

CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

THURSDAY 2nd SEPTEMBER 2021 at 6.00 p.m.

Committee Members Present:

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

Portfolio Holder

Councillor T. Wilson

Officers

Colleen Male Director - Children's Social Work
Andrea Potts Director - Early Help and Partnerships
Nikki Gough – Democratic Services Officer

Note: This meeting was held in the Town Hall in accordance with s.102 of the Local Government Act 1972 and the Council's Constitution. In order to comply with social distancing requirements as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the meeting was conducted via Microsoft Teams in accordance with the Council's Standing Orders for Remote Meetings.

1/21 **Apologies**

There were no apologies received for the duration of this meeting.

2/21 **Substitutions**

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

3/21 **Declarations of Interest and party whip**

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

4/21 **Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)**

There were no items to be considered in private session.

5/21 **Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 18th March 2021 were considered by the Committee.

Resolved

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 18th March 2021 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

6/21 **Areas of Focus 2021/22**

The Portfolio Holder addressed the meeting to welcome new committee members and emphasised the Authorities commitment to the children of Walsall.

The Director of Children's Social Work gave a presentation that provided an overview of the service and highlighted specific issues that the Committee may consider scrutinising.

A Member asked for further detail on the localities model, Officers informed the Committee that providing a consistent approach across all localities was a priority for the service. For a number of years, early help had been provided to families to try to prevent the need for statutory intervention. Within localities social work teams would work alongside early help colleagues, however the physical move of these teams had been delayed by the pandemic. The West locality team were in operation as a pilot and were developing local relationships. Locality meetings had taken place through the pandemic, with relationships being built with Partners in the area. The Director stated that the need at a locality basis was being examined to make the offer and resources specifically to each locality. A Member asked if buildings were ready for services to move

into, and the Director stated that the West Locality building was, however other buildings would be developed, based on lessons learnt from the pilot.

A member asked how many social workers were employed by the Council, Officers agreed to circulate this outside of the meeting. The number of Looked after Children in the borough was currently at 665, although this figure fluctuated. The Committee were advised that significant work had been done to reduce reliance on agency social workers and to strengthen the workforce. The average caseload in Walsall was '16' and this was one of the lowest in the West Midlands, which assisted with recruitment.

A Member asked if the Authority were prepared for an increase of families needing additional support. Officers confirmed that the Authority was prepared for increased demand, however to-date demand had been steady. Although there had been an increase in complexity, and a change in the areas of need, for example, young people experiencing mental health challenges had placed pressure on the system and health colleagues. The Portfolio Holder stated that the anticipated surge had not happened however the authorities were ready should it happen.

A discussion on the use of buildings ensued, and the method of allocating resources to each locality. It was suggested that the Committee may wish to receive performance information to allow members to understand the key measures for the service and how improvement was measured. This would assist Members to understand what a good service looked like.

In response to a question in relation to mental health of young people, a Member asked how children's services and CAMHS worked together. The Director stated that the services worked effectively together, met regularly and held discussions in relation to different groups of children. It was acknowledged that there was a waiting list for CAMHS and there was high demand. A Member asked if this could be added to the work programme of the Committee.

A Member asked for further information, at a future meeting, on the link between deprivation and the demand for social care and need for intervention. It was questioned what could be done to lower these statistics.

Officers were asked how refugee families would be supported, and if staff had been trained to assist them for their specific needs. Children's Services were working closely with Partners including the Refugee and Migrant Council (RMC). The Service was seeking to understand the needs of the families and the services needed. The RMC was proving support and help, and this was being complimented by subject matter experts. The Chair applauded the Cabinet for extending the number of refugee families that the Authority could support. The Portfolio Holder stated that this was a great partnership effort, although this issue was not directly in the remit of the committee, children's services would be utilised by families. A Member stressed that national government should provide funding to ensure that families could be supported to overcome the trauma that they have experienced.

The Democratic Services Officer highlighted the remit of the Committee and carry over items recommended from the previous municipal year. Members reviewed the information presented to them and agreed their areas of focus.

Resolved:

That the following areas of focus for 2021/22 be agreed:

- **Safeguarding young people with disabilities.**
- **Overview of CAMHS.**
- **Effectiveness of partnership working (strategic level).**
- **Impact of deprivation on demand for social care services.**
- **Transition into adult services.**
- **Holiday Activity Fund (Impact).**
- **Child Exploitation (Partnership).**
- **Youth Justice Peer review.**
- **Safeguarding Partnership Annual report.**
- **Finance and performance reporting.**

7/21

Forward Plans

The forward plans were noted.

The date of the next meeting was 12th October, 6pm.

Termination of Meeting

The meeting terminated at 7.25pm.