

## Council – 9 April 2018

### Portfolio Holder Children's Services Directorate

#### 1. Introduction

Keeping our children safe, happy and learning well is one of the most important roles that our council performs. Regrettably more and more children and families are finding themselves in situations where they are seeking support from the council, at a time when government funding to council's continues to reduce. This undoubtedly means we face a challenging agenda going forward. But there is also much to be proud of.

Walsall is an ambitious local authority that wants to achieve excellence for the children, young people and families in our borough. There is a strong cross party political focus on Children's Services and a commitment to improving services for Walsall children, evidenced by investment from 2016 / 17 to strengthen demand led services, recognised by Ofsted in their Single Inspection Framework report (September 2017) which we should all be proud of. And there is some great practice and great people doing some great work.

Our journey of improvement is determined and underpinned by a senior leadership team headed up by the Executive Director of Children's Services, Sally Rowe who joined the Authority in November 2017 that has high expectations, high aspirations and a relentless focus on quality. I am confident that the implementation of our refreshed improvement plan will deliver improved outcomes for children and families and that the pace of improvement will continue to increase. Children's Services are meeting the challenging agenda head on and excited about the future for Walsall that opportunities such as the council's transformation programme affords the Directorate, and most importantly, the opportunities it will afford the children and families of Walsall.

Before I move on to set out the achievements, challenges and priorities for Children's Services, I want to start with some thanks. First and foremost I want to thank the many **children, young people, parents, carers and advocates** I have spoken to, had face to face meeting with and received correspondence from, including some of our most vulnerable children, those looked after, those who have left care and those with special educational needs and disabilities, for talking honestly about the difficulties they have encountered as well as sharing their stories of personal achievement and success. I will continue to listen and learn, to visit and to see for myself what is actually working and what needs to improve.

Secondly, I want to formally recognise and thank the **Children's Services workforce**. Every team I have visited and every staff engagement session I have attended, I have been struck by the sheer commitment of our staff, whether they be social workers, teachers, foster carers, family support workers, administrators or staff carrying out vital back office support functions. We have

some extraordinary people who are doing some extraordinary things that are making a real difference to the lives of children and young people.

I would also like to commend our **partners** - the Police, Health, Schools, Housing and the Voluntary Sector for their continued contribution and commitment to collaborative working. Nurturing and developing effective partnerships has never been more critical than it is now at a time of reducing public sector resources. A mention to our **internal partners too**; Adult Social Care who we are working closely with to strengthen our transition arrangements for children moving into adulthood, Environment & Economy for the innovative work around apprenticeships which many of our young people are the beneficiaries of and colleagues in Money Home Job and Public Health for aligning welfare benefits, housing advisors, health visitors and school nursing resources to strengthen our locality offer.

And last, but not least I'd like to thank those of **you here in the council chamber** who share a strong and committed focus on prioritising services to improve the lives of vulnerable children and families, and pay specific thanks to Councillor Towe and Councillor Jukes who chair Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Corporate Parenting Board and the members of those respective Boards for their continued engagement and for collectively supporting Children's Services improvement journey.

The Children's Services Directorate is responsible for the council's work with children and young people aged 0-19 (up to 25 years for some students with special needs and disabilities). The Directorate, charged with caring for and protecting the needs of children and ensuring that every child in Walsall has the chance of a decent education, delivers targeted and statutory services to children and their families. In the current financial year, as at the end of December 2017 this was made up of 1474 children from 860 families receiving targeted Early Help Services, 105 young people in the Youth Justice Service, and 2721 children in need of support and protection, including 662 Looked After Children, 37 of whom are being helped towards adoption, 430 children on Child Protection Plans and 164 young people who are care leavers.

Children's Services is operating in challenging times. Numbers of contacts, referrals and assessments continue to add pressure to the social care system and the exponential increase in demand is manifested in high levels children on child protection plans, children looked after and changes in the complexity of need. Not all of our schools are as good as we need them to be, our achievement rates, whilst improving are not yet good enough, the pupil population is rising, demand for school places is growing, requiring a significant increase in school planning activity and the educational landscape is ever more fragmented. And all of this is set against a backdrop of ever tighter budgets and high instances of child poverty.

The Directorate is arranged into three interlinked service areas, Children's Social Care and Safeguarding, Early Help & Commissioning and Access & Achievement. This report details those achievements we are most proud of, the challenges we face and the areas we are focussing attention on to improve going forward for each of the three areas.

### **Children's Social Care and Safeguarding**

Our Ofsted '*requires improvement*' judgement in September 2017 recognised our progress and commitment to embedding improvements across Children's Social Care & Safeguarding, confirming our direction of travel, our steadily improving services and demonstrated solid practice in a challenging context.

Since then, we have much to be proud of achieving such as our sustained good performance in adoption, improved outcomes for our care leavers, workforce development and improved 'front door' arrangements and a strong organisational culture. Our strengths based approach, using restorative practice and a range of tools to support relationship based practice means that we are better placed to engage with our children, young people and families, although the full impact of the former is not yet fully evaluated.

We know we have further to go to deliver good Social Care and Safeguarding services for children and young people, including consistency of social work practice, effective legal proceedings, safe reduction in the number of children and young people through child protection or the looked after processes and reducing cost.

We recognise that we face significant challenges in delivering services for children and their families that keep them safe, well and achieving. Officers are working harder, smarter and evolving more innovative ways to meet these needs now and in the future, which mean that we need to:

- Continue to recruit, retain and develop a skilled workforce that is fit for the future
- Ensure our structure supports the child's journey and provides specialist support at the right time
- Continue our work to drive up the quality of our social work practice to ensure consistency
- Actively work on the gap between funding and current expenditure to generate required savings
- Improve our use of technology in our social work practice, case recording, performance monitoring and engagement with children and young people
- Work closely with our partners in the local area and neighbouring authorities to deliver collaborative and cost effective services for children and families.

There are many aspects of Social Care and Safeguarding we are proud of and these include:

- Our stronger front door and Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) partnership
- Our improving offer to care leavers
- Strong performance on adoption
- Increasing stability of the workforce and manageable caseloads
- Our comprehensive workforce development offer

There are also areas of Social Care and Safeguarding we need to focus our attention on to improve and these include:

- The right child has the right support at the right time for the right amount of time. There is a commitment to the safe reduction in the number of looked after children through the delivery of the transformation programme.
- Relentless focus on consistently good practice
- Improving response to Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and wider exploitation
- Improving early permanency planning
- Ensuring the voice of the child is heard and acted upon

### **3. Early Help and Commissioning**

Ofsted recognised, in its published report in September 2017 that *'the Authority has improved its Early Help provision significantly, following a comprehensive review and resign of services to ensure children and families receive the right help at the right time'*. Our 4 localities, a key component of our ability to manage demand, provide an effective platform to bring together professionals from Schools, Health, Children Centres, Family Support, Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHs), Housing, Police and the Voluntary Sector and ensure children and families benefit from a range of well co-ordinated services and targeted help.

The Early Help Hub provides good advice and support for professionals to complete assessments and the multi-disciplinary locality teams support significant numbers of children and families with a wide range of needs, including domestic abuse, behavioural issues and parental mental ill health. A comprehensive parenting programme supports parents of children with autism and disabilities, families involved with Social Care and Dads in prison and their families. Trained professionals have compiled a directory of services so they can provide more effective help and support to children, young people and families. Our evaluation of Early Help, informed by feedback from children and parents is showing the positive impact Early Help has on children's lives. The council's recognition of the importance of intervening early and its commitment to prioritise spend on early help and prevention through locality arrangements is something to be proud of.

In terms of commissioning, the procurement of transport services for the 550 children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities transported to school daily was a complex undertaking. Officers worked hard to communicate proposed changes prior to 'go live' in January 2018, to minimise impact on families and to resolve matters quickly for the small number of families we didn't get things right for first time. The benefits of these arrangements include a single transport provider for each special school, improved vehicle quality, CCTV in vehicles over 16 seats and some cost reductions.

Opportunities to increase internal residential capacity to reduce out of borough placement of children with complex needs have been successful at Redruth children's home. The range of commissioned services for children, young people and families experiencing domestic abuse, wider parental mental ill health and parental substance misuse have been increased. This year we will review opportunities for joint and improved commissioning to help achieve cost savings but also to enhance the quality of services for children and families.

There are many aspects of Early Help and Commissioning we are proud of and these include:

- Early Help locality arrangements which provide a strong platform for solution focussed partnership dialogue and working and better outcomes for children, young people and families.
- Innovative locality partnership projects keeping children safe, reducing anti -social behaviour and mitigating the impact of child poverty in school holidays.
- New services for children, young people and families experiencing domestic abuse preventing, protecting and repairing the effects of domestic abuse.

There are also areas of Early Help and Commissioning we need to focus our attention on to improve and these include:

- Embed locality working across the social care system and sustaining our Early Help offer in the future.
- Strengthen the role of the voluntary sector in the delivery of Early Help, drawing in community resources and helping local communities to help themselves.
- Review our commissioning intentions, priorities and processes.

#### **4. Access and Achievement**

The Local Authority School Improvement Inspection in 2016 recognised the systems, structures, support and challenges put in place to raise academic standards across the Borough. After 12 years of a third party provider, the Local Authority brought education back into the Council and the Education Challenge

Board was established to focus on improving Ofsted grades for all schools in order for them to be good or better.

Our performance at Early Years is strong with 42 of the 48 schools that have a separate Early Years provision judged to be good or better and 44 out of 46 day care/ playgroups settings judged good or outstanding. The percentage of eligible 2 year olds ( often our most vulnerable children) taking up a funded early learning place is 70.5%, up 5% on the previous year and take up is actively promoted through all frontline services.

The percentage of schools rated by Ofsted as good or better is 87.2% which is below national at 88.7%. However, the percentage of schools judged to be outstanding within the borough has now risen to 23% which is above the national average. We must now focus our efforts on moving those remaining schools judged to be requiring improvement to good or better.

Closing the gap remains a challenge in Walsall schools. As we near or reach national benchmarks at each key stage, the targets are raised nationally. Walsall schools, local schools and pupil data is tracked and monitored on a monthly basis via the Director's school performance review (DSPR). Follow up actions include meetings with Head teachers, Chairs of Governors, Academy Sponsors, Dioceses representatives and other partners. Federations and Executive Head teachers are put in place to help improve standards. High mobility, English as an additional language (EAL) and special educational needs, disabilities and inclusion (SENDI) factors are being targeted to help close the gap with a focus on reading, literacy and numeracy skills.

The Local Authority continues to work with and challenge sponsors of Academies where under performance may be an issue. Maintained schools are also part of this process. School expansions are included in the raising standards agenda as the 5 year strategy aims to increase 1.5 form entry schools to 2 from where need is greatest.

In excess of 1700 children and young people are being supported with Education, Health and Care Plans. We also have 6000 children and young people who are supported at SEN support which is school based. We continue to work with our special educational needs coordinators (SENCO's) to ensure this vulnerable groups outcomes are met.

There are many aspects relating to Access and Achievement we are proud of and these include:

- The percentage of Good or Better schools continues to improve and presently is 87.2% closing the gap to National 88.7%
- Increased bespoke training and support offered to governing bodies which has improved the challenge to leadership and management in schools
- Implementation of an enhanced Behaviour Support Service across most Secondary Schools in Walsall which has helped schools to retain pupils in education and learning environments.

- Range of Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) programmes for identified schools continue to improve Walsall's overall Good Level of Development (GLD) to match national performance.
- Improvement Fund bids (EYFS and KS1 Writing) improving practice in all schools. Targets predicted for 2018 are matching or exceeding national expectations.
- Successful Partnership with the Black Country Authorities and Teaching Schools Alliance working in partnership to bid and secure special school innovation funding (SSIF) /explore position of schools.
- Kingshill Primary School move to Outstanding due to the collective hard work and determination of the Head teacher and senior leadership team. The Head teacher is now offering School to School support and is involved in initiatives with other schools.
- 2280 young people aged 16 -19 engaged in the Youth Employment Initiative, 437 of which have a job, apprenticeship or are in education or training as a result
- Reduced offending and reoffending of Walsall young people; our performance is better than regional and national.

There are also areas relating to Access and Achievement we need to focus our attention on to improve and these include:

- Continue targeted efforts on 'closing the gap', recognising this is still a key area despite progress
- Continue to improve pupil outcomes at KS1 and KS2 in reading, writing and maths. At KS4 in school's progress 8 score and secure strong passes for all pupils in English and maths
- Develop strong relationships between and with all schools, including independent / faith sector
- Improve outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities recognising this is a significant area of improvement for us
- Operationalise our inclusion strategy, with a clear remit and focus on reducing exclusion

This report ends where it began, with a reference to the priority for children set out in the Council's recently refreshed Corporate Plan; *'to give children the best possible start and keep them safe from harm, happy, healthy and learning well'*.

With the future success of Walsall dependent on our children and young people, caring for and protecting our most vulnerable children as well as ensuring that every child in Walsall has the chance of a decent education, really is one of the most important roles the Council performs. Realising our collective ambition for children relies upon us all, whoever we are, and in whatever role we fulfil - elected member, employee, partner, parent, carer or community member, acting as champions for children.

This report has set out the achievements Children's Services are proud of, the challenges faced by the Directorate and the areas attention is being focussed on to improve outcomes for children, young people and families going forward. The Directorate is making good progress and there is much to be proud of. Undoubtedly the circumstances in which the Directorate is operating will continue to be challenging and it is recognised that there is more to do. But there is absolute determination across Children's Services and this Administration to improve outcomes for all children and young people and to make a difference to the lives of those children who need it most.

**Councillor Aftab Nawaz**  
**Cabinet Member Children's Services**  
**March 2018**