the top 10% of most deprived neighbourhoods nationally.
- 32.5% of children live in poverty before housing costs and 41% after housing costs (according to the campaign to end child poverty and research from Loughborough University)
- Children in Walsall have more health challenges than their peers.

3.2. Walsall also has it's challenges in relation to its school age population:

- Significantly more children have English as an additional language
- Significantly more children are in receipt of Free School Meals
- A higher proportion of children are overweight in Reception and Year 6 compared with their peers
- A smaller proportion have identified special educational needs compared with their peers.

## **Children in Need<sup>2</sup>**

### **4. Referrals**

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<sup>2</sup> A child in need (CiN) is defined under the Children Act 1989 as a child who is unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable level of health or development, or whose health and development is likely to be significantly or further impaired, without the provision of services; or a child who is disabled.

- 4.1. There were 5,135 referrals to children's social services in Walsall in 2019 compared with 5,228 referrals in 2018 – a reduction of just under 2%.
- 4.2. This equates to a rate of 753.4 per 10,000 of the under 18 population - fewer than 2018 when it was 777.8 per 10,000. This rate is broadly in line with statistical neighbours, whose rate has increased, but higher than regional and national comparators.
- 4.3. In the rolling 12 months to the end of October 2019, the referral rate has remained steady with 5,181 referrals at a rate of 760 per 10,000 population, however, since August, the number of referrals has begun to fall and there have been just 883 between August and October compared with 1,163 in the same period last year – a reduction of 24%
- 4.4. 1,292 were referrals to social care within 12 months of an earlier referral, fewer than the previous year (1,426). The percentage of repeat referrals fell to 25.2%, lower than 27.3% in 2017-18 but remaining higher than comparators.
- 4.5. In the rolling 12 months to the end of October 2019, the percentage of repeat referrals has increased very slightly to 25.9%, however, the last three months have seen further increases, so this is likely to continue to rise throughout the year. *This is an area that is being looked at in more detail through further data analysis and audit, so that we can understand why children are being re-referred to social care.*
- 4.6. 327 (6.4%) referrals resulted in no further action, fewer than the previous year (480 (9.2%)). This is in line with regional and statistical neighbours and lower than the England result.
- 4.7. 1,999 referrals resulted in an assessment in which the child was assessed not to be in need, fewer than the previous period (2,255). This was 38.9% of referral resulting in an assessment, compared with 43.1% last year but remaining higher than comparators.
- 4.8. In the rolling 12 months to the end of October 2019, there has been an increase in the percentage of referrals resulting in no further action to 7.5% and the percentage of referrals that led to an assessment in which the child was assessment not be in need has increased to 54.7%.

## **5. Assessments**

- 5.1. There were 5,143 assessments completed by Walsall during 2018/19, which is greater than the previous period (5,070).
- 5.2. The rate of assessments completed by Walsall has remained stable at 754.6, however this is higher than statistical neighbours and regional and national comparators.
- 5.3. In the 12 months up to the end of October 2019, the number of assessments has fallen slightly to 5,041, a rate of 740 per 10,000 population. There was a

significant reduction in the number of assessments in October (277 compared with 397 in October 2018) and this is expected to reduce further due to the smaller number of referrals being received.

- 5.4. The percentage of assessment completed within 45 working days was 78.2%, a reduction on 2017-18's performance of 90.2% and lower than statistical neighbours. However, a high proportion of assessments were started and ended on the same day – 12.2% which is higher than statistical neighbours (3.3%). *This is an area that is being looked at in more detail through further data analysis and audit, so that we can understand why such a high number of assessments have started and ended on the same day.*
- 5.5. In the 12 months up to the end of October 2019, timeliness of assessments has fallen further to 69.9%, however, in recent months, timeliness has improved significantly with performance in three of the four preceding months being over 80%.

## **6. Children in Need Episodes and Plans**

- 6.1. In Walsall there were 5,227 episodes of need during the financial year 2018/19, an increase of just under 11% compared with the 4,716 episodes of need in 2017-18.
- 6.2. The 5,227 episodes were for 4,905 children – a rate of 719.7 per 10,000 population.
- 6.3. 2,809 children started an episode of need during the period and 2,223 ended an episode.
- 6.4. There were 3,004 children in need at 31 March for the financial year 2018/19, a rate of 440.7 per 10,000 children, an increase since the previous period when there were 2,715 such children and slightly less than the current rate for statistical neighbours 444.4 per 10,000 children.
- 6.5. At end of October 2019, the rate of children in need had fallen to 359 per 10,000 – as the number of children who are subject of a CP plan and the number of children who are looked after has increased, this reduction is in the number of children who are undergoing assessment and the number of children who are subject of a CiN plan.
- 6.6. The highest need for children in need in Walsall is Abuse and Neglect up from 49.9% to 55.6% - this is line with regional and national comparators but significantly lower than statistical neighbours. Family Dysfunction is also high in Walsall – 20.4%, this is much higher than statistical neighbours (7.4%). *This is an area that is being looked at in more detail through further data analysis and audit, so that we can understand whether this is genuinely a higher need in Walsall or whether it is due to the way need is recorded.*
- 6.7. A higher proportion of children in need have episodes that are open for three months or less than statistical neighbours, however a much lower proportion have episodes that are open for two years or more. *This is an area that is being*

*looked at in more detail through further data analysis and audit, so that we can understand why children have such short episodes of CiN compared to statistical neighbours and whether children are being closed to social care too soon or whether they should not have been open to social care in the first place because their needs could have been met through targeted Early Help or universal services.*

## **Child Protection**

### **7. Section 47 enquiries and Initial Child Protection Conferences**

- 7.1. The rate of children subject to section 47 enquiries is 302.2 per 10,000 children aged under 18 for 2018/19, an increase since the previous period (279.6 per 10,000 children), and greater than the Walsall statistical neighbours result (240.3 per 10,000 children). The conversion rate of section 47 enquiries to ICPC was 32.7% compared with 37.6% among statistical neighbours.
- 7.2. In the rolling 12 months to the end of October 2019, the rate of section 47 enquiries has fallen to 298 per 10,000 population. The conversion rate to ICPC has also fallen to 29.1%. However, there has been significant decreased in the number of section 47 enquiries in September and October, compared to the same period last year, with 216 having taken place compared with 322 – a reduction of 33%. In addition, the conversion rate for the same two months stands at 38%.
- 7.3. The rate of Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC) is 98.9 per 10,000 children aged under 18 for 2018/19, a decrease since the previous period (117.5 per 10,000 children), but greater than the Walsall statistical neighbours result (88.4 per 10,000 children). The conversion rate of ICPCs to child protection plans was 87.1% compared with 88.6% among statistical neighbours.
- 7.4. In the rolling 12 months to the end of October 2019, the rate of ICPCs has decreased to 90.8 per 10,000 population with the conversion rate remaining stable at 87.4%.
- 7.5. The percentage of ICPCs that are completed within 15 days of the strategy discussion taking place is 88.1% in 2018-19, in line with the previous period (88.0%) and better than statistical neighbours (81.8%).
- 7.6. Timeliness has improved in the rolling 12 months to the end of October 2019 with 92.2% of ICPCs being carried out within 15 days of the strategy discussion.

### **8. Child Protection Plans**

- 8.1. There were 389 children subject of a child protection plan at 31 March for the financial year 2018/19 in Walsall, a decrease since the previous period of 2017/18 when there were 408.



- 8.2. The rate of children subject of a child protection plan per 10,000 children aged under 18 is 57.1 in Walsall at 31 March for the financial year 2018/19, a decrease since the previous period of 60.7 per 10,000 children aged under 18, and fewer than the Walsall statistical neighbour rate of 61.2.
- 8.3. At the end of October 2019 there were 411 children subject of a child protection plan, a rate of 60.3 per 10,000.
- 8.4. The most prevalent category of abuse for children who were subject of a plan on 31 was Neglect with 56.0% of plans having this recorded as the main category of abuse – higher than statistical neighbours (43.6%). The second most prevalent category was Emotional abuse in 32.9% of plan, however, this is lower than statistical neighbours (46.1%). *This is an area that is being looked at in more detail through further data analysis and audit, so that we can assure ourselves that children are receiving the correct support for their needs and needs relating to emotional abuse are not being overlooked.*
- 8.5. There were 573 children that became subject of a children protection plan during 2018/19 in Walsall. Of these, 110 (19.0%) children were subject of a plan for a second or subsequent time, less than the Walsall statistical neighbour average of 19.8%.
- 8.6. In the rolling 12 months to the end of October 2019 there were 541 children who had become subject of a child protection plan. Of these 19.6% have become subject of a plan for a second or subsequent time. However, there has been a significant reduction in the number of children becoming subject of a plan in the last 3 months. Between August and October 145 children became subject of plan compared with 194 in the same period last year – a decrease of 25%.
- 8.7. The rate of children subject to a child protection plan during 2018/19 in Walsall was 84 per 10,000 children aged under 18.
- 8.8. There were 604 children who ceased to be the subject of a child protection plan during 2018/19 for Walsall. The rate of children ceasing to be subject of a CPP per 10,000 children aged under 18 is 89 for Walsall in 2018/19.
- 8.9. Of the children that ceased to be subject of plan during the year 28.1% ceased within three months of their plan starting. This is higher than statistical neighbours (15.0%). *This is an area that is being looked at in more detail through further data analysis and audit, so that we can assure ourselves that the plans were appropriate and that they were not ceasing before sustained change could be affected.*