



# Walsall Council

## Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

5 November 2024 at 6:00PM

**Meeting Venue: Conference Room 2 at the Council House, Lichfield Street,  
Walsall**

[Livestream Link](#)

**Membership:**

Councillor A. Hicken (Chair)  
Councillor E. Morgan (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor J. Chapman  
Councillor L. Harrison  
Councillor T. Jukes  
Councillor N. Latham  
Councillor S. Nasreen  
Councillor W. Rasab  
Councillor L. Rattigan  
Councillor C. Statham  
Vacancy

**Portfolio Holder:**

Councillor S. Elson – Children's Services

**Quorum:**

4 Members

Democratic Services, The Council House, Walsall, WS1 1TW  
Contact name: Nikki Gough Telephone: 01922 654767 Email: [nikki.gough@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:nikki.gough@walsall.gov.uk)  
[Walsall Council Website](#)

**If you are disabled and require help to and from the meeting room,  
please contact the person above**

The Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012  
Specified pecuniary interests

The pecuniary interests which are specified for the purposes of Chapter 7 of Part 1 of the Localism Act 2011 are the interests specified in the second column of the following:

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Prescribed description</b>
Employment, office, trade, profession or vocation	Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain.
Sponsorship	<p>Any payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than from the relevant authority) made or provided within the relevant period in respect of any expenses incurred by a member in carrying out duties as a member, or towards the election expenses of a member.</p> <p>This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Regulations (Consolidation) Act 1992.</p>
Contracts	<p>Any contract which is made between the relevant person (or a body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest) and the relevant authority:</p> <p>(a) under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed; and</p> <p>(b) which has not been fully discharged.</p>
Land	Any beneficial interest in land which is within the area of the relevant authority.
Licences	Any licence (alone or jointly with others) to occupy land in the area of the relevant authority for a month or longer.
Corporate tenancies	<p>Any tenancy where (to a member's knowledge):</p> <p>(a) the landlord is the relevant authority;</p> <p>(b) the tenant is a body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest.</p>
Securities	<p>Any beneficial interest in securities of a body where:</p> <p>(a) that body (to a member's knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of the relevant authority; and</p> <p>(b) either:</p> <p>(i) the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or</p> <p>(ii) if the share capital of that body is more than one class, the total nominal value of the shares of any one class in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest exceeds one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class.</p>

Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended)

Access to information: Exempt information

Part 1

Descriptions of exempt information: England

1. Information relating to any individual.
2. Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).
4. Information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the authority.
5. Information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings.
6. Information which reveals that the authority proposes:
  - (a) to give any enactment a notice under or by virtue of which requirements are imposed on a person; or
  - (b) to make an order or direction under any enactment.
7. Information relating to any action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime.
8. Information being disclosed during a meeting of a Scrutiny and Performance Panel when considering flood risk management functions which:
  - (a) Constitutes a trades secret;
  - (b) Its disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice the commercial interests of any person (including the risk management authority);
  - (c) It was obtained by a risk management authority from any other person and its disclosure to the public by the risk management authority would constitute a breach of confidence actionable by that other person.

## Part 1 – Public Session

1. **Apologies**  
To receive apologies for absence from Members of the Committee.
2. **Substitutions**  
To receive notice of any substitutions for a Member of the Committee for the duration of the meeting.
3. **Minutes of the previous meeting**  
To approve and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2024.  
*(Enclosed, Pages 1 - 4)*
4. **Declarations of Interest and Party Whip**  
To receive declarations of interest or the party whip from Members in respect of items on the agenda.
5. **Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended):**  
To agree that the public be excluded from the private session during consideration of the agenda items indicated for the reasons shown on the agenda.
6. **Walsall Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report 2023-2024**  
To receive the Walsall Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report 2023 – 2024 which reviews the effectiveness of the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements for children and young people in Walsall.  
*(Enclosed, Pages 5 - 29)*
7. **Private Fostering Annual Report**  
To receive an update on Private Fostering, and how the welfare of privately fostered children is safeguarded.  
*(Enclosed, Pages 30 - 63)*
8. **Draft Revenue Budget and Draft Capital Programme 2025/26 – 2028/29**  
To receive a report on the draft revenue and capital budget proposals for services within the remit of this Committee. To provide feedback to Cabinet on the proposals.  
*(Enclosed, Pages 64 - 80)*
9. **Corporate Financial Performance – Quarter 2 Financial Monitoring Position for 2024/25**  
To provide the budget monitoring position for Period 6 2024/25.  
*(Enclosed, Pages 81 - 104)*
10. **Areas of focus – 2024/25**  
To review the areas of focus for 2024-25.  
*(Enclosed, Pages 105 -106)*
11. **Forward Plans**  
To receive the latest Forward Plans in respect of the following:
  - Walsall Council Executive Forward Plan.
  - West Midlands Combined Authority Board.*(Enclosed, Pages 107 - 119)*
12. **Recommendations Tracker**  
To consider progress on recommendations from the previous meeting.  
*(Enclosed – Pages 120)*
13. **Date of next meeting**  
To note that the date of the next meeting will be on 3 December 2024.

## **Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**24 September 2024, 6:00pm**

**In Conference Room 2 at the Council House, Walsall**

### **Committee Members present:**

Councillor Hicken (Chair)  
Councillor Morgan (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor Chapman  
Councillor N. Latham  
Councillor Rattigan  
Councillor C. Statham

### **Portfolio Holder**

Councillor S. Elson

### **Officers present:**

R. Homer	Director (Children’s Social Care).
I. Vanderheeren	Director (Early Help)
M. Halliwell	Assurance Lead Officer
N. Gough	Democratic Services Officer

### 82 **Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Jukes, Rasab, and Harrison.

### 83 **Substitutions**

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

### 84 **Declarations of interest and party whip**

No declarations of interest or party whip were received.

### 85 **Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)**

There were no agenda items requiring the exclusion of the public.

### 86 **Minutes**

The minutes of the previous meetings held on 25 June 2024 were considered.

### **Resolved:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 25 June 2024 be approved and signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record.

### 87 **Complaints Annual Report – Children and Young People 2023-2024**

The Assurance Lead Officer introduced the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The report described the number and types of complaints received, who from, the service areas involved, and the number of complaints upheld. It was noted that this report referred to the statutory and the corporate complaints process and summarises trends, issues and complaint outcomes.

The Committee was informed that the total number of complaints received had reduced in 2023/2024, with 70 received in comparison to 81 in 2022/2023. Members considered the timeliness of complaint responses, with 50% of complaints were responded to within timescales. The types of issues raised were consistent and include staff conduct and quality of service delivered.

It was also highlighted that the Council also received compliments about the services provided.

There then ensued a period of questioning, and the Lead Assurance Officer stated that the Local Government Ombudsman produced an annual report on each contact received in relation to Walsall. In response to challenge around improvement, the Executive Director state that the data and issues raised were considered as part of performance and improvement – it was stressed that receiving and learning from complaints was important.

Assurance was sought that the timeliness of responding to complaints would improve. Officers explained that there was a relatively low number of complaints and described ways that were being considered to improve this. The Committee was reassured that as soon as the complaint was received it was actioned however the cases could be complex and require a lot of information to be processed. The issue of repeat and vexatious complainants was considered, and the drain on resources that this could have.

Members stressed the importance of updating complainants regularly to ensure people were aware that action was being taken, the ways in which this could be built into the system was described. It was agreed that Officers would consider this in the future.

**Resolved:**

**That the Complaints Annual Report (Children and Young People 2023-2024) be noted.**

**88 Portfolio Holder priorities**

The Portfolio Holder for Childrens Service provide detail and set out her three main priorities for the year. These were:

- Establish a Youth Council  
This was enable equal partnership and to listen to young people to better respond to their priorities.
- Pathfinder Project

- To establish a robust family first pathway.
- Staff Feedback

To regularly consult staff and improve where necessary.

In response to questions the Committee were advised that the youth council would be a separate entity to the Corporate Parenting Board. Officers confirmed that the Council was working at pace in relation to the pathfinder and was on track with timescales.

**Resolved that:**

**The Portfolio Holder update was noted.**

## 89 **Update on Children's Alliance and Children and Young People 2040 Strategy**

The Director presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed) and informed the Committee that the report provided an overview of the 2040 Children and Young People Strategy and progress against priorities.

The Committee was informed that the Walsall Children's and Young People's Strategic Alliance was a partnership group that was responsible for the delivery of the strategy. The Alliance was launched in 2023 and was made up of a range of Partners. Following a large public consultation, as detailed within the report, Walsall had set an ambitious vision for where it wanted to be by 2040. It was noted that children in deprived areas felt more negative, consultation also revealed that some children accepted that they would be treated differently to others.

Members were advised that the strategy was still in draft form, however work was underway to deliver on priorities. The initial evaluation of the summer holiday provision suggested that there had been less antisocial behaviour and outcomes were informing the coordinated youth offer. When progressing the town centre masterplan, young people had been involved and themes emerging were that they wanted it to feel safer.

There then ensued a period of questioning and discussion. It was noted that the information provided evidenced a very thorough consultation and congratulated Officers on their work. In response to questions, Officers confirmed that further work would be carried out with young people in relation to the town centre masterplan.

**Resolved that:**

- 1. The update on Children's Alliance and Children and Young People 2040 Strategy be noted.**
- 2. That Members are assured that the Alliance was making good progress in the development of a meaningful 2040 Children and Young People Strategy.**

**3. That the Committee is provided with an update on progress at a future meeting.**

90 **Areas of Focus – 2024 – 2025**

Members considered the areas of focus 2024-2025.

**Resolved**

**That the areas of focus was noted.**

91 **Forward Plans**

The Forward Plans were considered by the Committee.

**Resolved**

**That the forward plans were noted.**

92 **Recommendation Tracker**

The Committee received the tracker of recommendations from previous meetings, including progress made and outstanding items. Members also considered the letter from the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner which responded to a letter written by the Chair, on behalf of the Committee, in relation to the resourcing of exploitation hubs in the region.

[Annexed]

**Resolved:**

1. That the recommendation tracker be noted.
2. That the letter from the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner be noted.

93 **Date of next meeting**

The next meeting would be 5 November 2024.

There being no further business this meeting was terminated at 7.05 pm.

Signed:

Date:



**Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**Agenda  
Item No.**

**5 November 2024**

**6.**

Walsall Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report

**Ward(s)** All

**Portfolios:** Cllr Stacie Elson

**Report:**

The report sets out the Walsall Safeguarding Children Partnership (WSCP) Annual Report which covers the period from 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024.

Walsall Safeguarding Partnership (WSP) has a joint Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangement combining Walsall Safeguarding Children's Partnership (WSCP) and Walsall Safeguarding Adults Board (WSAB). Working Together 2023 and Care Act 2014 is statutory guidance that places responsibility on the partnership to produce a report each year which evaluates the effectiveness of our local safeguarding practices for children and adults with care and support needs.

**Recommendations:**

To note and identify any further information required by the Committee.

**That:**

1. The Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee to note the report.
2. Identify any further information required by the Committee.

**Contact Officer:**

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# WALSALL SAFEGUARDING PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT



**2023 - 2024**

***A review of the effectiveness  
of the multi-agency safeguarding  
arrangements for children and  
young people in Walsall***



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## Introduction from our Statutory Safeguarding Partners

We are pleased to present Walsall Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report covering the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024, which is produced on behalf of the partnership by the Delegated Safeguarding Partners. This report is focused on the partnership's work in relation to **Safeguarding Children**. You can access our Annual Report for Safeguarding Adults here [WSP Annual Reports - Walsall Safeguarding Partnership \(walsallsp.co.uk\)](https://walsallsp.co.uk)

We want to start by taking the opportunity to thank all our front-line practitioners and managers, who work tirelessly to improve outcomes for children, families and adults with care and support needs on a daily basis. It is their commitment, dedication, and care that enables the partnership to translate its strategic priorities into operational practice to keep children, families and adults with care and support needs safe.

In March this year we said goodbye to our Independent Scrutineer, Sally Hodges. We want to thank Sally for the support and robust challenge that she has given to us as Delegated Safeguarding Partners and to the wider partnership over the past 3 years. We are grateful to have worked with someone with such passion and commitment for driving improvements in safeguarding practice.

This annual report provides a summary of our collective achievements as safeguarding partners, an analysis of the impact our work has had for children, families and adults with care and support needs and notes areas for development that require further work in order to strengthen multi-agency safeguarding practice and our local arrangements.

This is year two of our three-year strategic plan and progress against our priorities is outlined within the report. In 2025 we will continue to test the long-term impact of our work in these areas whilst identifying new priorities for the partnership. We have also worked together to prepare for key changes at a national level with the publication of the revised "Working Together 2023" guidance in December and the introduction of Care Quality Commission (CQC) Inspection framework for Adult Social Care. The partnership conducted a full review of its governance framework to enable us to make the necessary structural changes to our Business Unit so that we are in the best position to meet these new requirements. We are pleased to have appointed a new Head of Safeguarding Partnership to support us in implementing those changes. In the forthcoming year we will concentrate on embedding the revisions and testing the impact so that as Safeguarding Partners we have confidence that our arrangements are effectively safeguarding children, families and adults with care and support needs.



**Phil Dolby**  
Chief Superintendent  
West Midlands Police



**Colleen Male**  
Executive Director  
Children & Families Service  
Walsall Council



**Sally Roberts**  
Chief Nursing Officer / Deputy  
Chief Executive Officer  
Black Country Integrated Care  
Board



**Kerrie Allward**  
Executive Director  
Adult Social Care & Public Health  
Walsall Council



# What is Walsall Safeguarding Partnership

Walsall Safeguarding Partnership (WSP) has a joint Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangement combining Walsall Safeguarding Children's Partnership (WSCP) and Walsall Safeguarding Adults Board (WSAB). Working Together 2023 and Care Act 2014 is statutory guidance that places responsibility on the partnership to produce a report each year which evaluates the effectiveness of our local safeguarding practices for children and adults with care and support needs. Working Together 2023 says that organisations and agencies must work together to ensure that information about a child and their family is shared effectively, risk of harm is correctly identified and understood, and that children and families receive targeted services that meet their needs in a co-ordinated way. **The Local Authority, the Integrated Care Board and the Police (referred to as the three Statutory Safeguarding Partners) have a joint and equal responsibility for ensuring that we fulfil these expectations.** In Walsall our Safeguarding Partners are Walsall Local Authority, Black Country Integrated Care Board and West Midlands Police.

## Our Ambition

Walsall Safeguarding Partnership has agreed that its shared ambitions for 2023-2025 are:

- a. Improving our visibility with and amongst local communities and across the partnership
- b. Embedding core values of equality, diversity and inclusion in all tiers of the WSP sub-structure and multi-agency safeguarding practice
- c. Developing a stronger culture of working together to keep children, young people and adults with care and support needs safe
- d. Increasing the involvement (ask, listen and act) of children, young people and adults in our work
- e. Developing a culturally competent, confident, knowledgeable, and curious workforce who are supported to work together and deliver their safeguarding responsibilities
- f. Ask, listening and act to the experiences of practitioners and the learning from data and assurance activity, to improve the quality of the safeguarding response to children, young people, and adults with care and support needs.

## Our Partners (known as relevant agencies)

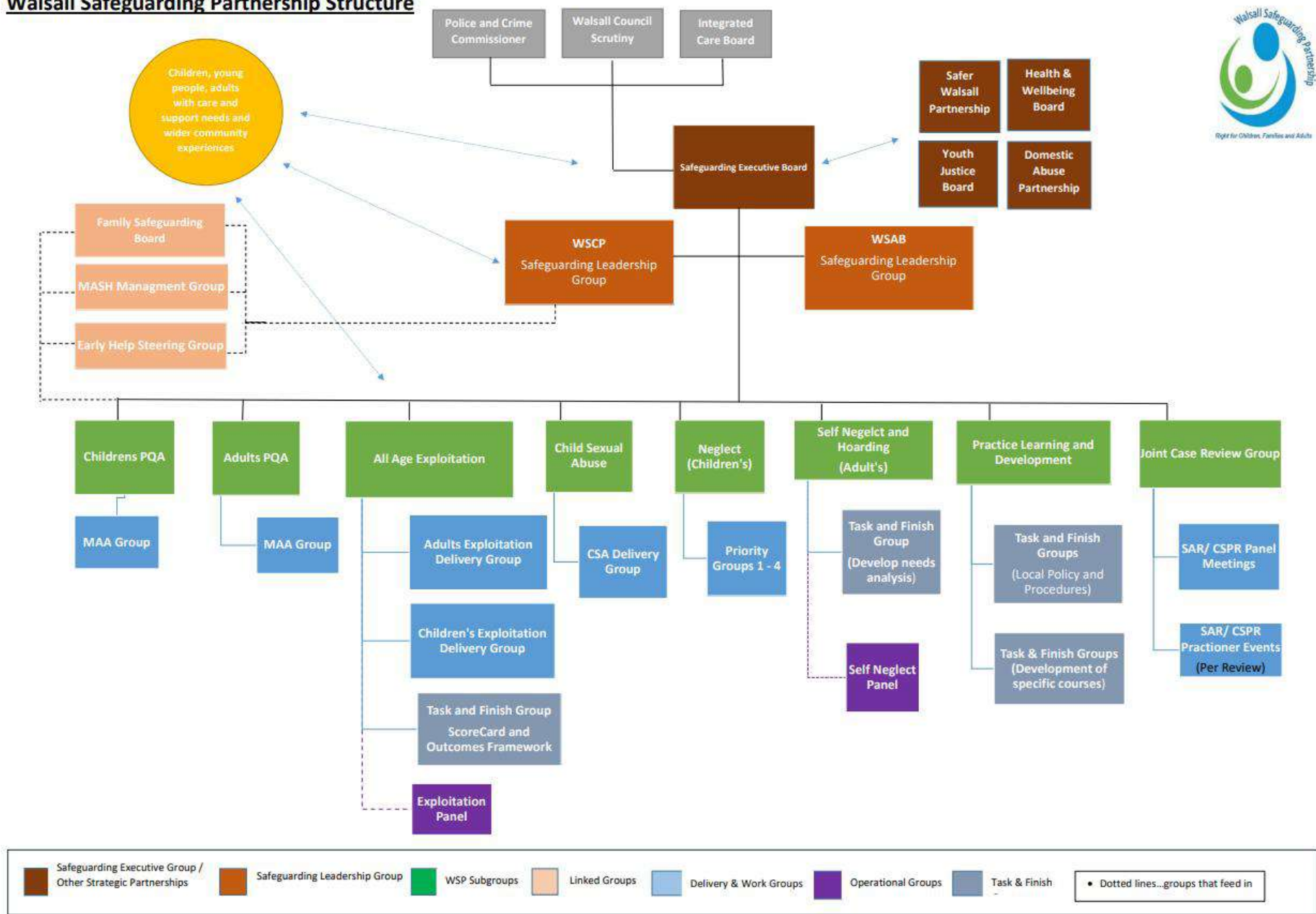
Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and Safeguarding Partners cannot effectively keep children and families safe without strong multi-agency safeguarding arrangements and information sharing involving other services that work closely with children and families. 'Relevant agencies' are those organisations and agencies whose involvement the safeguarding partners consider are required to safeguard and promote the welfare of local children. As part of the evaluation of our arrangements we have recognised that there is scope to improve engagement with education (including early years, schools and further education setting) as well as Voluntary and Community Sector providers. Our existing arrangements are currently being updated to reflect the changes we are making, including to our list of identified relevant agencies, and this will be published in line with Working Together 2023 requirements on our website [Arrangements - Walsall Safeguarding Partnership \(walsallsp.co.uk\)](http://walsallsp.co.uk) by December 2024. Our current arrangements and information about how our partners contribute to the work of the partnership is outlined throughout this report.

In Walsall we work with the following organisations and services.



## Our Current Framework

### Walsall Safeguarding Partnership Structure



Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 sets out the responsibilities of the three safeguarding statutory partners, and within that those of the Lead Safeguarding Partners (LSPs), who are named as the Chief Officer of Police, the Chief Executive of the Local Authority and the Chief Executive of the local Integrated Care Board (ICB). At the time of writing, work is taking place at a regional level in the West Midlands to establish how best the co-ordinate the work of the LSPs so that they can effectively discharge their functions as set out in legislation whilst taking into account that demands on the Chief Constable who has seven partnerships to cover.

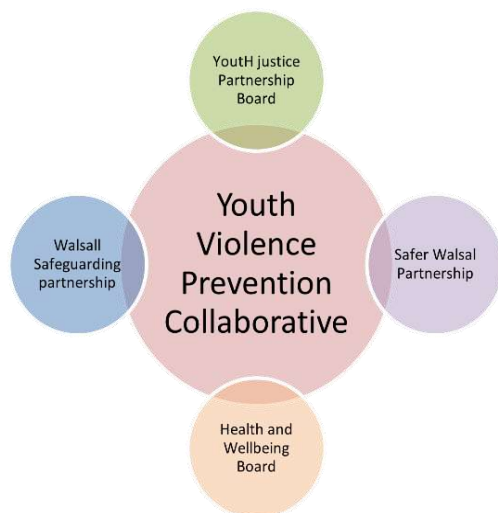
Each LSP should appoint a delegated safeguarding partner (DSP) for its agency to take decisions on behalf of the LSP and hold their sectors to account. In Walsall, the DSPs form an **Executive Group**. Due to our joint arrangement with the Safeguarding Adult Board, Adult Social Care is also represented. Executive Membership consists of the three Delegated Safeguarding Partners (DSPs) who are:

1. Chief Superintendent – Public Protection Unit, West Midlands Police
2. Executive Director of Children and Families, Walsall Council
3. Chief Nursing Officer / Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Black Country Integrated Care Board.

Plus,

- Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Public Health, Walsall Council
- Independent Scrutineer (Children's)
- Independent Chair (Adults)
- Head of Safeguarding Partnership.

## Our Relationship with other Boards and Partnerships



WSP do not operate in isolation of other multi-agency partnerships and boards within Walsall. Cross partnership collaborations have been established with Safer Walsall Partnership (Community Safety Partnership) to progress work in relation to the Exploitation of children and adults. In response to a rise in Serious Youth Violence, Safer Walsall Partnership commissioned a Serious Violence Needs assessment which was completed in April 2023. It recommended "A review of strategic boards should be undertaken, i.e. Safer Walsall Partnership, Walsall Safeguarding Partnership, Youth Justice Partnership, Health and Wellbeing Board and Walsall Together as well as Education, to consider their roles and functions in relation to violence prevention". On the 11<sup>th</sup> April Chairs and support officers of Youth Justice Partnership, Safeguarding Partnership and the Safer Walsall Partnership agreed to develop a collaborative to ensure we maximised opportunities to effectively respond to incidents as well as focus on proactive system change

following the learning from those incidents.

Walsall Together worked with the Partnership to share information about known health inequalities which can often have a close link with neglect.



## Child Death Review Process (CDOP)

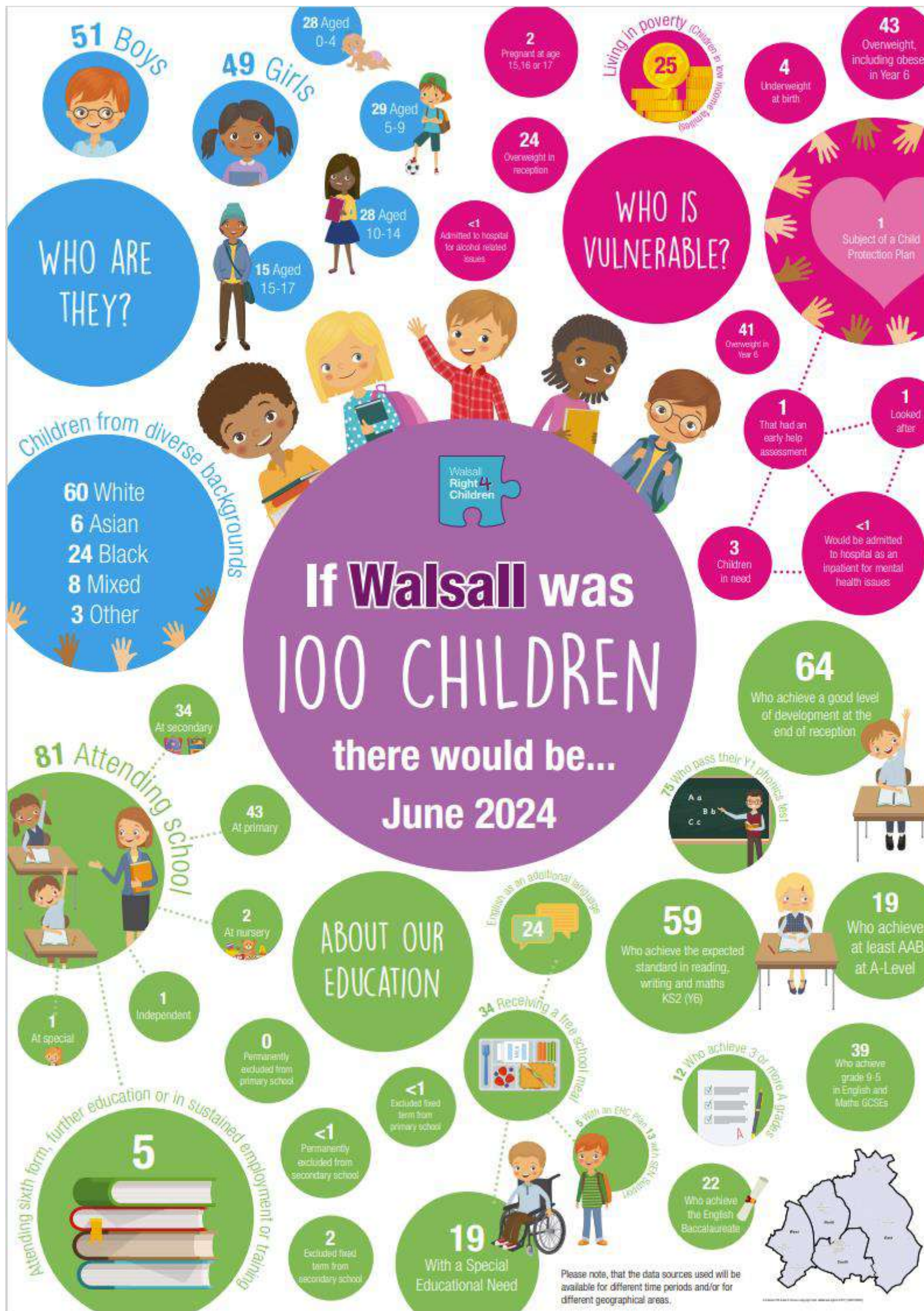
Child Death Review partners, Walsall Local Authority and Black Country Integrated Care Board (ICB) hold responsibility for the delivery of the Child Death Review Process as set out in the Children Act 2004, as amended by the Children and Social Work Act 2017. The WSP have maintained a close working relationship with the Black Country CDOP with a representative from the WSP Business Unit attending the strategic meetings and CDOP presenting their Annual Report to the partnership. For further information about the Child Death Review Process and its purpose please visit: [Black Country Child Death Overview Panel](#) :: [Black Country ICS](#)





# Walsall at a glance

If Walsall was made up of 100 children the demographics would look like this.



Walsall has an estimated population of 284,130 and is expected to see continued and consistent population growth, projected to increase by 7% to an estimated 304,400 by 2030. Walsall is made up of four localities – North, South, East, Central and West.



## Accessing Education in Walsall

There are 78 Registered Childminders in Walsall and 133 settings (Day Nurseries, Pre-Schools, Maintained, Academy, Independent Nurseries and Nursery Classes in Schools). There are 115 schools – 86 Primary Schools, 19 Secondary Schools, 7 Special Schools and 3 Pupil Referral Units. Young people and Adults can access further education at 3 sites across the Town, this includes University provision at the Walsall campus of the University of Wolverhampton.

As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 there were 629 children registered as Electively Home Educated (this means they are taught at home not in school) which is an increase from 491 the previous year and reflects the rise nationally. WSP is aware of the national attention that home-schooling has attracted and at the time of writing awaits the publication of the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's Briefing on learning from reviews where Elective Home Education is a feature. In 2024-2025 WSP intend to seek assurance that children who are home-schooled and at potential risk of harm are visible to services and have appropriate safeguarding in place where required.

Education is currently represented at the WSP via Local Authority officers from the Education and Early Help Directorate, and teaching staff in the Neglect Sub-Group. In 2024 to ensure we are fully embracing the aspirations of Working Together 2023 we will be establishing a 'Safeguarding in Education Sub-Group' that will report to the WSP Executive. This group will represent early years, all school settings and further education in addition to key partners who actively support education providers.

## Accessing Health Services in Walsall

The Black Country Integrated Care Board (ICB) is a statutory NHS organisation responsible for developing a plan for meeting the health needs of 1.26 million people in the Black Country. It manages the NHS budget for the area and arranges for the provision of health services locally. It is part of the Black Country Integrated Care System (ICS), known as Healthier Futures, working to bring health and social care services closer together for the good of our communities.

Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust provides local general hospital and community services. It is the only provider of NHS acute care in Walsall, providing inpatients and outpatients at the Manor Hospital as well as a wide range of services in the community.

Black Country Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust delivers mental health services for children and adults, specialist learning disability services and community healthcare services for the population of the Black Country.

Local Authority Public Health commission 0-19 Services including Health Visiting and School Nursing. In addition, they also commission Sexual Health Services, infection control support and alcohol and drug services.

General practices in Walsall within each Place are organised into Primary Care Networks (PCNs). PCNs enable practices to pool resources, share expertise and deliver a broader range of services. Walsall has 50 GP practices working across seven PCNs.

Health Services are active members on all partnership sub-groups and are represented through the statutory partner Black Country Integrated Care Board and in addition wider members include Public Health, Black Country Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust and Walsall Hospital NHS Trust.

## Other Service Providers

The area is covered by one Council – Walsall Local Authority and one Police Force – West Midlands Police (which also covers another 6 areas in the region). Other regional partners include West Midlands Fire Service, West Midlands Ambulance Service, and National Probation Service (Midlands Division). These services are represented at many of the meetings of the Partnership. There is also a thriving Voluntary, Community and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sector provision operating in Walsall, some of whom are directly involved in the work of the partnership e.g. Healthwatch, Walsall Housing Group (WHG), Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC), Change Grow Live-The Beacon, Street Teams, St Giles and Black Country Women's Aid. Our ambition in 2024 is to develop our relationships with these providers and establish improved links with the partnership through our governance arrangements.





'Really fascinating presentations. I feel I have learnt a lot from the day. I look forward to learning more about the Aware App'. – **Walsall Healthcare Trust**

'Really enjoyed the day. As a new employee with Walsall, it was lovely to meet my Social Work colleagues. Additionally, it was good to see such support from Partner Agencies'. – **Social Care, Children's Services**



### Health Inequalities and links to Neglect

The sub-group received a presentation from colleagues in Walsall Together on the information they hold about health inequalities and the links to neglect. The input supported the group to focus on areas that could indicate potential neglect, such as poor oral health and missed health appointments. The group recognised the importance of removing barriers to facilitate attendance at appointments. These areas will feature in the refreshed Neglect Strategy that is due for completion in 2024.

### Neglect Workshop – August 2023

In August the WSP held a workshop with sub-group members to reflect on progress they have made against the workplan and learning from the Neglect Conference. The group summarised their position like this:

# Refreshing the Neglect Strategy 2023

18th August Workshop Discussion

What we Have Achieved!	The Gaps/ Improvements	What we Know	Our Priorities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Joint Training- Neglect has been integrated in core training eg Right Help Right Time, Early Help, time2talk. Received positive feedback.</li> <li>- Started to think about: Support through key programmes eg Family HUBS, HAF, Poverty and taking action.</li> <li>- We are a matured Partnership. Evidenced through the – Steering Group and The See, Hear and Respond to Child Neglect Conference- setting a good foundation.</li> <li>- Have a dedicated Neglect Resource- Neglect Lead Role is now recruited.</li> <li>- Conference and the Time2Talk sessions that followed- Positive multi-agency conversations.</li> <li>- We are a Learning Partnership</li> <li>Multi-Agency Audits.</li> <li>Child-Centred focus.</li> <li>More conversation re-impact on child.</li> <li>Changing practice across the partnership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Need more practitioners as part of the training pool.</li> <li>- Quality Assurance around the training.</li> <li>- Education membership .</li> <li>- Mental Health engagement could be improved.</li> <li>- Links between neglect and oral hygiene- better identification and action- work with dentists.</li> <li>- Links between neglect and education- duty around attendance in September.</li> <li>- Identifying inequalities. Gap in early years.</li> <li>- Links between other key agenda's eg. neglect/ self-neglect- Greater engagement with education</li> <li>- Cultural change – practitioners feel they are waiting for families to reach thresholds.</li> <li>- Using data to provide support / planning/ mitigation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Temporary Accommodation- Invisible children, information not being shared timely. Children placed by other Local Authorities.</li> <li>- Data on invisible children. - No vaccination 6-8 weeks, No Health Check Attendance - Not in 2 year old placements. Triangulated support through family hubs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Data sharing to help us to drive tactical decisions.</li> <li>- Insights – what information would be helpful</li> <li><u>Training</u></li> <li>- Current offer.</li> <li>- Build neglect as a core/ child centred focus.</li> <li>- GCP2 training + support + champions</li> <li>Supervision- pilot.</li> <li><u>Toolkit to help with actions.</u></li> <li>Think about how to help, professional curiosity to identify neglect when it is not obvious.</li> <li><u>AWARE APP</u></li> <li><u>Fathers strategy + work</u></li> <li><u>Diversity</u>- for those that English is a second language</li> <li><u>Steering group representation</u> – Education, Walsall4All, Resilient Communities.</li> <li><u>Champions</u></li> <li>Community champions- bring the Family Hub Spokes together to a think and challenge event around neglect.</li> <li>Practitioner champions.</li> </ul>

**Graded Care Profile 2 (GCP2) Training** – In September 2023 the WSP Executive endorsed the recommendation from the sub-group to rollout GCP2 across the workforce. The Sub-Group supported by the Neglect Lead established an GCP2 implementation group to support the rollout, and 16 multi-agency trainers were trained by NSPCC in February 2024 and this will continue in 2024. This decision was taken based on feedback from the Independent Evaluation of learning from the W6 SCR that previous efforts to embed GCP 2 had not as yet been fully realised.

**Training** – The sub-group supported by the Neglect Lead developed an e-learning course on Child Neglect which was launched in February 2023 and can be accessed here [eLearning : Child-Neglect-Awareness---Level-1 \(event-booking.org.uk\)](https://eLearning:Child-Neglect-Awareness---Level-1(event-booking.org.uk)) At year end there were 239 signed up of which 179 had successfully completed the course and 42 were in progress. The e-learning course is intended to improve basic knowledge and understanding and be accessible, free of charge, to anyone that supports children's and families.

“There is evidence throughout of a focus on improving practice through training and reflective supervision. There has been a large investment into GCP2 training but results of audits indicate that this is not always being used in practice”

**Jane Wonnacott, Independent Consultant**  
Evaluation of Learning from W6 SCR  
presented to WSP Executive July 2023

**WSP Website** – In December the partnership refreshed its website with new resources and information on child neglect [Neglect - Walsall Safeguarding Children \(walsallsp.co.uk\)](https://walsallsp.co.uk)

**Challenges & Next Steps in 2024-2025** – The sub-group recognises that it lacks data and intelligence about the full extent of neglect within Walsall and this will be a priority for 2024 in order that our strategic decision making is based in evidence and that the impact of our work can be tested. The sub-group is currently working on developing a Neglect Toolkit, including a screening tool, to support practitioners in identifying neglect.

## Priority 2 - Self Neglect and Hoarding

This is the third year of strategic focus on Self-Neglect and Hoarding. The group is Chaired by the Group Manager from Adult Social Care and supported by the Independent Chair, Derek Benson.

### Strategic Intention

Walsall's strategic intention was to raise awareness of the issues across the adult's workforce in order that persons living with self-neglect and hoarding can be identified for assessment and support to reduce need and risk. The interface with children's safeguarding was also recognised and it was deemed essential that the adult's workforce recognise and know when and how to respond when there are children living with adults in these circumstances. To support this aim, a member of Children's Social Care attends the Self-Neglect Sub-Group and a member of Adult Social Care attends the Child Neglect Sub-Group.

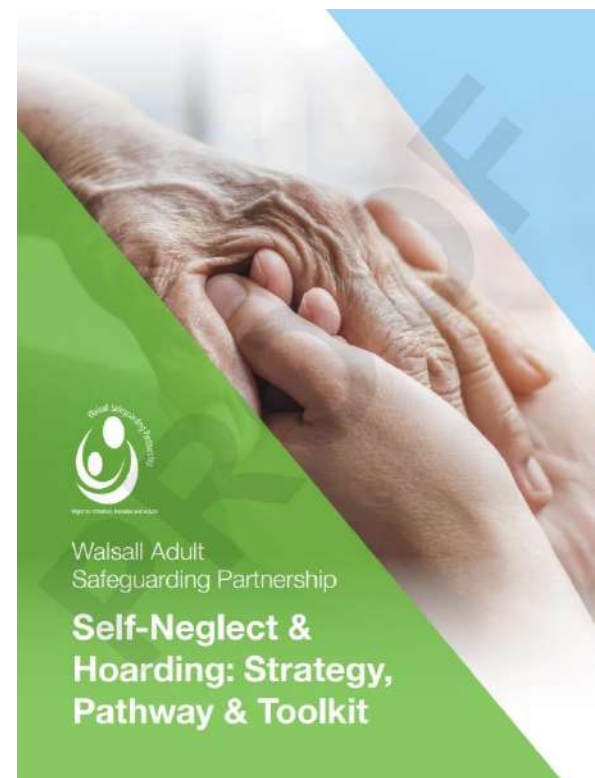
### Self-Neglect & Hoarding Conference 'Be part of making a difference'

The Self-Neglect & Hoarding Sub-Group, delivered a conference, supported by key speaker Michael Preston-Shoot, Independent Consultant, who presented the National Perspective. The conference was attended by 192 practitioners from 14 different agencies in October 2023. The conference objectives were to:

- To raise awareness of Self-Neglect & Hoarding, the Strategy and Toolkit.
- To support practitioners to identify, assess and manage risk through the Self-Neglect & Hoarding toolkit.
- Raising awareness about the work of the self-neglect panel and how to refer
- Promoting a strength-based approach by working alongside adults who self-neglect and/ or hoard.

To view the full recording of Michael Preston-Shoots presentation to the conference here

[FULL VERSION Presentation with Professor Michael Preston Shoot for Self-Neglect & Hoarding \(youtube.com\)](#)



### Feedback

*A very useful and informative conference. Useful handouts.*

*Conference was excellent. Nice to feel like not so alone with dealing with things and where to turn. It was refreshing to see how many agencies in the Walsall borough came together at the conference to discuss the experiences and share good practice.*

*The Conference was well organised and relevant to me as a member of the Adults Safeguarding and sponsors, I have more tools to address self-neglect and hoarding referrals.*

**Walsall Wellbeing Outcomes Framework** – was presented to the sub-group in September 2023 by colleagues from Walsall Together. The sub-group considered how this could be embedded into the approaches of all local services in order to promote the importance of good mental health and wellbeing.



**Self-Neglect & Hoarding Panel** - Referrals into the Self-Neglect and Hoarding Panel have remained relatively low across the year, although it was encouraging to see that following the conference in October, referrals increased from 3 in Quarter 1 to 9 in Quarter 3. The group, led by Adult Social Care, reviewed the panel functioning in quarter 4, including the referral form for panel and are now actively monitoring referrals.

**Challenges & Next Steps for 2024-2025** – The sub-group recognises that it lacks data and intelligence about the full extent of self-neglect and hoarding within Walsall and this will be a priority for 2024 in order that our strategic decision making is based in evidence and that the impact of our work can be tested. The sub-group intends to work more closely with frontline practitioners to more fully understand how self-neglect presents itself and the challenges and barriers to supporting adult who self-neglect and/or hoard. This will inform a refresh of the Neglect Panel and the Self-Neglect Strategy.



## Priority 3 – All-Age Exploitation

This is the second year of strategic focus on All-Age Exploitation. The group is Co-Chaired by Superintendent West Midlands Police and Head of Community Safety and Enforcement, Walsall Council.

### Rationale

WSP recognised that exploitation does not stop on a person's 18th birthday. Where a child is experiencing exploitation at 17 years and is seen as a victim, it becomes more apparent that services needed to recognise and respond to the very likelihood that the same young person will continue to be vulnerable to the risk of exploitation and will continue to require support and or protection after their 18th birthday. It is for this reason WSP have agreed to an 'all age approach' to tackle exploitation in the Borough.

In early 2023 a series of reflective challenge conversations with the Independent Chair took place with regard to the performance of the All-Age Exploitation Sub-Group. The conversations identified that there had been a drift and delay in resolving issues such as governance between Walsall Safeguarding Partnership and Safer Walsall Partnership which had impacted on the progression of the exploitation agenda. Three key areas of activity were identified as not having progressed, these were:

- Development of a strategic needs assessment (SNA)
- Development of a multi-agency dashboard so that data and intelligence could be gathered to inform the group
- Development of an All-Age Exploitation Strategy.

The conversations led to completion of a diagnostic report being prepared by the WSP Business Unit which included various recommendations informed by partners views. The report resulted in the Independent Chair of Safeguarding Adult Board being asked by the WSP Executive to provide leadership and scrutiny to the work of the All-Age Exploitation Sub-Group which has seen progress made, although it is acknowledged that wider governance decisions in respect of Modern Slavery and the Exploitation agenda remain unresolved.

### Progress against priorities

- The Sub-Group conducted a 'True for Us' exercise in line with the recommendations from the Independent Enquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in Telford. This review has informed the groups workplan.
- In October 2023 Dr Helen Lowey, Independent Consult in Public Health was commissioned to complete the Strategic Needs Analysis on behalf of the sub-group. This work will continue into 2024.
- Following the appointment of the new Head of Safeguarding Partnership and Head of Service for MASH, Exploitation and Adolescents with Complex Needs in March 2024 priority was given to developing a draft dashboard for the group and a full review of the terms of reference for the Sub-Group and the Exploitation Panel commenced.
- To support the submission of intelligence between Panel and Sub-Group a revised information and intelligence report template was endorsed for use.
- The work completed by Youth Justice Service on Disproportionately (see [section 5](#) of the report) was presented. This informed decisions to ensure that data captures the demographics of victims and perpetrators
- In March 24 Safer Walsall Partnership commissioned an independent review of its response to Modern Slavery. This will inform work in this area in 2024 and decisions about governance.
- The Sub-Group supported County Lines Intensification week in March 2024 which saw 16 arrests for drug and weapon related offences.

**Challenges and Next Steps for 2024/2025** – The work completed this year to address membership, consistency of attendance and governance structures has positioned the sub-group well to progress the priorities actions going forward. The WSP Executive recognised the risks linked to drift in progression of the actions for this sub-group. The Head of Partnerships with support from the Chair and Co-Chair have developed a workplan and risk register which is now actively overseen by the sub-group and Safeguarding Leadership Group. In 2024/2025 there will be a greater emphasis on outputs, clear timeframes, and addressing areas that currently lack detail such as the governance of modern slavery and the outstanding strategic needs assessment. Positively, at year end, the Independent Chair advised the WSP Executive that "there was renewed confidence that the recent revisions and targeted workplan for the group would result in the necessary progress being achieved".

## Priority 4 - Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)

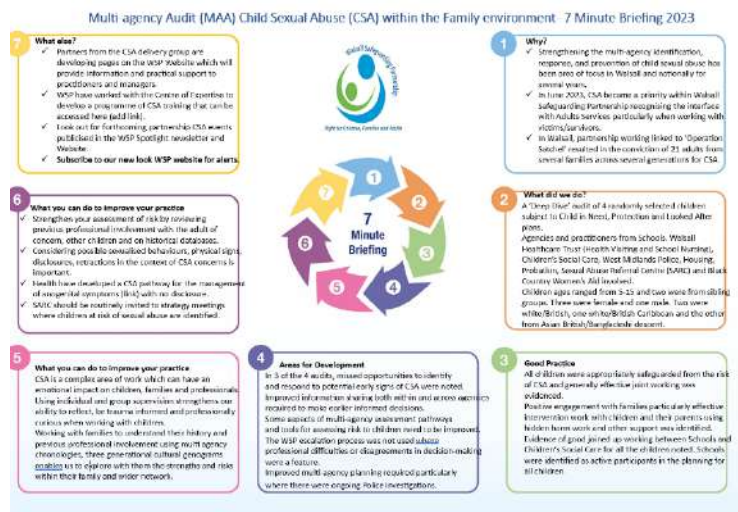
WSP has had a focus on child sexual abuse since 2019 and has worked with the Centre of Expertise to develop its CSA Strategy 2020-2023. The strategy included a focus on awareness raising, training and development work, strengthening practice and pathways. Learning from Operation Satchel, Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, Safeguarding Adult Reviews and a CSA focus for the National Panel led the WSP Executive to agree that further work needed to be undertaken around Walsall's identification and response to Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) and so a sub-group with a specific focus on sexual abuse within the family environment was formed in September 2023.

The sub-group is Co-Chaired by Director of Children's Services, Walsall Council, Designated Doctor for Safeguarding Children, Black Country ICB and Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children, Black Country ICB,

Whilst the CSA subgroup is in its infancy the impetus for change and commitment of the partnership is demonstrating strengths in commitment to making the changes needed in order to safeguard children from harm. Significant activity has been undertaken in a short period of time in order to deliver strategic partnership priorities of:

- Ensuring that there is strategic commitment across all agencies to understand, prevent and reduce the impact of CSA.
- Improve the capability of the multi-agency workforce to recognise and act on the signs of CSA.
- Improve the effectiveness of assessment, planning and interventions to reduce CSA and respond in a consistent and timely way.
- Evaluate our practice and systems through the use of our quality assurance mechanisms.

**Development of Anogenital Symptoms Management Pathway** – this was developed by the Designated Doctor for Safeguarding Children, included in local procedures and briefed out to frontline practitioners in January 2024. The Designated Doctor also provided a session explaining the medical examination in suspected child sexual abuse to allow professionals to better support children and families.



**Multi-Agency Audit on Child Sexual Abuse** – The WSP conducted a multi-agency audit on child sexual abuse within the family environment in July 2023. Learning from the audit is detailed in [Section 6](#) of this report. The learning was shared with the CSA Sub-Group to inform its workplan.

**Training and Awareness** – In response to W6 SCR the WSP has worked with the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse to provide a suite of training to support the partnership in identifying and responding to child sexual abuse, alongside more specialist training for practitioners. Courses can be accessed at [Event List : Child Sexual Abuse \(event-booking.org.uk\)](#) Promotion of the Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) has also been undertaken across the multi-agency workforce. Children's Social Care where recognised for the additional training they have provided to their workforce. The WSP needs to seek assurance that all agencies prioritise attending the training that is now available to the partnership.

“The child sexual abuse strategy is in place and there is evidence that training has been implemented within children’s social care. There is less evidence within the documents of a multi-agency approach to practice development.

**Jane Wonnacott, Independent Consultant**  
**Evaluation of Learning from W6 SCR**  
**presented to WSP Executive July 2023**

**Challenges & Next Steps for 2024-2025** – Like the other sub-groups, there is recognition that members need to develop its intelligence in respect of child sexual abuse in Walsall both in relation to victims and perpetrators. Moving into 2024 the group has agreed the following areas of work:

- An independent review of the work undertaken in respect of CSA to date and its impact on practice
- Development of a CSA pathway in line with that of the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse
- Development of a CSA Dashboard to inform intelligence for the partnership
- Refresh of the CSA Strategy
- Delivery of a Multi-Agency Conference to launch the pathway and revised CSA Strategy.

# How the Voice of Children and Families have Shaped our Work

## Disproportionality Strategy 2024-2027

Reducing the over-representation of Black and Mixed ethnicity children within the Justice system remains a key priority for YJS. Walsall Youth Justice Service (YJS) developed a strategic plan to significantly reduce disproportionate over-representation of Black and Mixed Ethnicity boys within the Youth Justice Service over the next three. The YJS, working with Open Lens Media, delivered a 16-week employability and personal development programme which provided intense group and 1:1 support to five Black and Mixed Heritage boys within the YJS. The programme also delivered empowerment sessions with local external mentors and advocates to deliver sessions aimed at empowering the boys.

### What we learned from their lived experiences:

- **Negative interactions with authority figures in education** – All of the boys expressed difficult encounters with the education system and teachers, some of which had resulted in suspension or exclusion. They spoke about feeling unfairly treated in relation to their white counterparts and being unsure of how to express themselves at times due to feeling frustrated about their circumstances. The boys took accountability in areas they felt responsible but largely discussed feeling unheard or pre-judged before they had been given a chance.
- **Primary school** – The boys unanimously expressed that leaving primary school was a significant turning point. They highlighted that the transition between primary and secondary was difficult and many of their issues began at this point. Further discussion as to why this was the case highlighted that each of them experienced significant events at this age, such as the breakdown in parental relationships, moving to live in a different area or not having learning difficulties recognised at the time.
- **Fatherlessness** – A few of the boys had a relationship with their father and some of them expressed a disconnect with their father's role in their lives and their search for identify in some cases. They each identified other male role models that they looked up to. Often these were media personalities that they drew some affinity with or in one instance another male family member. However, their examples were often far removed from their current circumstances.
- **Navigating peer relationships** – The boys spoke candidly about making choices in life and what that meant for them consequently. They often spoke of their close peers as family and the codes of conduct that they have had to adopt growing up in their respective areas and amongst their said peers. Whilst aware of some of the impacts of the choices they could make, they spoke about feeling trapped within 'the system' and often feeling backed into a corner of choices due to not seeing a positive or achievable way out.
- **Negative experiences with the police and judicial system** – The majority of the boys spoke of negative encounters with the police. However, the boys expressed this was nothing new and as a result had built up some level of distrust towards the police when it came to supporting their communities. Much of their experience was also spoke of inherently, as they had adopted some of their viewpoints from the experiences of their peers and family members as well as from their own.
- **Living in areas of extreme deprivation** – the boys spoke fondly of the communities that lived within their areas, although they recognised that they were living within areas of deprivation. They expressed the communal approach to friendship and neighbourliness was encouraging and that they would like to see more money invested into improving the quality of their areas as well as the outcomes for the young people living within them.

Open Lens Media jointly consulted with the boys, Walsall YJS and partners to produce a documentary film called Reformation 2. The film explored the lived experiences of Black and Mixed Heritage boys within Walsall and the systemic issues that contribute to their experiences with the YJS. The film presents the causes, contributions, and solutions to reducing the over representations of Black and Mixed Heritage boys in the Youth Justice System through the commentary of senior heads of services and YJS team members. It also touches on the findings of the Thematic report and the roles mentoring, alternative provision and support play in working with the subject group. You can view the documentary here <https://youtu.be/Q5iZBZQBtt4>

### What difference has it made?

The boys showed a significant increase in their levels of confidence and aspirations post project. In the initial stages of the project, their communication was minimal, and they were unwilling to articulate their goals or aspirations. However, as the sessions progressed and they were able to self-reflect, each of the boys opened up and were able to better express their thoughts and emotions towards their futures which allowed them to further explore their goals in their 1:1 sessions. Their candid sharing of their experiences has helped the partnership to identify areas of the strategy that it can further promote. The strategy and findings from the project were shared with the WSP Neglect Sub-Group to ensure learning about the boys' experiences influenced the refresh of the Neglect Strategy, particularly the importance of having a good educational experience.

## 'It takes a Village' documentary

In Walsall there were **266 care leavers** (as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024), who, at some point in their childhood, have been in the care of the council and left after turning 18 years old. Walsall Council and partners such as police, health, housing, and education organisations act as Corporate Parent to those in the council's care and it is their responsibility to prepare young people for adulthood and help them to live stable and safe lives. 'It Takes a Village' is a documentary, produced by Open Lens Media, to support the Council and partners to better understand the everyday challenges faced by young care leavers. Filming for the documentary took place during **National Care Leavers Week in October 2023** and was screened at the Light Cinema in Walsall on 20 February 2024. The film focuses on the experiences of Zoe Morgan, Head of Service for Corporate Parenting and Leaving Care at Walsall Council, who spent some time away from her usual home and work life to live in the shoes of a care leaver. The film portrays Zoe's attempt to understand some of the difficulties young people face and how the council can improve its service. Contributors to the documentary also included Transition and Leaving Care staff, separated migrant children and young care leavers.

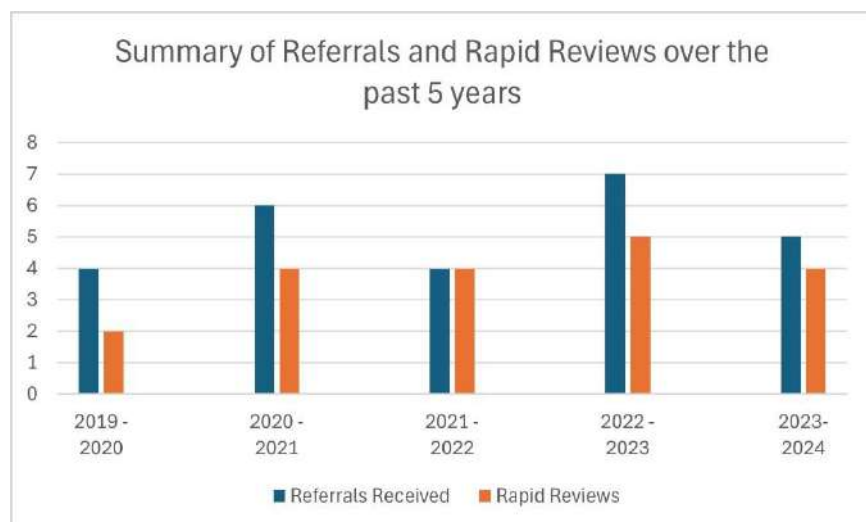


## Learning from Practice Review and Audit Activity

In situations where children, young people or adults have died or have been seriously harmed and abuse or neglect is thought to be a factor, Walsall Safeguarding Partnership is responsible for making arrangements for agencies to come together to consider how effectively services safeguarded the individual; what worked well and what lessons can be learned to prevent similar incidents from happening to children, young people and adults with care and support needs in the future. These reviews are expected to show where things might have been done differently to improve outcomes and it is an expectation on partnerships that learning from such reviews are published.

### Serious Incident Notifications and Rapid Reviews

'Serious Safeguarding Incidents' involving children are notified to the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (referred to as the 'National Panel') and it is a requirement of Working Together 2023 that a 'Rapid Review' is then considered / completed. Referrals can be made by any agency wishing to highlight a serious incident for consideration of notification. It should be noted that a Serious Incident Notification may be for more than one child but will be counted as only one notification/referral.



Since the introduction of Rapid Review requirements in Working Together 2018 the referrals to WSP on average are stable. This year there was a slight reduction compared to the previous year (5 compared to 7 in 2022/23). However, the percentage of Rapid Reviews undertaken as a result of the referrals is higher.

Below is a breakdown of the referrals received by Walsall Safeguarding Partnership during 2023-2024 and their current status:

Activity	Volume
Total number of referrals in 2023 – 2024	5
Number of referrals which met criteria for a Rapid Review (children only)	4
Number of referrals that progressed to a statutory review in this period (Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review)	1
Number of reviews completed and awaiting publication	3
Number of ongoing reviews	2
Number of reviews published in this period	1

Of the five referrals submitted to the partnership, four were notified as 'serious incidents' to the National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, and Rapid Reviews were completed, one was not deemed to meet the criteria for notification. The four notifications relate to children who were all residents of Walsall. Their ages range from under 12 months to 17 years. All four children were male. One Child was British Indian, two were White British and one was Dual Heritage.

The reviews featured Non-Accidental Injury, Domestic Abuse, Fabricated and Induced Illness and Parental Mental Health. The learning from these reviews were shared with the National Panel and locally across the Partnership via 7-minute briefings and learning newsletters which can be located on the WSP website at

- [7 Minute Briefings - Walsall Safeguarding Children \(walsallsp.co.uk\)](https://www.walsallsp.co.uk/7-minute-briefings)
- [Learning Newsletters - Walsall Safeguarding Children \(walsallsp.co.uk\)](https://www.walsallsp.co.uk/learning-newsletters)

### Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews

Between April 2023 and March 2024 the WSP published the recommendations from a legacy Serious Case Review (SCR W6).

#### SCR W6

The decision was taken by the WSP not to publish the full report in order to protect the anonymity of the victims. **SCR W6** is a review of the circumstances relating to the multi-agency response to neglect and complex sexual abuse of several children over a number of years. The serious case review was completed in 2018 and examined the learning arising from the quality of multi-agency practice between 2004 and 2014. The delay in publishing the recommendations from the review was due to the ongoing criminal investigation which concluded in Spring 2023.

The recommendations focused on strengthening safeguarding supervision across agencies, increasing staff confidence in responding to child sexual abuse, reviewing and embedding the Child Neglect Strategy, seeking assurance that Pre-Birth and Non-Accidental Injury guidance is understood and embedded and that when required agencies utilise the Escalation Policy. A detailed action plan has been overseen by the Joint Case Review Group and Child Sexual Abuse Sub-Group since 2021. All actions have



been completed and as can be seen by the work of the CSA Sub-Group and audit activity across that period the impact of the action taken is regularly reviewed and additional actions identified when the intended impact cannot be demonstrated.

To read the full list of recommendations for SCR W6 click here: [Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews - Walsall Safeguarding Children \(walsallsp.co.uk\)](https://walsallsp.co.uk)

In June 2022 the WSP commissioned an independent evaluation of the impact of learning from SCR W6. A reference group was established to support the evaluation and met on three occasions. Documentary Evidence, meetings with practitioners, team managers and senior managers across the partnership were also engaged to inform the findings.

#### FINDINGS FROM THE INDEPENDENT EVALUATION OF IMPACT SCR W6

- **Although Neglect is a formal partnership priority, Child Sexual Abuse is not and this is a barrier to system change** – this is because CSA had been a priority for the partnership in 2017-2019. In response to this finding the Independent Scrutineer recommended to the WSP Executive that another targeted period of focus would be beneficial giving rise to the CSA Sub-Group in September 2023.
- There is ample evidence of both partnership and single agency activity focused on improving practice in the areas of neglect and child sexual abuse. **Audits show that this is beginning to have an impact on referrals and assessments and focus groups were able to describe changes to practice.** This included school staff referring to training that had focused attention on the voice of the child and social workers feeling more confident in working with child sexual abuse.
- Practitioners are aware of (and appreciate) the training opportunities and information disseminated by the partnership. However, at times the amount of information/e-mails can feel overwhelming and important information might be missed. **Practitioners identified the 7-minute briefings as useful partnership information.** In 2024-2025 consideration of other forms of disseminating key learning will be prioritised
- Evidence suggests that chronic and severe neglect would be identified earlier and social work assessments more thorough although the **GCP2 may not be used as a tool to support early work with the family and Schools would be more attuned to hearing the “voice” of the child.**
- Evidence suggests that where social workers and police officers were made aware of the possibility of child sexual abuse **there would be a more proactive and prompt response today.**

A further three reviews have been completed but await publication pending the conclusion of criminal proceedings. Two of the three reports are legacy Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) dating back to referrals in 2018 and 2019. The WSP has shared it's concerns as to the passage of time which analysis indicates is due to a combination of length of police investigation, CPS charging decisions and waiting times for court hearings. The WSP has identified this issue as a barrier to publication and a challenge when sharing learning, which it understands to be a national issue. In July 2023 the WSP Executive met with the CPS to seek resolution as far as was possible, but for some reviews the challenge persists. The WSP has ensured action plans pertaining to the reviews have been progressed to completion and learning shared within the Partnership pending publication of the final reports.

## Learning from Multi-Agency Audits (MAA)

Undertaking MAA audits enable WSP to review the quality and impact of safeguarding practice. Generally, WSP undertake four themed multi-agency audit rounds, one theme per quarter where the multi-agency practice in relation to five children and their families are evaluated.

The themes are identified due to strategic priorities, response to the findings of Child Safeguarding and Learning Reviews both locally and nationally and data and intelligence. A report detailing findings from the audits is produced and as part of the learning from each audit; a 7-minute briefing is developed and disseminated.

The following audits have been completed during this period:

- Child Sexual Abuse
- Transitions into Adulthood
- Adolescents receiving support at Level 3 Early Help
- First 1001 Days

The table below details the overall grading of multi-agency practice. Positively no practice was deemed to be 'inadequate' during this period, although we have seen a decrease in practice assessed as 'good'.

**Table 1: Multi-Agency Children Audit Gradings 2023-2024**

Year/Quarter 2023/2024	Theme	Outstanding	Good	Requires Improvement	Inadequate	Total
Q1	Child Sexual Abuse			4		4
Q2	Transitions		1	5		6
Q3	Adolescents and Early Help		1	4		5
Q4	First 1001 Days		2	3		5
Total			4	16		20

When the MAA audit gradings in 2023-2024 are compared against previous years, on average there has been a reduction by 15% of audits rated as good compared to the previous year; more significantly an approximate 40% reduction from 2020/2022. Conversely there has been an 30% increase in audits marked requiring improvement compared to the previous year which reflects that no audits were graded as inadequate during this period, unlike last year.

**Table 2: Comparison of annual audit grades for Children MAA from 2019-2023**

Year/Quarter	Outstanding	Good	Requires Improvement	Inadequate
2023-2024	0%	20%	80%	0%
2022-2023	0%	35%	50%	15%
2021-2022	0%	60%	40%	0%
2020-2021	4%	61%	30%	4%
2019-2020	0%	23%	63%	15%

There are several factors that need to be taken into consideration. Audit grades relate to the quality of multi-agency working rather than overall practice. In addition to the multi-agency work rated as good, there could be positive elements of single and partnership agency working as well as areas for development particularly in those rated as requires improvement. Whilst this is a small sample size, due to the 'deep dive' nature of the evaluation of multi-agency practice, we have confidence that these findings align with those identified by other WSP work such as learning reviews and other quality assurance activity. Robust multi-agency practice is an important part of achieving good outcomes when working with children. It should also be noted that no child was found to be at risk of harm through the MAA and that we have ensured necessary action has been taken to address any areas of practice requiring improvement.

Understanding the reasons for the changes in grading are more complex. It should be acknowledged that the themes chosen are done so in recognition that some areas of practice require strengthening locally as well nationally and regionally. Comparisons to practice during the Covid Pandemic also need to be done acknowledging that the partnerships approach to quality assurance was adjusted during that period in light of the lockdowns. Going forward the partnership intends to compare audits on the same themes over the same time period to ascertain where improvements have been made and what stubborn challenges still persist in practice.

### Q1: Audit on Child Sexual Abuse

This audit was undertaken to provide an insight into the effectiveness of multi-agency practice where there are concerns about child sexual abuse. This topic was chosen following the learning from SCRW6 and the outcome of criminal proceedings in relation to Operation Satchel.

#### Assurances included:

- **Child and Family Engagement** - There was evidence of effective engagement with children and their families across the audits. This included positive practice by Children's Social Care with a child's mother to explore her childhood and lived experience in order to affect change in her thinking about the perpetrator. There was evidence of effective intervention and engagement from Black Country Women's aid with children undertaking safety planning and positive relationships between a school and a child's mother which enabled them to facilitate a positive connection with other support services.
- **Joint Working** – There was evidence of good joined up working between schools and social care for all of the children considered and the school were seen as an active participant in the planning for all children. This practice needs to extend to other key partners in health and police.
- **Management of Risk** - We were satisfied that at the point of the audits the children considered were being appropriately safeguarded from further risk of child sexual abuse. Once risk was identified and understood there was generally effective joint working to ensure immediate safeguards were put in place.

#### Gaps in Assurance:

- **The Identification of Risk and Referral** – when an adult discloses historical sexual abuse agencies must identify and assess any contact the alleged perpetrator may have with a child or vulnerable adult, irrespective of whether the Police take action. Referral to Children's Social Care is expected practice.
- **Length of police Investigation** – In 50% of the audits a protracted police investigation (2 years and 12 months) appeared to have impacted effective assessment and therefore management of risk. Whilst the partnership acknowledges the importance of comprehensive investigation, it is imperative that Police share any information with Children's Social Care that could be pertinent to the assessment of risk. The WSP should also seek assurance from West Midlands Police that timeliness of investigations is reflective of the complexity of the case.

- **Lack of Escalation** – This learning reflects that from previous multi-agency audits. In two audits school and probation felt their referrals should have progressed to assessment; children social care highlighted a delay in the perpetrator work commencing by probation in another audit, and the length of investigation and limited communication from Police was noted in two audits but no agency utilised the escalation procedure.

#### This audit led to the priorities within the CSA sub-group to:

- Enhance the training to the multi-agency workforce in relation to CSA – Completed
- Develop a CSA Pathway – Ongoing
- Refresh the CSA Strategy – Ongoing
- Ensure that all children with an open police investigation have a named Investigating Officer as point of contact - Completed

## Q2: Transitions into Adulthood

This audit was undertaken to provide an insight into the effectiveness of multi-agency practice where young people are transitioning to adulthood. This audit was held in partnership with Adult Social Care to understand the areas of strength and challenges arising in these transitions for young people.

#### Assurances included:

- **Management Oversight** – The majority of audits evidence good management oversight. It was also noted that the use of the recently introduced complex needs panel offering senior management oversight of the transition process for young people from children's to adult's social care, whilst in its infancy, was seen to be promising. It was evident that drift in assessment by Adult Social Care had been addressed via this panel and there was now a clearer plan for assessment and intervention.
- **Multi-Agency Working and communication** - There is evidence of good communication and multi-agency working to support most of the young people as they approach transition and for several of the young people this has resulted in robust transition plans.
- **Relationships with children** - There is evidence that practitioners across the partnership have invested time, effort and energy into building meaningful and positive relationships with children.

#### Gaps in Assurance:

- **Mental Capacity Assessment** - There was a lack of clarity from practitioners about who should be completing mental capacity assessments to inform the assessment of need by both adults and children's social care, and Children's Social Care practitioners advised they did not feel equipped to undertake the assessment.
- **Contingency Planning** – Whilst planning in itself was relatively positive, one of the key issues identified was a lack of contingency and parallel planning for these young people in terms of their transition and next steps into independence. This should include better consideration of the family network both in assessment of and planning for transition into adulthood.
- **Timeliness of referral** – Children's Social Care and CAMHS must ensure timely referral to Adult Social Care to enable assessment and planning.

#### This audit led to the following actions:

- Development a joint training plan for adult and children's social care to enable all practitioners to better understand each other's legislative and practice frameworks – Completed
- Development of a transitions pathway so there is a clear understanding of expectations – Completed.
- Provision of Mental Capacity Act and Deprivation of Liberty training for Children's Social Care in order to develop a competent and confident workforce in carrying out Mental Capacity Assessments for young people aged 16 and 17. – Completed.

## Q3: Audit on Adolescents receiving support at Level 3 Early Help

This audit was undertaken to provide an insight into the effectiveness of multi-agency practice for adolescents aged 13 and over who are currently being support at Level 3 Early Help.

#### Assurances included:

**Timely Referrals** - referrals were generally timely and appropriate and there was a consensus that the families were being held at the right threshold for support.

**Multi-Agency Planning** - there was evidence of SMART plans that were generally focused on the right level of intervention for the family.

**Relationships with children and families** - there was evidence of excellent engagement work with families which resulted in some positive outcomes for the children and families.

#### Gaps in Assurance:

**Think Family** – the partnership must ensure it is always thinking family and considering the differentiated needs of children of different ages, taking into account the experiences of older siblings in informing our understanding of their lived experiences and considering the family networks outside of the home.

**Knowledge of roles and responsibilities** - Greater awareness is required across the safeguarding system of the school nursing offer and how this can be accessed.

**This audit led to the following actions:**

- Promotional work required by school nurse service to ensure all services are clearly aware of the offer and the referral process.
- CAMHS to complete assurance activity regarding the risk assessment of those children on waiting lists and report to PQA via agency report.
- Assurance work relating to supervisions to be completed by Early Help to inform their understanding of practice and feedback to PQA via agency report

**Q4: First 1001 Days**

**Assurances included:**

**Working with Fathers** – There was evidence within this audit that professionals had engaged with both parents and there was evidence that ICON had been discussed with Dad

**Relationships with children and families** - There is evidence that practitioners across the partnership have invested time, effort and energy into building meaningful and positive relationships with children and parents. This has been a strength within all audits conducted this year.

**Gaps in Assurance:**

**Was Not Brought** - Missed Opportunities within Health 0-19 service to robustly follow-up non-attendance at appointments.

**Lack of Escalation** – Despite sharing concerns during audit for one of the children, there had been no escalation.

**Information Sharing** – In a number of the audits, the GP had not been communicated with and was therefore unaware of the nature of the concerns for the child.

**Section 11 and Care Compliance Audit**

The Section 11 and Care Compliance Audit Tool was developed regionally to streamline work and avoid replication for agencies that share a geographical proximity. On the 27<sup>th</sup> February 2023 the West Midlands Regional MASA group launched the online audit tool for the completion of organisation/agency self-assessments in accordance with Section 11 Children Act and Section 43 of the Care Act 2014. The audit was completed by the agencies in the first quarter of 2023/24 and analysed by the WSP ahead of an assurance event on 9<sup>th</sup> August 2023. Hosted by the Independent Chair and Scrutineer for the Adult and Children Partnerships, the event provided a “check and challenge” opportunity for partners to reflect on the grading in their self-assessments and to discuss what action was needed to address areas for improvement.

The services which attended the assurance event are outlined below. Each organisation that completed the audit has an individual action plan arising from the audit and the discussions arising from the assurance event. In 2024/2025 progress against the action plans will be tested via dip-samples and visits to some of the agencies. In 2025/26 the audit will be completed again.

Black Country Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust	Black Country ICB	Change Grow Live (Walsall Substance Misuse Service)	Walsall Council - Adult Services	West Midlands Ambulance Service	West Midlands Fire Service
West Midlands Police	Walsall Housing Group	Walsall Council - Youth Services	Walsall Council Sports, Culture & Leisure	Walsall Healthcare Trust (WHT)	
Walsall Council - Public Health	Walsall Council - Housing	Walsall Council - Childrens Services	Walsall Council (Licensing authorities)	Street Teams	Probation Service (Walsall and Wolverhampton)



## Workforce Learning and Development

Walsall Safeguarding Partnership is keen to promote a learning culture for its workforce to enable them to be reflective and responsive to the needs of children, young people and families. The Practice, Learning and Development (PLD) Sub-Group oversees the coordination of multi-agency training, the embedment of learning arising from national and local reviews and policy changes and multi-agency audit outcomes. The training provided by WSP is aligned with the WSP priorities, learning from local and national CSPRs, SARs and multi-agency audit activity and incorporates relevant guidance from Working Together 2023, Care Act 2014 and Children's Act 2004.

Below is a flavour of some of the courses we have provided this year (not an exhaustive list). We are grateful to our regional partners in the Violence Reduction Partnership for the provision of Exploitation and Trauma Informed Practice training and sessions on serious violence; National Colleagues at the Centre of Expertise for Sexual Abuse for delivery of the CSA range of courses and our local substance misuse service – Change, Live, Grow (CGL) for courses on drug and alcohol awareness and hidden harm. The WSP also operates a multi-agency training pool made up of Children's Social Care, Local Authority Exploitation Team and Early Help practitioners. One area of focus for 2024 is to expand contributions to that pool from other organisations.

Courses delivered face to face or virtual	E-Learning
Right Help, Right Time (Threshold)	Adults Safeguarding Awareness Level 1
Right Help, Right Time Refresher (Threshold)	ICON – Babies Cry You Can Cope
Intra-familial Child Sexual Abuse	Children's Safeguarding Awareness Level 1
Speaking to children about sexual abuse	Private Fostering Module
Spotting the signs and indicators of child sexual abuse	Understanding Mental Capacity Act Level 2
Hidden Harm Training	Understanding Neglect Level 1
Outcome Star – Voice of the Child	
Serious Violence Duty Briefing	
Exploitation Webinar	
Drug and Alcohol Awareness – New and Emerging Trends	
Supporting Families Coordinator (Lead Professional) Training	
Learning from Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SAR's)	
Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB)	
Launch of the working with Father's Strategy	

We've seen a significant increase in the training and development activity provided through the partnership this year. We've almost tripled the number of events scheduled, rising from 52 in 2022/2023 to 144 this year, a number of which have been conference events. 1,617 bookings were made of which 1,333 attended (82% completion rate) which is positive. E-learning also increased from 1,123 in 2022/23 to 2,877 this year. Training attendance is largely multi-agency but we have noted from the independent evaluation of W6 that Children Social Care are the service which access most opportunities so greater targeted and assurance seeking of other statutory services needs to occur in 2024/25.

<b>Events:</b> 144	<b>Event Occurrences:</b> 162	<b>Places Offered:</b> 2,412	<b>Bookings:</b> 1,617
<b>Cancellations:</b> 352	<b>Attended:</b> 1,333	<b>No Shows:</b> 284	<b>Attendance %:</b> 82%
<b>No Show %:</b> 18%	<b>Utilisation %:</b> 55%	<b>Trainers:</b> 12	<b>Venues:</b> 8
<b>eLearning Taken:</b> 2,877	<b>On Waiting Lists:</b> 50		

## Event Impact Statements

Impact evaluations from training events. Pre-evaluation forms completed on the day of attendance at training to self-measure prior knowledge/skill. Post-session evaluation form at the end of the training events to self-evaluate the learning that has taken place and to commit to actions to implement the learning. Post course impact evaluations sent out eight weeks after the course to the delegate to ascertain how learning from the training has been applied in practice and what the outcomes have been.

### Some feedback from this year's events include:

*'The learning will enhance my practice with individual parents and help address their specific needs.'* - **Domestic Abuse Practitioner, Probation Services, Trauma Informed Training - What is Trauma?**

*'I thought the course was very well presented, I enjoyed the subject matter as it was very thought provoking.'* - **Advanced Practitioner, Mental Health, Trauma Informed Training - What is Trauma?**

*'I thoroughly enjoyed the training and learnt so much from other professionals. It was interesting to know how different thresholds are in different sectors. Would highly recommend this training to my colleagues and will use this in my day to day practice. Thank you so much.'* - **Social Worker, Children's Services, working together to meet the needs of children & young people who have displayed Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB)**

*'This workshop was so necessary and should be mandatory for all health and social care organisations and partners'* - **Social Worker, Adult's Services, Learning from Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SARs)**

*'It is always beneficial to attend a training session when real life experiences and good practice are shared'* - **Infant School, Child Sexual Abuse Workshop: Hearing and Responding to allegations/disclosures and the role of the professional network**



### Right Help, Right Time Launch February 2024

The Right Help, Right Time (RHRT) Threshold Guidance was developed with partners and launched in October 2019. The guidance required reviewing and refreshing in line with evolving and current safeguarding practice in Walsall. The MASH Management Group were delegated responsibility for the review of the guidance and was guided by evidence and intelligence gleaned from a range of activities.

The consultation period for the review of the document was between June and September 2023 and this included:

1. Review of feedback from RHRT training.
2. Feedback from practitioner on their views, i.e. any barriers to using the guidance/its application in practice.
3. Learning arising from audits and performance data.
4. Consideration to the learning and changes to the Early Help Supporting Families Programme.

The revised threshold was relaunched at a conference in February 2024 with 162 practitioners. It can be accessed here [Right Help Right Time - A Multi-Agency Guidance on the Continuum of Need \(walsallsp.co.uk\)](https://walsallsp.co.uk/Right-Help-Right-Time-A-Multi-Agency-Guidance-on-the-Continuum-of-Need)

# Independent Scrutiny and Assessment of Partnership Effectiveness

This year the WSP received independent scrutiny of its children's safeguarding work from **Sally Hodges, Independent Scrutineer** and of its adults safeguarding work from **Derek Benson, Independent Chair**. Given the departure of the Children's Independent Scrutineer the Executive have taken the decision to trial a shared arrangement in 2024/2025, intending to recruit one Independent Person to provide the scrutiny function across the children's and adults arrangements.

The Independent Chair and Independent Scrutineer have chaired the Performance and Quality Assurance (PQA) Sub-Groups given the risks identified with the lack of partnership data and intelligence throughout this report. They also chair the Safeguarding Leadership Groups for Adults and Children and attend the WSP Executive, in which they to present their assurance and challenge report.

In the absence of the scrutineer at the time of writing this annual report, below is a summary of the assurances and challenges presented to the WSP Executive and the action taken:

- It was highlighted to WSP Executive that work in respect of CSA would benefit from more targeted oversight via the introduction of a CSA sub-group following learning from the W6 Independent Evaluation. **WSP Executive made CSA the fourth priority in 2023-2024**
- It was highlighted that whilst a robust neglect strategy has been developed, further work is required to ensure that it is embedded in practice and improved outcomes for children evidenced. **Executive noted that further promotion of the strategy would be highlighted at 'See, Hear and Respond to Child Neglect Conference' and through the additional Neglect training offer and that this area would continue to be monitored.**
- The challenges in developing a robust data dashboard was escalated by both Children's and Adult scrutineer / chair. **Executive requested a diagnostic report from the Business Unit from which a new Quality Assurance Framework was developed. Work to develop and embed data and intelligence into the work of the partnership continues into 2024 as the partnership recognises there is opportunity for continued growth. Executive have added this to their risk register.**
- Lengthy and significant delays in obtaining expert reports and post-mortem reports in suspected serious child safeguarding incidents, infanticide, and child homicide cases was discussed with the Executive as a contributing factor for the two serious case reviews which cannot be published due to ongoing criminal justice processes. It was understood that the problem has arisen due to the complex national commissioning arrangements and the availability and recruitment of Forensic Post-mortem and Specialist Health Consultants nationally. **WSP Executive wrote to the Secretary of State to highlight the challenges this presented.**
- Continuing governance issues between Safer Walsall Partnership and Walsall Safeguarding Partnership relating to domestic abuse and exploitation have been reported by both the Adult and Children's Chair / Scrutineer. **This issue remained unresolved at year end. There are plans to hold a development session with both partnerships in which this issue will be addressed. Executive have added this to their risk register.**

**Working Together states that independent scrutiny can be delivered through a range of methods and structures. Some additional scrutiny that the WSP welcomed during this period includes:**

**Neglect Conference** – Bridget Griffin, independent consultant supported our Neglect Conference, speaking about the learning from a national Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews and supporting reflection about how practice in Walsall aligns itself with these best practice principles. Outcomes from this event informed the Neglect Sub-Group action plan.

**SCR W6 learning themes independent evaluation** – In addition to what has been noted throughout this report; the evaluation made a number of observations about the wider partnership systems and governance:

- "The overarching impression from the document review was of strong leadership from the multi-agency partnership with strategic direction and priorities owned at a senior level".
- "Audit processes are well developed and integrated into system improvement".
- "Supervision policies – single and multi-agency are in place".

## Priorities for 2024-2025

The key priority areas identified for the WSCB in 2023 – 24 continue to be the main priority areas for further development and embedment for the Partnership in 2024/25.

- ❖ **Priority 1** – **Neglect**
- ❖ **Priority 2** – **Self-Neglect and Hoarding**
- ❖ **Priority 3** – **All-Age Exploitation**
- ❖ **Priority 4** – **Child Sexual Abuse**

Following the restructure of WSP arrangements, the Business Unit has begun work to review the WSP governance including all layers of the WSP sub-structure. This is to continue into 2024-2025 in order to test whether the new arrangements are effective in fulfilling the requirements of Working Together 2023.

A focus for 2024/25 is improving the communication between the Safeguarding Partnership and other Boards/Partnerships to avoid duplication in terms of discussions at sub-Group meetings and to ensure that resources are used to best effect when addressing areas of practice where there is a shared interest.



# Appendices

## Appendix 1. Financial Summary

A single funding arrangement is in place for WSP covering the joint arrangements for the Safeguarding Adults Board and Safeguarding Children Partnership.

The contributions from partners for WSP for 2023/24 is set out below:

Income 2023-24		Expenditure 2023-24		
Organisation	Contribution £		Budget	Actual Expenditure
			£	£
WM Police	33,988	<b>STAFFING</b>		
ICB	97,500	Employees (permanent)	258,091	146,769
Probation	1,500	Agency & Consultants	0	301,521
Walsall Council – Adults and Children	244,662			
Walsall Healthcare Trust	10,000			
		<b>TOTAL STAFFING</b>	<b>258,091</b>	<b>448,290</b>
<b>Total Income WSAB and WSCP</b>	<b>387,650</b>	<b>NON - STAFFING</b>		
		Professional Services (Chair costs, consultancy etc.)	60,000	57,891
		CSPR / SAR & Other scrutiny work	20,717	20,491
		Development activities	15,000	20,721
		Other service costs (website, memberships etc.)	21,005	20,328
		<b>TOTAL NON-STAFFING</b>	<b>116,722</b>	<b>119,431</b>
		<b>INCOME</b>		
		Contributions from partners	130,151	142,988
		Walsall Local Authority	244,662	244,662
		Other income		16,100
		S31 Grant		47,300
		<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>374,813</b>	<b>451,050</b>
		<b>NET POSITION</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>116,671</b>

There was a reserve balance of £299.260 which was carried forward from 2022-2023. Expenditure is broadly in line with the previous year, except for a slight increase in the staffing expenditure due the ongoing interim appointments to cover the vacant Business Manager. There was also a Section 31 Grant from the Department for Education to support the embedding of Working Together 2023



**November 2024**

**Title of the Report** Private Fostering

**Ward(s):** All

**Portfolios:** Cllr Stacie Elson

## **1. Aim**

- To provide an update to the Scrutiny Committee in respect of Private Fostering. To provide assurances around how Walsall Safeguarding partnership has delivered its duties and functions in relation to private fostering and how the welfare of privately fostered children have been safeguarded and promoted during the last 12 months period. This report also outlines the activities which have been undertaken to promote awareness of the notification requirements regarding children who are privately fostered.
- To support proposals for the ongoing implementation and development of Private Fostering both internally and across the wider partnership.

## **2. Recommendations**

That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

1. Note the Private Fostering report and the progress made to date.
2. Support the safeguarding partnership in driving accountability across the wider partnership and community in raising awareness of children who reside in Private Fostering arrangements.

## **Report**

Thousands of children across Britain live with adults who aren't their parents in private fostering arrangements. They may be teenagers who have a poor relationship with their parents, children from overseas sent to live with family friends for a better life, or their parents may be in prison, ill or serving in the armed forces.

Private fostering may often be safe and appropriate however there are equally vulnerabilities and potential risks for this hidden group of children. It is imperative that the wider partnership and community are alert to the potential for a privately fostered child and know what to when such a situation is recognised. Each partnership agency is responsible for the distribution and awareness raising of private fostering.

## **Performance:**

Performance relating to private fostering has significantly improved in the past three years. To show the improving performance of PF awareness I shall set this out over the past three years.

### **2021-2022**

We received 8 private fostering contacts received into MASH and 6 children privately fostered across the year

### **2022-2023**

Between October 2022 and October 2023 there had been eighteen children that had been identified as living in a private fostering arrangement. This was an increase of 200% compared to previous reporting year. Furthermore, in total we received 14 MASH contacts whereby children were identified as potentially living within a private fostering arrangement and this was an increase of 75%.

### **2023-2024**

Between 1<sup>st</sup> November 2023 and October 2024 we received 26 contacts to MASH. This is an increase of 85% compared to previous reporting year.

There have been 16 children that have been living in a private fostering arrangement. Whilst this is a slight decrease in last year's reporting it should be acknowledged that last year we had seen a 200% increase in the numbers of children being privately fostered therefore arguably this is still a consistent increase of children privately fostering since we commenced increased private fostering awareness across the partnership. Some of these arrangements have now ended for differing reasons as set out in annual report. We currently have eight children that are known to be living within a private fostering arrangement.

This data shows a significant increase in the number of contacts received which is an indication that private fostering awareness is becoming better recognised amongst the local authority, partners and the wider public.

## **Notifications / Referral source**

Reasons for a child living in private fostering arrangements:

- Living with great Aunt as father has criminal convictions that preclude him from caring for children
- Four children have experienced a family breakdown and living with family friends
- Young person is aged 15 is an expectant father with his 15 year old girlfriend and wants to live with the same household
- Parental poor health
- Parent deceased, a will was completed which consented for the child to live with their cousin
- Moved to live in the UK with elder boyfriend and his parents.

## **Notifications / Referral source**

Of the 16 children that were identified as being privately fostered across the year the following table outlines how we became aware of the arrangement:

Allocated Social Worker	4
Education	1
Early Help Practitioner	1
Health	1
Another Local Authority	1
Parent / Carer	8

Of the 26 MASH contacts received-

Education	5
Home Office	6
Health	2
West Bromwich Albion Football Club	1
Private Foster Carer	7
Another Local Authority	1

Across the 12 months we can see that the identification of the number of children in private fostering arrangements has increased. We can also see that there is a varied source from across the partnership which would support the view that the awareness raising and training offer is having a positive impact. We recognise that the number of children does remain low and there is further work to do so that this is progress to be maintained and built upon.

Throughout the year of 2023-2024, the following activities were undertaken:

- PF leaflets for children, parents and carers are available on Walsall Partnerships website
- PF leaflets and posters are visible in all family hubs across the locality and have been distributed to a number of agencies that are linked to the local community and through HAF.
- A PF awareness raising video is available on the partnership website
- A PF 7 minute briefing has been developed and is available on the partnership website
- The partnership officers continue to raise awareness with the early help partnership throughout their menu of training opportunities including; ACTION training where we raise awareness of Early help Supporting families lead professional training – for professionals who want to understand how to support families at level 3 early help
- Outcome star training
- Private fostering has been included in all DSL/refresher training, PF leaflet has been emailed out to all educational establishments and across Early Years.
- Private fostering is included within any induction programme for a new starter in Children Services

- A private fostering scenario is included within the Right Help Right Time multiagency training.
- PF has been added as an agenda item to Early Help, Health, Education Children Services briefings throughout the year.
- PF has also been added to Walsall Safeguarding Partnership Spotlight newsletter on two occasions throughout the year.
- We have celebrated PF awareness day on 8<sup>th</sup> November 2023 by ensuring that we have visibility on the internal Walsall website and are due to celebrate PF awareness day on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2024
- On 15<sup>th</sup> February 2024 Councillor Stacie Elson, Portfolio Holder for Children's Services Walsall Council released a press release- [Are you caring for somebody else's child? Walsall Council is here to help | Walsall Council](#)-
- Attendance at GP training event

#### **4. Financial information**

Privately fostered children do not receive a fostering allowance from the Local Authority. The guidance stipulates that financial sustenance for the carers is the responsibility of the parents. There may be a requirement to provide services under section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

#### **5. Reducing Inequalities**

The number of identified private fostering arrangements in Walsall remains low and it is believed that this is due to non-identification rather than non-existence of such arrangements. Private Fostering remains an area of practice that brings challenges in both workforce understanding, awareness across partnerships and the wider Walsall community. There is emerging understanding of process around private fostering assessments and the roles and responsibilities of the children's social worker and the fostering social worker. There is evidence of robust safeguarding activity taking place and no child has been left at risk in a private fostered arrangement.

Children in private fostering situations can be invisible as has previously been stated. Whilst it is important that we act promptly and follow due process when a child has been identified, it is equally important to raise awareness and urge both the public and professionals to report signs of informal care arrangements for children who are being cared for by a person who is not their parents.

#### **6. Review**

Private fostering continues to be a priority for 2024 and is an identified area for improvement following the last OFSTED inspection in October 2021. Arrangements are in place to evidence how we will continue to raise awareness.

A main priority is to ensure on-going promotion to maintain awareness around the notification process of private fostering for professionals, carers, and young people.

Advice and support must be provided to private foster carers, parents of privately fostered children and to the children themselves. This may include advice on child development, religious or cultural issues, relevant training opportunities and

accessing universal benefits/ finances. All children who are subject to private fostering arrangements remain an open case and are subject to regular monitoring and support services.

Private Fostering remains an area of practice that brings challenges in both workforce understanding, awareness across partnerships and the wider Walsall community.

There is an understanding of process around private fostering assessments and the roles and responsibilities of the children's social worker and the fostering social worker is now better understood. Given the small numbers of children privately fostered this is still not routine for many social workers. Although we have experience of undertaking Private Fostering Assessments across all four localities in Walsall.

It is important that Children's Social Workers understand and are able to recognise a private fostering arrangement. The PF toolkit, awareness raising, training and changes to the mosaic workflow all support the development of this.

There has been a significant increase in the number of private fostering contacts and arrangements over the past three years, indicating improved awareness and reporting.

Revised protocols ensure timely assessments by locality and fostering social workers, with ongoing monitoring via the locality Group manager. Private fostering arrangements are tracked and audited regularly to ensure compliance with regulations and to identify areas for improvement.

Throughout the year various initiatives, including leaflets, videos, training sessions, and newsletters, have been implemented to raise awareness about private fostering among professionals and the public.

**Future Actions:** Plans include targeted communications, regular training, and collaboration with various sectors to continue raising awareness and improving the identification of private fostering arrangements.

## **Background papers**

### **Private Fostering Annual Report**

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Walsall Council

# Private Fostering

Annual Report 2023/2024

**Produced by:**

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Walsall Council

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## **BACKGROUND**

This is the Annual Private Fostering Report covering November 2023 until October 2024.

This report details how Walsall Safeguarding Partnership has delivered its duties and functions in relation to private fostering and how the welfare of privately fostered children has been safeguarded and promoted during the last 12 months period. This report also outlines the activities which have been undertaken to promote awareness of the notification requirements regarding children who are privately fostered.

## **LEGISLATION AND GUIDANCE**

The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005, the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering (2005) and the Replacement Children Act 1989 Guidance on Private Fostering (2005):

The local authority is required to:

- Promote awareness of the notification requirements for private fostering
- Publish a written statement on private fostering
- Safeguard and promote the welfare of the privately fostered children
- Provide advice and support to privately placed children, young people, parents, and carers.
- To consider the implications of these new regulations, national minimum standards, and guidance.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The Children Act 1989 defines private fostering as occurring 'when a child under 16 (or under 18 if disabled) is placed for more than 28 days in the care of someone who is not a close relative, guardian or someone with parental responsibility'.





Private fostering is not the same as mainstream fostering services, which is delivered by the public, private or voluntary sector. Private fostering is an arrangement between a parent/s and someone who they nominate to care for their child or children.

The Children's Act 2004 introduced a tighter framework for private fostering, and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2015, and the amended S67 of the Children Act 1989, strengthens the duties upon local authorities in relation to private fostering. This includes a duty for parents and private foster carers to notify the local authority about their proposed or current private fostering arrangement.

### **DEFINITION OF PRIVATE FOSTERING**

A private fostering arrangement is essentially an arrangement between families/households, without the involvement of a local authority, one that is made privately, for the care of a child under the age of 16 (under 18, if disabled) by someone other than a parent or close relative, with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more. Private Foster Carers may be from the extended family, such as a cousin or great aunt, or they may be a friend of the family or other non-relative, such as the parents of the child's friend. A person who is a close relative of the child, as defined by the Children Act 1989 – a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether by full or half blood or by marriage, civil partnership or step-parent) – will not be a Private Foster Carer.

Examples of private fostering arrangements are:

- Children sent from abroad to stay with another family, usually to improve their English or for educational opportunities.
- Asylum seeking and refugee children.
- Teenagers who, having broken ties with their parents, are staying in short term arrangements with friends or other non-relatives.
- Children living with host families, arranged by language schools or other organisations.



- Children of prisoners placed with distant relatives.
- Children living with members of the extended family, e.g. great aunt.
- Children attending a football academy and residing with extended family/friend

The primary responsibility of the local authority is to safeguard and promote the welfare of these children and young people by:

- Meeting the duty to promote public awareness of the requirement to notify the local authority of private fostering arrangements and, therefore, to reduce the number of 'unknown' private fostering arrangements.
- Responding to notifications and assessing the private fostering arrangements; and meeting the duty to support private fostering arrangements. This responsibility is underpinned by the Replacement Children Act 1989 Guidance on Private Fostering; Children Act 2004 (Section 44 amends Section 67 in the 1989 Act); the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering 2005.

## **PERFORMANCE**

To show the improving performance of PF awareness I shall set this out over the past three years.

### **2021-2022-**

- We received 8 private fostering contacts received into MASH and 6 children privately fostered across the year.

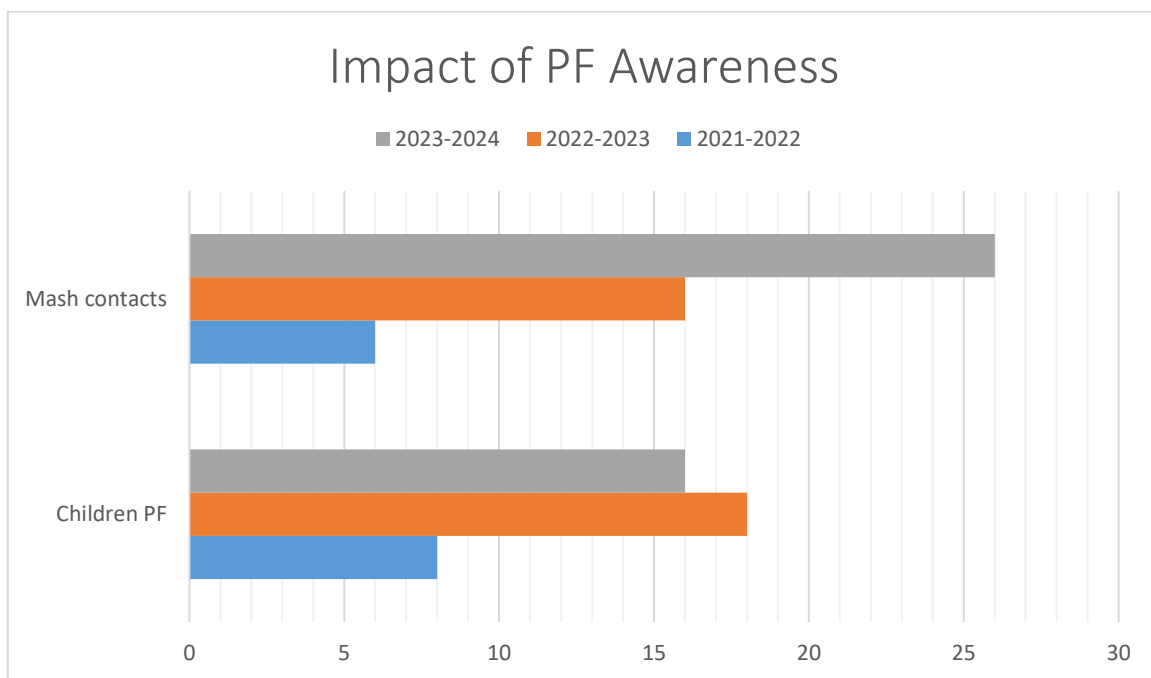
### **2022-2023-**

- Between October 2022 and October 2023 there had been 18 children that had been identified as living in a private fostering arrangement. This was an increase of 200% compared to previous reporting year. Furthermore, in total we received 14 MASH contacts whereby children were identified as potentially living within a private fostering arrangement and this was an increase of 75%.

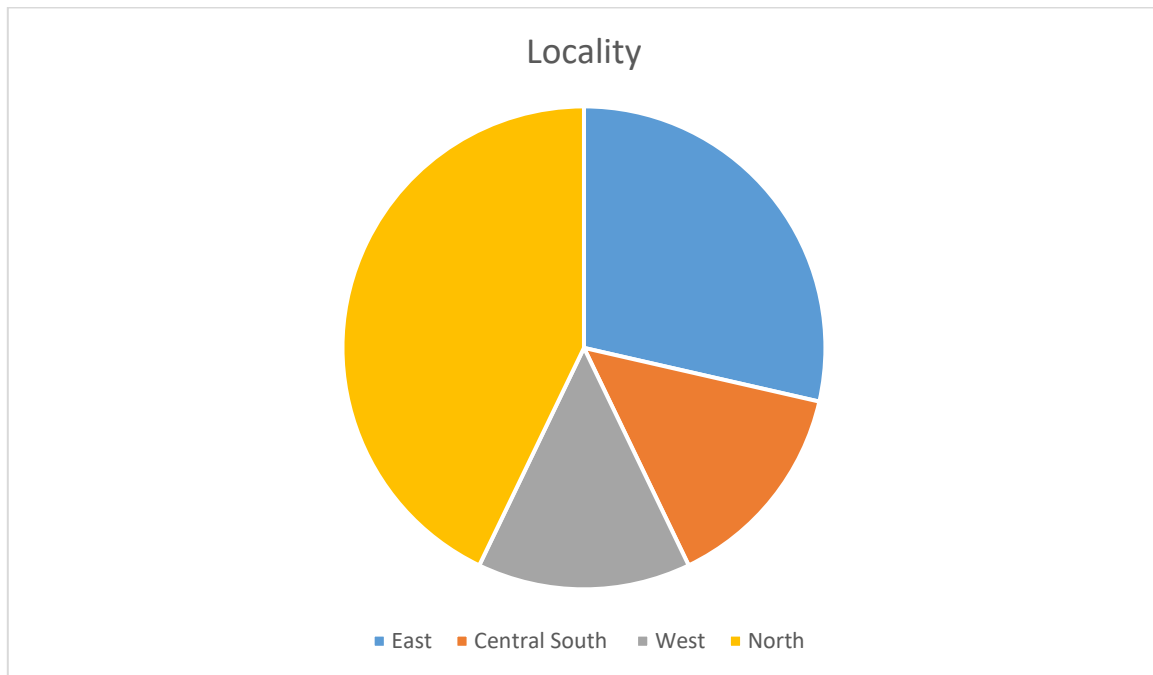


**2023-2024**

- Between 1<sup>st</sup> November 2023 and October 2024 we received 26 contacts to MASH. This is an increase of 85% compared to previous reporting year.
- There have been 16 children that have been living in a private fostering arrangement. Whilst this is a slight decrease in last year's reporting it should be acknowledged that last year we had seen a 200% increase in the numbers of children being privately fostered therefore arguably this is still a consistent increase of children privately fostering since we commenced increased private fostering awareness across the partnership. Some of these arrangements have now ended for differing reasons that will outline later in the report. We currently have 8 children that are known to be living within a private fostering arrangement.



This data shows a significant increase in the number of contacts received which is an indication that private fostering awareness is becoming better recognised amongst the local authority, partners and the wider public.

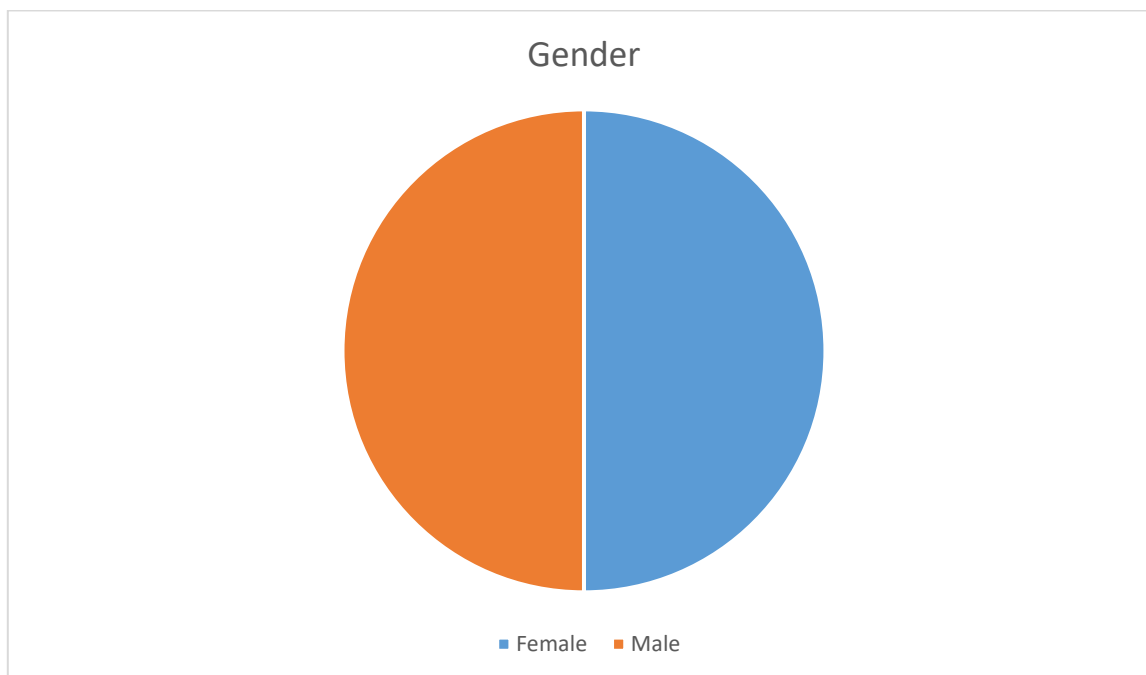


Above is a pie chart representing the identification of children whom are currently privately fostered :

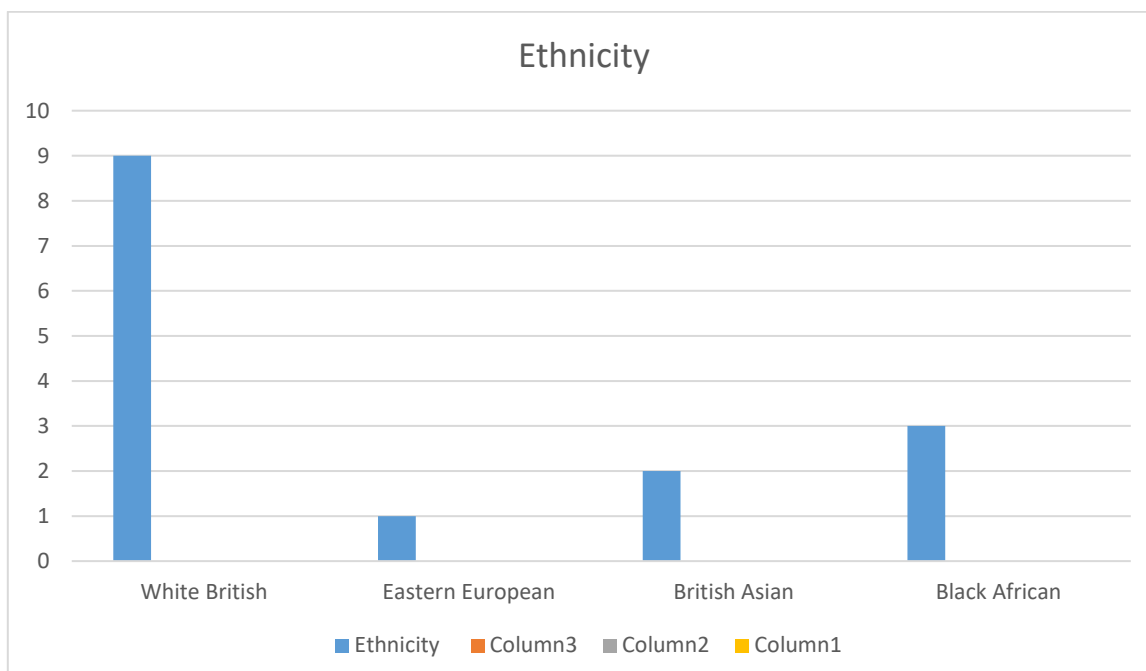
- **East locality:** Two siblings aged 7 and 8
- **Central and South:** One female aged 10
- **West locality:** One male child aged 12
- **North Locality-** One sibling group of three children

We do not currently have any children that have been privately fostered for more than 12 months.

Of the children in Walsall whom have been privately fostering across the year the following has been identified :



Eight of the children identify as female and eight identify as male.





White British children continue to be the highest reported number of children whom are living in privately fostered arrangements.

Reasons for a child living in private fostering arrangements:

- Living with great Aunt as father has criminal convictions that preclude him from caring for children
- Four children have experienced a family breakdown and living with family friends
- Young person is aged 15 is an expectant father with his 15 year old girlfriend and wants to live with the same household
- Parental poor health
- Parent deceased, a will was completed which consented for the child to live with their cousin
- Moved to live in the UK with elder boyfriend and his parents.

**Notifications / Referral source**

Of the 16 children that were identified as being privately fostered across the year the following table outlines how we became aware of the arrangement:

Allocated Social Worker	4
Education	1
Early Help Practitioner	1
Health	1
Another Local Authority	1
Parent / Carer	8

Of the 26 MASH contacts received:

Education	5
Home Office	6
Health	2
West Bromwich Albion Football Club	1
Private Foster Carer	7
Another Local Authority	1



Across the 12 months we can see that the identification of the number of children in private fostering arrangements has increased. We can also see that there is a varied source from across the partnership which would support the view that the awareness raising and training offer is having a positive impact. We recognise that the number of children does remain low and there is further work to do so that this is progress to be maintained and built upon.

Reasons identified for eight children no longer being identified as private fostered:

Young Person turned 16 years old	3
Returned to parent's care	3
Moved to live with alternative carer	2

**Staffing**

There are revised protocols in place to ensure that private fostering arrangements are appropriately assessed. The assessment is undertaken jointly by the locality social worker and the fostering social worker. This assessment should be completed within 42 days. There has been a review and amendment of the private fostering mosaic workflow procedure. The impact of the changes is significant as it means when a child is recognised as being privately fostered, the fostering team will also be notified and the Private Fostering Assessment on the adult is opened and subsequently allocated. Prior to the commencement of the Private Fostering Assessment a meeting will take place between the locality social worker and the fostering social worker to plan out the assessment and ensure there is clarity around roles and responsibilities. The Group Manager for Provider Services continues to give authorisation for the suitability of this arrangement and should a child be living within an privately fostered arrangement for more than 12 months the Group Manager for provider Services would also review the annual review report and provide management overview and direction should this be necessary.



If, at any stage of the assessment of the private foster carers, information is obtained, which suggests that a child already placed with the private foster carer may be a Child in Need, the manager may authorise services under a Child in Need Plan and/or a Child and Family Assessment is to be carried out alongside the assessment of the private foster carer. The Child and Family Assessment is undertaken by the child's locality social worker.

In the event of a refusal of any person to cooperate with the making of the necessary checks, the social worker should advise the private foster carers that they cannot be recommended as suitable and advise the parents of the reason why alternative arrangements will have to be made for the child. Any action required to secure the child's safety would be considered and legal advice sought as necessary. This is evidenced in previous years as public law orders have been applied for.

If any information comes to light during the course of the private foster carer assessment, for example as a result of the Disclosure and Barring Service checks, which may preclude the person from fostering a child, the social worker should prepare a report to the Group Manager for consideration. Immediate consideration should also be given to the arrangements for the child and if necessary child protection procedures should be followed.

### 3. Procedures

**National Minimum Standard 1: The local authority has a written statement or plan which sets out its duties and functions in relation to Private Fostering and the ways in which they will be carried out.**

Private Fostering arrangements in Walsall are set out in the Statement of Purpose. These were updated in October 2021 to reflect the changes in responsibilities in Children's Services. This is available on the Children's Services website.





The Statement of Purpose meets the requirements of Standard 1 and provides guidance for professionals, members of the public and other agencies on the policy and procedural requirements relating to Private Fostering.

A private fostering toolkit has also been developed with the aim was to assist in identifying and assessing children who are privately fostered. The toolkit supports the assessment and clearly outline the responsibilities of Walsall Local Authority when a child is privately fostered. The documents and resources include power point presentation- briefing for all professionals on private fostering, Private Fostering - Visits and Assessments – Practice Guidance, Coram BAAF Guidance - Completing good private fostering assessment and private fostering leaflets for children and carers.

## **National Minimum Standard 2:**

### **2.1 The local authority:**

**2.1.1 Promotes awareness of the notification requirements and ensures that those professionals who may come into contact with privately fostered children understand their role in notification;**

**2.1.2 Responds effectively to notifications; and**

**2.1.3 Deals with situations where an arrangement comes to their attention, which has not been notified.**

The Children Act 2004 places a duty on local authorities to promote public awareness in their area of the statutory notification requirements regarding Private Fostering. The Group Manager for Private Fostering is responsible for developing a strategy with the support of the Safeguarding Partnership to raise public and professional awareness about private fostering.

The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 outlines the requirement for anyone involved in making a private fostering arrangement must notify the relevant local authority.



Parents and carers often fail to notify the local authority because they are unaware of these requirements and believe this is a private family arrangement.

As soon as a local authority becomes aware of a proposed arrangement to privately foster a child or young person within their area, or where a child or young person is being privately fostered within their area, the local authority must assess the suitability of the arrangement.

Whilst local authorities do not formally approve or register private foster carers, they have a duty to satisfy themselves that the welfare of a privately fostered child or young person within their area is being safeguarded and promoted.

Parents making such an arrangement should inform the local authority of their intention before the start of any private fostering arrangement. In reality, across the country, most parents do not do this.

Therefore, the Walsall Safeguarding Partnership must be able to rely on GP's, teachers, primary health, faith organisations and other staff working with children to make a referral to the local authority's children's social care if:

- They become aware of a private fostering arrangement which is not likely to be notified to the local authority
- They have doubts about whether a child's carers are actually their parents, and there is any evidence to support these doubts

Throughout the year of 2023-2024, the following activities were undertaken:

- PF leaflets for children, parents and carers are available on Walsall Partnerships website
- PF leaflets and posters are visible in all family hubs across the locality and have been distributed to a number of agencies that are linked to the local community and through HAF.
- A PF awareness raising video is available on the partnership website
- A PF 7 minute briefing has been developed and is available on the partnership website



- The partnership officers continue to raise awareness with the early help partnership throughout their menu of training opportunities including;  
ACTION training where we raise awareness of Early help  
Supporting families lead professional training – for professionals who want to understand how to support families at level 3 early help  
Outcome star training
- Private fostering has been included in all DSL/refresher training, PF leaflet has been emailed out to all educational establishments and across Early Years.
- Private fostering is included within any induction programme for a new starter in Children Services
- A private fostering scenario is included within the Right Help Right Time multiagency training.
- PF has been added as an agenda item to Early Help, Health, Education Children Services briefings throughout the year.
- PF has also been added to Walsall Safeguarding Partnership Spotlight newsletter on two occasions throughout the year.
- We have celebrated PF awareness day on 8<sup>th</sup> November 2023 by ensuring that we have visibility on the internal Walsall website and are due to celebrate PF awareness day on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2024
- On 15<sup>th</sup> February 2024 Councillor Stacie Elson, Portfolio Holder for Children's Services Walsall Council released a press release- [Are you caring for somebody else's child? Walsall Council is here to help | Walsall Council-](#)
- Attendance at GP training event

Of significance this year we received our first referral from West Bromwich Albion football club notifying us that they had a 15 year old male whom had recently signed a two year scholarship with the team. We learnt that the young person is living with a host family and who care for two other young people. Upon further exploration this was not deemed a privately fostered arrangement as the young people would regularly (within the 28 days) return to parents care for a weekend stay. Through this referral



we were able to establish a connection with the team and were assured that should it such arrangements exceed 28 days or if they had another arrangement then they would refer to children services.

A further example of the impact of awareness raising is that we received a freedom of information request (FOI) in regard to private fostering.

**National Minimum Standard 3: the Local Authority determines effectively the suitability of all aspects of the Private Fostering arrangements in accordance with the regulations**

Following an initial suitability assessment, the assessment of potential private foster carers is undertaken jointly with the child's social worker and a worker from Family Placements.

The decision making and authorisation regarding the ongoing suitability or otherwise of these arrangements is now consistently undertaken by Group Manager for Fostering Services. This can include making a determination that the arrangements and the carer are not suitable for the child.

All children have their own allocated worker who will support and work with the child and their carers during assessment and following agreement regarding the suitability of the placement.

All children identified as living in a private fostering arrangement are tracked and discussed every four weeks by the locality Children's Group Manager during permanency panel. Within this, police checks, references, DBS, medicals, assessment completion is all considered. A tracker is in place which identifies all children privately fostered and those that have ceased to be privately fostered. Assessments are concluded timely and appropriate checks are in place.



**National Minimum Standard 4: the local authority provides such advice and support to Private Foster Carers and prospective Private Foster Carers as appears to the authority to be needed**

As with other families, the allocated social worker will provide advice and guidance in relation to parenting, managing boundaries and any challenging behaviours. They also provide advice and support to private foster carers regarding securing a permanent arrangement for a child by way of a legal order if appropriate. There would also be assistance with practical issues for carers around benefits, housing and immigration status if required. Children Services would ensure that all carers had support in accessing education and health provision for the child or young person. Any training that may be appropriate to private fostering carers is considered on a case by case basis.

**National Minimum Standard 5: the local authority provides advice and support to the parents of children who are Privately Fostered within their area as appears to the authority to be needed.**

The child's social worker will also support the child and birth parents to repair their relationship as far as possible and, on a number of occasions in the last 12 months; they have been instrumental in enabling children to return back to their parent.

Where possible all parents are seen and spoken to during the course of the private fostering assessment.

A leaflet designed for parents, the private foster carers and the placed child is also provided.

**National Minimum Standard 6: children who are privately fostered are able to access information and support when required so that their welfare is**



**safeguarded and promoted. Privately Fostered children are enabled to participate in decisions about their lives.**

The child's social worker must visit a privately fostered child and regularly see the child on their own. Visits take place in the family home and at school, dependent on the age of the child and what is most appropriate for that child. This enables the child's views in relation to the living arrangements to be sought and reflected both in their record and in subsequent discussions with their carers and parents.

At 12 months, should a child remain in a private fostering arrangement, then an annual review is held, and the child is actively encouraged to attend. We currently do not have any young people who have been privately fostering for 12 months.

**Standard 7: The local authority has in place and effectively implements a system for monitoring the way in which it discharges its duties and functions in relation to private fostering. It improves practice where this is indicated as necessary by the monitoring system:**

All information pertaining to children and young people is placed onto Mosaic. Information stored on this system can be utilised for performance reports. This includes age of the child, place of birth, ethnicity, first language and any disability. As part of the Quality Assurance Framework any private fostering arrangement is subject to an auditing process and the qualitative and quantitative information obtained is reported to the quality assurance subgroup. Changes to the mosaic workflows, establishment of the PF toolkit and development of the PF tracker has greatly supported in improving practice.

An audit tool has been developed and audits have taken place this year. This was undertaken by Group Manager, MASH team manager, duty and assessment team manager, fostering team manager and private foster senior social worker. This is to ensure that there is learning from both elements of the children and fostering service.



The audits have evidenced that progress has been maintained in respect of the identification of a PF arrangement, appropriate checks undertaken and assessments concluding timely.

A main priority is to ensure on-going promotion to maintain awareness around the notification process of private fostering for professionals, carers, and young people.

Advice and support must be provided to private foster carers, parents of privately fostered children and to the children themselves. This may include advice on child development, religious or cultural issues, relevant training opportunities and accessing universal benefits/ finances. All children who are subject to private fostering arrangements remain an open case and are subject to regular monitoring and support services.

## 7. Conclusions

Private Fostering remains an area of practice that brings challenges in both workforce understanding, awareness across partnerships and the wider Walsall community.

There is an understanding of process around private fostering assessments and the roles and responsibilities of the children's social worker and the fostering social worker is now better understood. Given the small numbers of children privately fostered this is still not routine for many social workers. Although we do have experience of undertaking Private Fostering Assessments across all four localities in Walsall.

It is important that Children's Social Workers understand and are able to recognise a private fostering arrangement. The PF toolkit, awareness raising, training and changes to the mosaic workflow all support the development of this.

There has been a significant increase in the number of private fostering contacts and arrangements over the past three years, indicating improved awareness and reporting.



Revised protocols ensure timely assessments by locality and fostering social workers, with ongoing monitoring via the locality Group manager. Private fostering arrangements are tracked and audited regularly to ensure compliance with regulations and to identify areas for improvement.

Throughout the year various initiatives, including leaflets, videos, training sessions, and newsletters, have been implemented to raise awareness about private fostering among professionals and the public.

**Future Actions:** Plans include targeted communications, regular training, and collaboration with various sectors to continue raising awareness and improving the identification of private fostering arrangements.

- Quarterly safeguarding partnership implementation group meetings
- Twice annually re-distribute electronic version of PF toolkit for professionals who are in regular contact with children and families including details of who to contact to report a case of private fostering.
- Twice yearly, include information on Walsall Safeguarding Partnership website/newsletter reminding practitioners of their responsibility to refer into children services
- Private fostering has been incorporated into the mandatory RHRT safeguarding training for all social workers, early help practitioners and staff through the Walsall Safeguarding Partnership
- Printed and electronic information to continue to be distributed through existing channels for professionals including GP safeguarding bulletins, CCG intranet/website and communications group, school safeguarding contacts, Head teacher forums, NHS Trust e-bulletin, School Health Nurse staff briefings, Schools e-bulletin, Voluntary Sector Council, Religious groups, Refugee and Migrant Centre, Police intranet/e-bulletins, West Midlands Fire Service.
- Each Locality has a Time to Talk Partnership event which occurs bi monthly, PF awareness to be included within this and revisited twice per year.





- Each Locality also has a Lead Early Help Participation Officer whom is able to consistently raise the awareness of PF when meeting with the locality professionals.
- Adding information / leaflet design on the family hub communication TV screens
- Raise awareness of private fostering with the early help volunteers
- Development of private fostering dash board.

### **Schools & childcare settings:**

- PF to be discussed in DSL workshops and Head Teacher forums.
- Work with the School Admissions Team to identify where the adult making the application was not the parent or close family member.
- Revisit information about private fostering on schools e-bulletin with a reminder to school staff that they need to let us know of any private fostering arrangements they become aware of.

### **Online and social media:**

Further press release to be undertaken in time for Private Fostering Awareness day on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2024.

Private fostering continues to be a priority for 2024/2025 and is an identified area for improvement following the last OFSTED inspection in October 2021. Arrangements are in place to evidence how we will continue to raise awareness. It is recognised that understanding private fostering is complex and therefore a collaborative approach is essential in developing relationships across each sector.

*Private Fostering  
Children's Overview and Scrutiny  
Committee  
November 2024*



Walsall Council

PROUD OF OUR PAST OUR PRESENT AND FOR OUR FUTURE

# Purpose



- To support proposals for the ongoing implementation and development of Private Fostering both internally and across the wider partnership.
- To consider how Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee can support in raising awareness of Private Fostering



# What is Private Fostering?

## 7 Minute Briefing: Private Fostering



**7**

**What to do**

- If you know or suspect a child or young person is being Privately Fostered, you should notify the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub. You should inform the parent and/or carer about Private Fostering and inform that a referral is being made. Phone: 0300 555 2866 ([0300 555 2866](tel:03005552866))

For more information please scan the QR code.

**6**

**Notification**

- Parents and carers have a legal requirement to notify the Local Authority of a proposed Private Fostering Arrangement 6 weeks prior to the arrangement being in place, or, if in an emergency, as soon as possible.
- Parents are responsible for providing the carer with all the information needed to care for the child/young person.

**5**

**Examples of children who may become privately fostered**

- A child or young person sent (for educational or medical purposes) from another country to live with someone who is not their parent, carer with parental responsibility or close relative whilst their parents remain abroad.
- A child or young person living with a family friend as a result of their parents breaking up, family fall out or a parent in hospital or in custody. holistic perspective of what is happening.

**4**

**Legal requirement**

- Private Fostering is only legitimate if the parent has made the arrangement with the carer and the Local Authority is notified and in agreement. By law, parents/carers must notify the Local Authority of any Private Fostering Arrangement.
- The Local Authority will check that the child/ young person are kept safe, well cared for (in appropriate accommodation) and happy.

**1**

**What is Private Fostering?**

- Private Fostering is a term used when someone who is not a parent, carer with parental responsibility or a 'close relative' (a close relative includes grandparent, aunt, uncle, sibling or 1st cousin) is looking after a child or young person under 16 (18 if the young person has a disability) for 28 days or more in their own home.
- Private Fostering also covers children or young people who stay at a residential school for more than two weeks during the school holidays.

**2**

**Background**

- Since the Children Act 2004, it has been a legal responsibility for a Local Authority to know about children and young people who are Privately Fostered. Children's Services have a duty to assess and monitor arrangements to make sure the child or young person is safe, and their needs are being met.

**3**

**Why does it matter?**

- Private foster carers carry out a vital role in the welfare of children, and they are always offered support and guidance to carry out their roles – but it can only be offered if the arrangement is known. Many private fostering arrangements can remain hidden, which could put children at risk of abuse. For example, Victoria Climbié was a child brought into the UK by a distant relative, who went on to abuse and neglect Victoria and cause her death - this was an unreported Private Fostering Arrangement.

To find out more, read the Inquiry by Lord

# Private Fostering

***'A private fostering arrangement is essentially one that is made privately (that is to say without the involvement of the Authority) for the care of a child or young person under the age of 16 (under 18 if disabled) by someone other than a parent or close relative with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more .... The period for which the child is cared for or accommodated by the private foster carer should be continuous, but that continuity is not broken by the occasional short breaks'***

(National Minimum Standard for Private Fostering DFES 2005)

Many children who are privately fostered are not known to services, agencies or people working with them.

- Privately fostered children are much more vulnerable because of their 'invisibility' and because services do not always record and report information about them.
- Under new regulations, identifying, recording and reporting children who may be privately fostered is everyone's responsibility – the responsibility falls on all those people or agencies who come into contact with children and young people in their work.

Privately fostered children are often made more vulnerable by their living circumstances and by their status not being identified and reported to the Local Authority.

It is estimated that about 10,000 children in England are privately fostered.

It is likely that more than 50% of private foster arrangements are not notified to Local Authorities.

We currently have **8** children that are privately fostered in Walsall.

Current examples of PF arrangements in Walsall :

- Two children have experienced a family breakdown and living with friends of the family
- Parents have poor health and are staying with family friends
- Parent deceased, a will was completed which consented for the child to live with their cousin
- Moved to live in the UK with elder boyfriend and his parents

#privatefostering #awarness

## Throughout the year of 2024 the following activities were undertaken...

### PF Awareness and Resources

A PF awareness raising video is available and A PF 7 minute briefing PF leaflets for children, parents and carers are available on Walsall Partnerships website.

PF leaflets and posters are visible in all family hubs across the locality and have been distributed to a number of agencies that are linked to the local community and through HAF.

PF leaflets and posters are available on the website.

### Training and Awareness

The partnership officers continue to raise awareness with the early help partnership throughout their menu of training opportunities including; ACTION training where we raise awareness of Early help, Supporting families lead professional training – for professionals who want to understand how to support families at level 3 early help and Outcome star training.

Private fostering has been included in all DSL/refresher training, PF leaflet has been emailed out to all educational establishments and across Early Years.

Private fostering is included within any induction programme for a new starter in Children Services.

A private fostering scenario is included within the Right Help Right Time multiagency training.

### Communication and Visibility

1. PF has been added as an agenda item to Early Help, Health, Education Children Services briefings throughout the year.
2. PF has also been added to Walsall Safeguarding Partnership Spotlight newsletter on two occasions throughout the year.
3. We have celebrated PF awareness day on 8th November 2023 by ensuring that we have visibility on the internal Walsall website and are due to celebrate PF awareness day on 6th November 2024.
4. On 15th February 2024 Councillor Stacie Elson, Portfolio Holder for Children's Services Walsall Council released a press release- Are you caring for somebody else's child? Walsall Council is here to help | Walsall Council.
5. Attendance at GP training event.



## Private fostering is defined as:

"When a child or young person under 16 years old (or 18 if they have a disability) is cared for by someone who is not a parent, close relative, guardian or person with parental responsibility for 28 days or more without the content involvement of Walsall Council."

An arrangement is likely to be private fostering if the child lives with:

- Cousin
- Friend or neighbour
- Host family
- Great aunt/uncle
- Great grandparent
- A divorced step-parent
- Independent boarding school (if the child remains for more than two weeks during the holidays)
- Cultural use of aunt or uncle who are no blood relation

## Close relatives are defined as:

- Brothers and sisters
- Aunts and uncles
- Grandparents
- Step-parents

It is not private fostering if the arrangement has been made by Walsall Council or if the person looking after the child is an approved foster carer. Some of the common reasons why private fostering takes place are:

- A child's parents are overseas
- A child lives with their best friend's parents because they have had an argument with their own parents
- A young person is living with the family of their boyfriend/girlfriend
- Children are on a cultural exchange which last for more than 27 days
- A family friend takes on a child as the parents are experiencing a difficult period in their life
- Children are in the country for health or education opportunities
- Children are at boarding school
- Refugee children or unaccompanied asylum seekers



# Main Impacts

There have been 16 children that have been living in a private fostering arrangement. When compared to 2021 we only had 6- an increase of 166%.

There has been a significant increase in the number of private fostering contacts and arrangements over the past three years, indicating improved awareness and reporting.

Revised protocols ensure timely assessments by locality and fostering social workers, with ongoing monitoring via the locality Group manager. Private fostering arrangements are tracked and audited regularly to ensure compliance with regulations and to identify areas for improvement.

Throughout the year various initiatives, including leaflets, videos, training sessions, and newsletters, have been implemented to raise awareness about private fostering among professionals and the public.

# Ongoing areas of improvement

- **Future Actions:** Plans include ongoing targeted communications, regular training, and collaboration with various sectors to continue raising awareness and improving the identification of private fostering arrangements.
- Further press release to be undertaken in time for Private Fostering Awareness day on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2024.

#privatefostering #awarness

**Children's Services  
Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**5 NOVEMBER 2024**

**Draft Revenue Budget and Draft Capital Programme 2025/26 – 2028/29**

**Ward(s)** All

**Portfolios:** Cllr S Elson – Children's

**Executive Summary:**

The draft budget, as reported to Cabinet on 16 October 2024, includes an update on the medium term financial outlook (MTFO) for the four-year period from 2025/26 to 2028/29. It also outlines the draft revenue budget for 2025/26 to 2028/29 (including savings proposals identified to date for consultation), the draft capital programme for 2025/26 to 2028/29, and sets out the process and timescale for setting a legally balanced budget for 2025/26.

Our MTFO has been updated for all known pressures, including best professional assumptions around the cost-of-living impact, and that on rising demand on our services. Due to the size and breadth of cost pressures, this has had a significant impact on the assumptions in relation to the 2025/26 budget, with additional growth and demand pressures now required of c£48.87m, resulting in a budget gap of c£11.05m.

The Council is legally obliged to set a one-year balanced budget (2025/26), however a medium-term approach is beneficial to allow for sound financial planning and to support future financial stability. The proposals set out in this report do not yet balance the budget for 2025/26, so there will be a requirement to report back on changes and options to close the gap at the January 2025 meeting of Cabinet. All draft proposals are subject to changes arising from the Autumn Budget due on 30 October 2024, and the local government finance settlement yet to be received (provisional settlement anticipated mid December 2024 and final settlement in early February 2025). A number of draft saving proposals are also included for 2026/27 to 2028/29, with further options being identified to allow for a balanced budget over the MTFO period aligned to the Council Plan.

The 2025/26 draft budget includes a proposed 2.99% increase in general council tax along with an additional 2% precept for Adult Social Care, which aligns with current referendum guidelines. The government is yet to confirm its policy on council tax referendum principles and the future status and rate of the Adult Social Care precept, which are anticipated to be detailed in the provisional 2025/26 settlement expected in December 2024.

The draft capital programme for 2025/26 totals £80.14m. It sets out capital investment funded from the council's own resources of £48.95m (funded by capital receipts and borrowing) and externally funded schemes of £31.19m (funded by capital grants) and represents a balanced programme for 2025/26. In addition, the report sets out a further three years of indicative proposals to 2028/29. Despite reductions in capital funding in recent years and going forward, the draft capital programme contains significant investment into regeneration initiatives,

highways, education, and into adults and children's social care and housing to support vulnerable households.

This report provides an extract of the draft revenue savings proposals and growth and demand pressures for 2025/26 – 2028/29 by the ambitions of the new Council Plan, which fall within the remit of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration. It also provides a summary of the draft capital programme for schemes within the remit of this Committee.

Feedback from the Committee on the draft revenue and capital proposals to date will be reported back to Cabinet in January 2025 for consideration.

The revenue proposals set out in the report to Cabinet on 16 October 2024 do not yet balance the budget for 2025/26, so there will be a requirement to report back on changes and options to close the remaining c£11m gap at the January 2025 meeting of Cabinet, and subsequent report to this committee should any changes relate to services within the remit of this committee.

The draft budget and its assumptions are under constant review particularly in volatile demand led services. The growth and demand assumptions within these areas include future projections of which there is a degree of uncertainty on whether these would materialise. On this basis the growth assumption would not be fully funded but identified as part of the budget risk assessment, which informs the suggested earmarked and general reserve levels. The results of this assessment will be presented to Cabinet and Council in the final budget report.

The final draft budget will be considered by Cabinet on 12 February 2025 for recommendation to Council on 26 February 2025. Any changes to draft revenue and capital budget proposals as a result of equality and health impact assessments and consultation will also be fed into the final budget report.

### **Reason for scrutiny:**

To enable consultation of the draft revenue and capital budget proposals for services within the remit of this Committee.

### **Recommendations:**

#### **That:**

1. The Committee are recommended to consider the draft revenue budget proposals to date as attached that relate to the remit of this committee as shown in **Appendices 1 and 2**, and that feedback will be presented to Cabinet in January 2025.
2. The Committee note that the revenue budget for 2025/26 is currently not balanced, with a gap of c£11m, and therefore a further report may be required to this committee if any changes to draft proposals outlined relate to services within the committee's remit.
3. The Committee are recommended to consider the draft capital schemes included in the draft capital programme attached that relate to the remit of this committee as shown in **Appendices 3 and 4**, and that feedback will be presented to Cabinet in January 2025.



## Background papers:

Various financial working papers.

## Resource and legal considerations:

Cabinet on 16 October 2024 were presented with a list of draft revenue savings proposals for consultation and a list of growth and demand pressures, along with a draft capital programme over the period 2025/26 to 2028/29.

The full Cabinet report can be accessed at the following link:

[Draft Revenue Budget and Draft Capital Programme 2025/26 - 2028/29 - Cabinet 16 October 2024](#)

Further to the changes in assumptions, the draft budget 2025/26 – 2028/29 includes growth and demand pressures of c£129m (£48.87m of this is in 2025/26). Those growth and demand pressures relating to the remit of this Committee are shown at **Appendix 1** and total £21.78m over 4 years.

## Savings proposals

The current budget proposals include £28.88m of savings to be delivered for 2025/26 (including the review of the £10.38m identified in the budget report to Council in February 2024). There is also £18.96m identified for 2026/27, £12.35m for 2027/28 and £12.10m for 2028/29. Current savings proposals total to £72.29m over the 4 years of the MTFO. Savings are classified into two categories:

1. Policy Proposals - which require an Executive decision to proceed, and which will be referred for public consultation and equality and health impact assessment. These total £0.51m in 2025/26 (remains the same over the four years to 2028/29).
2. Operational Proposals – savings which officers have delegations to implement; examples include restructures, back-office savings, operational efficiencies. These total £28.37m in 2025/26 (£71.78m over the four years to 2028/29).

Some proposals require investment to support delivery. Such investment will only be allocated if the relevant saving proposal is included within Cabinet's final budget report in February 2025, once consultation and equality and health impact assessments has concluded.

Savings proposals outlined in the report to Cabinet on 16 October 2024 will assist in closing the gap over the four years to 2028/29. A gap of £11.05m remains after the delivery of the £28.88m saving identified for 2025/26. Directors continue to work on identifying additional options for Members consideration, and further reports will be presented to Cabinet outlining further options to balance the budget for 2025/26 onwards.

Those savings proposals relating to the remit of this Committee are shown at **Appendix 2** and total £23.41m over 4 years.

The following table summarises the net change in the budget position by Directorate for 2025/26.

<b>Directorate</b>	<b>Growth and Demand pressures £m</b>	<b>Savings £m</b>	<b>Net £m</b>
Adult Social Care and Public Health	25.03	(8.87)	16.16
Children's Services and Education	10.62	(7.45)	3.17
Economy, Environment and Communities	4.12	(3.80)	0.32
Resources and Transformation	2.00	(1.55)	0.45
Central / Capital Financing*	7.09	(7.21)	(0.11)
<b>Total Net Growth and Demand Pressures by Directorate</b>	<b>48.87</b>	<b>(28.88)</b>	<b>19.99</b>

\*Central growth and demand pressures includes £6.21m of pay and pension costs which will be allocated to services following a detailed review of salary budget requirements.

Based on the current proposals all Directorates would see a net increase in their budgets for 2025/26.

### Draft Capital Programme

The draft capital programme for 2025/26 is balanced and totals £80.14m. It sets out new capital investment funded from the council's own resources of £48.85m (funded by capital receipts and borrowing) and externally funded schemes of £31.19m (funded by capital grants). In addition, the report sets out a further three years of indicative proposals to 2028/29.

Those council funded schemes relating to the remit of this Committee are shown at **Appendix 3** totalling £0.35m over 4 years. There are no external funded schemes within the remit of this committee.

### Summary of Children's Services budgets

A summary of the growth and demand pressures and savings within Children's Services has been included within **Appendix 5** for noting, in addition to an overview of the total budgets within the service.

#### **Contact Officers:**

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**APPENDIX 1**

**Summary of Growth and Demand Pressures 2025/26 to 2028/29 aligned to the ambitions of the Council Plan relating to the remit of this Committee**

Directorate	Ref No	Details of Growth and Demand Pressures	2025/26 £	2026/27 £	2027/28 £	2028/29 £	Total £
<b>Child-friendly borough</b>							
<b>Children's Services &amp; Education</b>	9	Children's young carers service	17,184	0	0	0	17,184
	10	Carer allowances uplifts	113,800	116,000	0	0	229,800
	11	External framework placement uplifts	286,416	292,144	297,987	0	876,547
	12	Carer fee uplifts	78,000	81,000	84,000	0	243,000
	13	Children in care growth	2,095,454	1,368,105	1,593,340	922,961	5,979,860
	14	Children placement moves	2,284,523	2,430,219	2,509,860	2,592,688	9,817,290
	18	Short breaks increased costs and demand	200,000	0	0	0	200,000
	19	Independent visitor	20,000	0	0	0	20,000
	20	Family time services additional workers to meet increased demand	100,000	0	0	0	100,000
	21	Management team localities	155,000	0	0	0	155,000
	22	Transition and leaving care staffing team	72,200	0	0	0	72,200
	23	Children & Young People Alliance	125,993				125,993
	24	Regional adoption agency increases	50,000	0	0	0	50,000
	25	Framework placements inflation increase	38,584	37,856	39,013	344,000	459,453
	26	New adolescent service (linked to saving OP19)	5,701	0	0	0	5,701
	27	New internal residential home to open from 2026/27 (linked to saving OP23)	0	631,970	45,583	0	677,553
	28	Revenue costs for new internal residential home opened 2024/25 (linked to saving OP24)	677,553	0	0	0	677,553
	29	Internal residential career pathway to support recruitment and retention (linked to saving OP24)	61,000	0	0	0	61,000
	30	Emergency foster carer scheme (linked to saving OP 25)	121,000	4,840	5,034	5,235	136,109
	31	Housing project (linked to saving OP26)	58,000	25,000	(10,000)	0	73,000
32	Independent fostering agency framework retender outcome	457,531	235,268	259,511	140,514	1,092,824	
33	Staying put allowance uplifts	24,000	24,960	25,958	26,997	101,915	
34	Carer fee uplifts	20,000	21,000	22,000	110,100	173,100	
35	Carer allowances uplifts	102,000	106,080	110,323	114,736	433,139	
<b>Total Child-friendly borough</b>			<b>7,163,939</b>	<b>5,374,442</b>	<b>4,982,609</b>	<b>4,257,231</b>	<b>21,778,221</b>
<b>Total Growth and Demand Pressures relating to the remit of this Committee</b>			<b>7,163,939</b>	<b>5,374,442</b>	<b>4,982,609</b>	<b>4,257,231</b>	<b>21,778,221</b>

## APPENDIX 2

**Savings for 2025/26 to 2028/29 aligned to the ambitions of the Council Plan relating to the remit of this Committee.**

### **A: Summary of Policy Proposals by Council Plan ambition 2025/26 – 2028/29**

None relating to the remit of this Committee.

### **B: Summary of Operational Proposals by Council Plan ambition 2025/26 – 2028/29**

Directorate	Ref No	Detail of Policy Proposals by Council Plan ambition	2025/26 £	2026/27 £	2027/28 £	2028/29 £	Total £
<b>Child-friendly borough</b>							
<b>Children's Services &amp; Education</b>	<b>OP10</b>	Recruitment & retention of internal foster carers	(600,000)	(600,000)	(133,905)	0	(1,333,905)
	<b>OP11</b>	Specialist foster placements	(694,000)	(432,000)	0	0	(1,126,000)
	<b>OP12</b>	Extend the family safeguarding programme into corporate parenting	(698,167)	(863,605)	(863,605)	(863,605)	(3,288,982)
	<b>OP13</b>	Continued focus on placement step downs	(439,174)	0	0	0	(439,174)
	<b>OP14</b>	Adolescent service - early help	(1,724,981)	(1,724,981)	(1,724,981)	0	(5,174,943)
	<b>OP17</b>	Reduced management costs following integration of early help into children's social care	0	(100,000)	0	0	(100,000)
	<b>OP18</b>	Recruitment & retention of Internal foster carers	0	0	(600,000)	(600,000)	(1,200,000)
	<b>OP19</b>	Adolescent service - increase existing sustainability and transformation plans linked to Family Pathfinder	(200,854)	(177,679)	(177,679)	(1,902,660)	(2,458,872)
	<b>OP20</b>	Families First for Children Pathfinder Programme - additional connected carers	(184,835)	(295,476)	(295,476)	(295,476)	(1,071,263)
	<b>OP21</b>	Families First for Children Pathfinder Programme - care avoidance	(297,525)	(550,523)	(550,523)	(550,523)	(1,949,094)
	<b>OP22</b>	Families First for Children Pathfinder Programme - lower cost placements	(247,467)	(634,220)	(634,220)	(634,220)	(2,150,127)
	<b>OP23</b>	New internal residential home to open from 2026/27 creating additional internal placements	0	(633,862)	(452,759)	0	(1,086,621)
	<b>OP24</b>	Placement sufficiency, an opportunity to open further internal residential homes from 2025/26	(999,078)	(87,542)	0	0	(1,086,620)
	<b>OP25</b>	Emergency foster carer scheme	(390,000)	0	0	0	(390,000)
	<b>OP26</b>	Housing project	(409,000)	(8,000)	(8,000)	0	(425,000)
<b>OP27</b>	Seek alternative funding - Children & Young People Alliance	(125,993)	0	0	0	(125,993)	
<b>Total Child-friendly borough</b>			<b>(7,011,074)</b>	<b>(6,107,888)</b>	<b>(5,441,148)</b>	<b>(4,846,484)</b>	<b>(23,406,594)</b>
<b>Total Operational Proposals relating to the remit of this committee</b>			<b>(7,011,074)</b>	<b>(6,107,888)</b>	<b>(5,441,148)</b>	<b>(4,846,484)</b>	<b>(23,406,594)</b>

**Draft Capital Programme 2025/26 to 2028/29 aligned to the ambitions of the Council Plan – Council Funded Schemes relating to the remit of this Committee.**

**Prior Year Approval Schemes**

Directorate	Capital Scheme	Detail of Capital investment	2025/26 £	2026/27 £	2027/28 £	2028/29 £	Total £
<b>Child-friendly borough</b>							
Children's & Education	Residential Home New 2023	The project will provide a modern 4/5 bedroomed property that would be registered with Ofsted to provide accommodation for 3 children deemed to require complex care. The objectives of the project are to provide a safe and secure building that is fit for purpose, increasing sufficiency for children with more complex needs, to address current shortfalls in provision and to reduce dependence on high-cost provision. Since 2019/20 the total number of children in care has reduced from 671 to 650, however, due to the ongoing sufficiency pressures and the increasing number of complex cases, the number of children residing in an external residential home has risen from 37 to 73 in August 23. In addition, the average weekly cost of these placements has risen from £4.2k to £6.1k over the same period. By opening a new home, the service will have the ability to support the needs of our more complex children, who are currently residing in external residential or unregistered placements, at a lower cost than currently budgeted.	153,600	0	0	0	153,600
	Children in care Foster Care refurbishment programme	This funding is provided to enable foster carers and special guardians for children looked after by Walsall to enlarge their homes or in some circumstances, to obtain an alternative larger home.	51,236	0	0	0	51,236
<b>Total Child-friendly borough</b>			<b>204,836</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>204,836</b>
<b>Total Prior Year Approval Schemes</b>			<b>204,836</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>204,836</b>
<b>Total Draft Capital Programme – Council Funded Schemes within the remit of this Committee</b>			<b>204,836</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>204,836</b>



**Draft Capital Programme 2025/26 to 2028/29 aligned to the ambitions of the Council Plan – External Funded Schemes relating to the remit of this Committee.**

None relating to the remit of this Committee

## Summary of Children's Services budgets incl. Growth and Demand Pressures and Savings.

Since 2022/23, the growth and demand pressures relating to the remit of this committee total £35.94m. During the same period savings of (£10.44m) have been identified, reducing the total net investment down to £25.50m. This is detailed by year in the table below.

After two financial years of significant investment, the net investment request for 2025/26 (as at October 2024), has reduced to £0.15m.

### Total growth and demand pressures and savings

	2022/23 £m	2023/24 £m	2024/25 £m	2025/26 (as at Oct) £m	Total £m
Growth and Demand Pressures	6.06	16.53	13.35	7.16	35.94
Savings	-4.75	-2.29	-3.40	-7.01	-10.44
<b>Net Investment</b>	<b>1.31</b>	<b>14.24</b>	<b>9.95</b>	<b>0.15</b>	<b>25.50</b>

The table below details the total budget by service area and shows the budget increases across the service since 2021/22. The net investments detailed above (excluding 25/26), in addition to in year adjustments across the directorates, have increased the total Children's Services budget by £25.84m since 21/22, from £52.34m to £78.19m.

### Total budget by service area

Service Area	Total Budget 21/22 (£m)	Total Budget 22/23 (£m)	Total Budget 23/24 (£m)	Total Budget 24/25 (£m)	Movement from 21/22 to 24/25
Children's Wide	0.76	0.93	0.78	0.48	(0.28)
Children in Care (CiC)	25.95	27.41	38.90	47.35	21.39
Children's Social Care	20.42	20.98	23.82	25.69	5.27
Early Help and Commissioning Services	4.37	3.67	3.89	3.87	(0.50)
Early Help - Shortbreaks	0.85	0.81	0.81	0.81	(0.04)
<b>Total Budget</b>	<b>52.34</b>	<b>53.79</b>	<b>68.19</b>	<b>78.19</b>	<b>25.84</b>

Of the £25.84m budget increase, £21.39m lies within the Children in Care (CiC) placement budget. Over the past four years, there has been significant demand led pressures within the CiC placement budget. These pressures include:

- Changes in legislation requiring all placements to be regulated
- Placement sufficiency pressures which have created an increased reliance on higher cost / spot placements
- Ongoing placement cost increases linked to the cost of living and lack of suitable placements / competition in the market
- Increased number of children entering remand or secure placements
- Larger number of sibling groups entering care

- Increased complexities and vulnerabilities of young people entering care, including exploitation, mental health difficulties and emotional dysregulation, requiring Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards and additional support within the placements

To mitigate the impact of these pressures the service has identified multiple remedial actions and savings proposals. These include:

- The introduction of the Family Safeguarding model and more recently the Families First for Children pathfinder, which focuses on supporting families at an earlier stage to avoid entry into care
- Enhancement of the carer fees and allowances to support the recruitment and retention of internal carers, in addition to the creation of a specialist foster carer scheme
- The creation of three new internal residential homes to support placement sufficiency and assessments
- The introduction of the adolescent Turning Point and Youth in Sight services which supports adolescents at crisis point
- Additional programmes including the Family Drugs and Alcohol Courts.
- Additional focus on placement stability and step downs where achievable.

Of the £25.84m budget increase, £5.27m lies within the Children's Social Care core budget. Over the past four years, the service has focussed on developing a stable workforce to reduce reliance on agency and to provide the best service and outcomes for Walsall's children and young people.

To create this the service have developed their offer in the following ways:

- The implementation of a 9-day fortnight
- Retention payments
- A manageable caseload
- Clear career pathways with a comprehensive career development offer and specialist training
- Access to clinical supervision.

In addition, to avoid children entering care and to reduce the costs of those who do, the service has identified multiple remedial actions which are detailed above. In doing so, there has been revenue implications through the use of invest to save models. The additional investment has created new teams to support the projects detailed, further increased the Section 17 budget and supported the running costs of multiple new internal residential homes.

Although the budget for Early Help and Commissioning has reduced since 2021/22, the service has benefitted from some investment through the receipt of national grants, including Family Hubs, Holiday Activities and Food programme, Supporting Families, Youth Justice Turnaround, and Reducing Parental Conflict.

# **CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

## **DRAFT REVENUE BUDGET & DRAFT CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2025/26 – 2028/29**

**5<sup>th</sup> November 2024**  
**Tanya Collier**



**Walsall Council**

**PROUD OF OUR PAST OUR PRESENT AND FOR OUR FUTURE**

# Contents

- 1 Overview
- 2 Investments / Cost Pressures
- 3 Savings Proposals
- 4 Draft Capital Programme



# 1. Overview

The draft budget, as reported to Cabinet on 16 October 2024, includes an update on the medium term financial outlook (MTFO) for the four-year period from 2025/26 to 2028/29.

The MTFO is update for all known pressures, including best professional assumption around the cost-of-living impact and the impact of rising demand on our services.

Due to the size and breadth of cost pressures, this has had a significant impact on the assumptions in relation to the 2025/26 budget, with additional growth and demand pressures now required of c£48.87m, resulting in a budget gap of c£11.05m.

The proposals set out in this report do not yet balance the budget for 2025/26, so there will be a requirement to report back on changes and options to close the gap at the January 2025 meeting of Cabinet.

The final draft budget will be considered by Cabinet on 12 February 2025 for recommendation to Council on 26 February 2025.

## 2. Growth and Demand Pressures

Those growth and demand pressures relating to the remit of this Committee are shown at **Appendix 1** of the report and total **£21.78m** over 4 years.

The key investments relating to the remit of this committee include:

- Provision for future demand, placement moves, and cost increases relating to Children in Care;
- Provision for expected increases in fees paid to internal carers and the allowances paid to foster carers, special guardians and staying put placements;
- Expected inflationary increases to current framework placements;
- Additional staffing resource to meet increased demand;
- Investment to support the costs of new savings initiatives including an emergency foster carer scheme, the national housing project, and the opening of a new internal residential home.

# 3. Savings Proposals

Those savings proposals relating to the remit of this Committee are shown at **Appendix 2** of the report and total **£23.41m** over 4 years.

The key savings relating to the remit of this Committee include:

- Further recruitment and retention of internal foster carers;
- Creation of an emergency foster carer scheme;
- Extension of the family safeguarding model into corporate parenting;
- Continued focus on placement step downs;
- Implementation of new adolescent service supporting children with complex needs;
- Implementation of the Families First for Children Pathfinder;
- Implementation of the National Housing project scheme;
- Cost reductions expected from the creation of additional internal residential placements.

## 4. Draft Capital Programme

Those council funded schemes relating to the remit of this Committee are shown at **Appendix 3** of the report totalling £205k over 4 years. There are no external funded schemes reported within **Appendix 4** of the report.

The key capital projects within the remit of this Committee are:

- Funding to support foster carers and special guardians to alter or expand their homes;
- Funding to support the creation of a new internal residential home.

## 5. Overview of prior year budgets

As requested, an additional report summarising the budget growth over the past four years, relating to the remit of this Committee, has been included within **Appendix 5** of the report.

Since 2022/23, the growth and demand pressures relating to the remit of this committee total £35.94m. During the same period savings of (£10.44m) have been identified, reducing the total net investment down to £25.50m.

The net investments detailed above (excluding 25/26), in addition to in year adjustments across the directorates, have increased the total Children's Services budget by £25.84m, from £52.34m in 2021/22 to £78.19m in 2024/25.

Of the £25.84m budget increase, £21.39m lies within the Children in Care (CiC) placement budget due to significant demand led pressures which have been detailed within the report. To mitigate the impact of these pressures the service has identified multiple remedial actions and savings proposals, which has reduced the net investment request for 2025/26 to £0.15m.

Of the £25.84m budget increase, £5.27m lies within the Children's Social Care core budget. Over the past four years, the service has focussed on developing a stable workforce to reduce reliance on agency and provide the best service and outcomes for C&YP. In addition, there has been multiple investments linked to savings, including the creation of new teams, running costs of multiple new children's homes and increased demand for Section 17 support.

**Children's Services  
Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**DATE: 05 NOVEMBER 2024**

**CORPORATE FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE – QUARTER 2 FINANCIAL MONITORING  
POSITION FOR 2024/25**

**Ward(s)** All

**Portfolios:** Cllr S Elson – Children's Services

**1. Aim**

1.1 To provide the budget monitoring position for Period 6 2024/25. The Chair requested that this item be considered by the Committee.

**2. Recommendations:**

The Committee are requested to:

2.1 Note the revenue and capital forecast for the financial year end 2024/25 for the services under the remit of the committee.

**3. Report detail - Know**

3.1 This report summarises the forecast revenue and capital financial position for 2024/25, based on the position to September 2024, for services within the remit of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as reported to Cabinet on 16 October 2024. The full Cabinet report can be accessed by the following link:

[Corporate Financial Performance 2024/25 - Cabinet 16 October 2024](#)

3.2 The forecast revenue outturn for 2024/25 for the services under the remit of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee is an overspend of £2.59m after the net use of reserves of £1.40m, as shown in **Table 1**. The forecast revenue outturn shown is based on actual information from the financial system as at the end of August 2024, and discussions with managers regarding year end forecast and achievement of approved savings.

3.3. For completeness, the forecast revenue overspend for services under the remit of the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee is an overspend of £2.52m. This gives a total forecast position of an overspend of £5.11m for Children's Services directorate as of 30 September 2024.



<b>Table 1: Forecast revenue analysis 2024/25 by Service</b>						
<b>Service</b>	<b>Annual Budget</b>	<b>Year End Forecast</b>	<b>Net Use of Reserves</b>	<b>Action Plan</b>	<b>Draft Outturn after use of and transfer to Earmarked Reserves</b>	<b>Variance to Budget</b>
	<b>£m</b>	<b>£m</b>	<b>£m</b>	<b>£m</b>	<b>£m</b>	<b>£m</b>
Children's Wide	0.48	0.48	(0.00)	0	0.48	0.00
Children in Care (CiC)	47.35	49.35	(0.60)	0	48.75	1.40
Children's Social Care Core	25.69	26.96	(0.51)	0	26.46	0.77
Early Help and Commissioning Services	4.68	5.39	(0.29)	0	5.10	0.42
<b>Total Services within remit of Committee</b>	<b>78.19</b>	<b>82.18</b>	<b>(1.40)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>80.78</b>	<b>2.59</b>

3.4 The main variances are summarised in **Table 2** below.

<b>Table 2: Reasons for revenue outturn variance</b>		
<b>Service</b>	<b>Variance £m</b>	<b>Explanation of Year End Outturn</b>
Children's Wide	(0.00)	No variance.
Children in Care (CiC)	1.40	Overspend linked to ongoing increases in costs of placements for Children in Care (CiC) and changes in the mix of CiC, linked to placement sufficiency issues. Further detail is provided in Appendix 1.
Children's Social Care	0.77	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• £0.12m increased demand for occupational therapy equipment</li> <li>• £0.33m staffing and agency pressures across the service</li> <li>• £0.13m increased demand for section 17 support</li> <li>• £0.18m other non-staffing pressures relating to travel, premises, security costs and contract increases.</li> </ul>
Early Help and commissioning Services	0.42	Pressure within the shortbreaks service linked to increased demand to avoid children entering care and increased complexity of children using the service.
<b>Total Services within remit of this Committee</b>	<b>2.59</b>	

### 3.5 Reasons for Movements

The June forecast position reported to Cabinet in July 2024 was an overspend of £1.79m therefore there is a net increase in the overspend of £0.81m over the period. The key reasons for movements are detailed in **Table 3** below:

Table 3: Reasons for movements in variance		
Service	Movement £m	Explanation of Movement in Year End Variance
Children's Wide	(0.00)	No movement
Children in Care (CiC)	0.43	A detailed breakdown is provided in Appendix 1.
Children's Social Care	0.37	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>£0.06m increased demand for occupational therapy equipment</li> <li>£0.02m increased demand for section 17 support</li> <li>£0.20m staffing and agency pressures across the service</li> <li>£0.09m other non-staffing pressures relating to travel, premises and security costs.</li> </ul>
Early Help and Commissioning Services	0.00	No movement
<b>Total Movements for Services within remit of this Committee</b>	<b>0.81</b>	

### 3.6 Reserves

The total allocated reserves for 2024/25 for services under the remit of this committee are £3.37m, of which (£1.45m) has been used or committed to date and £0.05m will be transferred to reserves at the year-end, ringfenced for expected spend in 2025/26.

The use of reserves below is made up of:

- (£0.58m) external funding to support the Family Drugs & Alcohol Court Programme and Safeguarding Families Programme
- (£0.06m) Youth Justice reserves
- (£0.03m) net use of Supporting Families reserve
- (£0.26m) external funding to support the Family Hubs programme
- (£0.01m) contribution towards Regional Adoption Agency
- (£0.03m) funding to support regional training
- (£0.33m) use of corporate reserve to support the early opening of a new internal residential home
- (£0.15m) use of corporate reserve to fund additional management posts within safeguarding

**Table 4** below details the use of and transfer to reserves across the services within the remit of this committee.

Table 4: Summary of use of reserves and transfer to reserves				
Reserve Details	Allocated reserve	Use of reserve	Transfer to reserve	Balance of reserve
	£m	£m	£m	£m
Children's Wide	0.24	-	-	0.24
Children in Care	1.20	(0.60)	-	0.60

Children's Social Care	0.99	(0.51)	-	0.48
Early Help and commissioning services	0.94	(0.34)	0.05	0.65
<b>Total Reserves</b>	<b>3.37</b>	<b>(1.45)</b>	<b>0.05</b>	<b>1.97</b>

### 3.7 Risks

For the services under the remit of this committee, there are total risks of **£8.94** which are not included in the above forecast. At this stage the risks are not a certainty and as such are not included in the monitoring position. There are high risks of £2.23m relating to Services within the remit of this committee. If any risks became a certainty, they would need to be included in the forecast position as an overspend, unless alternative action can be identified to mitigate these costs. A summary of the risk assessment is shown in **Table 5** below.

<b>Table 5: Revenue Risks 2024/25</b>				
<b>Risk</b>	<b>Value £m</b>	<b>Ongoing £m</b>	<b>One Off £m</b>	<b>Actions to manage risk</b>
High	2.23	2.23	0	Additional resource in place to support with placement moves and cost increases. Introduction of the Families First Pathfinder to further avoid children entering care and reduce reliance on the S17 budget.
Medium	5.87	5.87	0	Savings reviewed monthly as part of the monitoring process. ICB contributions reviewed monthly with the Lead Commissioner and Health Partners. Retendering of the placement frameworks to reduce reliance on spot placements and effectively plan for inflationary increases.
Low	0.85	0.85	0	Monthly review of staffing and agency across the service. Monthly review to avoid any Family Hubs grant slippage in year.
<b>Total</b>	<b>8.94</b>	<b>8.94</b>	<b>0.22</b>	

The high risks (Red risk) that could negatively impact the current forecast position are detailed in **Table 6** below:

Table 6: High risks		
Service	Reason / explanation of risk	£m
Children in Care (CiC)	£0.55m risk of increased placement moves and step ups over and above the current position £0.60m risk of increased entrants to care, further impacted by reliance on higher cost placements £0.66m risk of current placements increasing in cost due to the complexity of cases.	1.81
Children's Social Care	The section 17 spend continues to be relied upon to support children coming into care pending the full implementation of the Families First for Children pathfinder.	0.42
<b>Total High Risks</b>		<b>2.23</b>

The medium risks include the risk of:

- current ICB contributions towards placement costs reducing or ending at the next review date
- amber savings not being achieved by the end of the financial year
- further uplifts and inflation requests from providers
- increased demand on non-staffing budgets e.g. travel and legal.

### 3.8 Service Transformation Plan Benefits

Included within the budget for 2024/25 for services within the remit of this Committee are £4.22m of approved savings. **Table 7** gives an update on progress towards implementing these benefits:

Table 7: Delivery of 2024/25 approved savings – services within the remit of this Committee					
Saving	Total savings £m	Delivered £m	To be delivered by 31/03/24 £m	Not fully guaranteed £m	At High risk of non-delivery £m
OP6 – Review of current establishment and reduction in the use of agency staff, following recruitment of permanent staff	(0.32)	-	-	(0.32)	-
OP57/60 - Further Recruitment & Retention of Internal Foster Carers	(0.81)	(0.20)	(0.25)	(0.36)	-
OP58 - Specialist Foster Placements – New Horizons Foster Carer Scheme	(0.46)	(0.19)	(0.13)	(0.14)	-
OP61 – Creation of a new internal residential home	(0.47)	(0.47)	-	-	-
OP62 – Extension of the Family Safeguarding programme into Corporate Parenting	(0.86)	(0.04)	(0.23)	(0.59)	-

OP64 – Continued focus on placement step downs	(0.59)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.51)	-
OP65 – Adolescent service – Complex needs	(0.71)	(0.09)	(0.41)	(0.21)	-
<b>Total approved savings for services within remit of Committee</b>	<b>(4.22)</b>	<b>(1.03)</b>	<b>(1.06)</b>	<b>(2.13)</b>	<b>(0.00)</b>

Each benefit is “BRAG” categorised as follows:

- Blue (delivered);
- Green (on track to be delivered with no issues at year end of 2024/25);
- Amber (not guaranteed at this stage but no major issues expected, some management action needed to ensure delivery) or,
- Red - (at high risk of not being achieved either in part or in full and therefore either alternative actions are required or a plan to ensure delivery is put back on track).

### 3.9 Capital Forecast

The capital programme for the services under the remit of the Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as at the end of September 2024, is £1.26m. As at September, it was expected that £0.95m will be fully spent within the current financial year and the remaining £0.31m will be carried forward into 2025/26. A list of schemes within the remit of this committee is shown in **Table 8**.

<b>Scheme</b>	<b>Approved Budget £m</b>	<b>Actual year to date £m</b>	<b>Forecast Outturn £m</b>	<b>Year End Variance £m</b>	<b>Proposed Carry Forward to 2025/26 £m</b>	<b>Variance Over / (Under) £m</b>
<b>Council Funded schemes</b>						
Children’s Residential Home	0.85	0.58	0.70	(0.15)	(0.15)	0.00
Refurbishment of homes to support Foster Carers	0.31	0.01	0.15	(0.16)	(0.16)	0.00
Mobile Youth Work Bus Revamp	0.03	0.01	0.03	0.00	0.00	0.00
Mosaic/ Fusion Build	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00
<b>Total Council Funded Schemes</b>	<b>1.20</b>	<b>0.60</b>	<b>0.89</b>	<b>(0.31)</b>	<b>(0.31)</b>	<b>0.00</b>
<b>External Funded Schemes</b>						
Family Hubs and Start of Life	0.06	0.00	0.06	0.00	0.00	0.00
<b>Total Externally Funded Schemes</b>	<b>0.06</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.06</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>
<b>Total Capital – Services within the remit of this Committee</b>	<b>1.26</b>	<b>0.60</b>	<b>0.95</b>	<b>(0.31)</b>	<b>(0.31)</b>	<b>0.00</b>

#### **4. Financial information**

- 4.1 The financial implications are as set out in the main body of this report. The council has a statutory responsibility to set a balanced budget and to ensure it has an adequate level of reserves. The council will take a medium-term policy led approach to all decisions on resource allocation.

#### **5. Reducing Inequalities**

- 5.1 Services consider and respond to equality issues in setting budgets and delivering services. Irrespective of budgetary pressures, the Council must fulfil equal opportunities obligations.

#### **6. Decide**

- 6.1 To note the recommendations as set out in this report.

#### **7. Respond**

- 7.1 The Executive Director for Children's Services, with finance in support will be working with Directors and Heads of service to review the forecast, to continue to implement mitigating actions for any further forecast overspends and to consider these financial implications in line with the council's budget setting process.

#### **8. Review**

- 8.1 Regular monitoring reports are presented to Cabinet to inform them of the financial forecast for 2024/25, including an update on risks and impact on the budget for 2025/26 and beyond.

**Background papers:** Various financial working papers

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Colleen Male  
Executive Director, Children's Services

## **Children in Care (CiC) Financial Monitoring Position for Q2 as at September 2024 Overview**

Local Authorities in England have a statutory responsibility for protecting the welfare of Children and delivering Children's Social Care. In more serious situations Local Authorities may use their statutory powers to place children and young people in need on child protection plans or even take them into the care of the Local Authority.

Walsall's Social Care demand led pressures are in-line with the national picture and, although costs continue to increase, extensive work has been undertaken to effectively manage demand.

The Local Authority has a duty, under Section 22 of Children Act 1989 to, as far as is reasonably practicable, secure sufficient accommodation within the authority's area, which meets the needs of children that the Local Authority are looking after, and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is local. In September 2021, the law changed to require that children aged under 16 years who are placed in registered care settings, which includes foster care, residential care or other care setting, must be placed in an Ofsted registered setting. From the end of October 2023, all supported accommodation providers to children in care must be registered with Ofsted or have made an application to do so.

Following these changes in legislation, placement sufficiency continues to be a significant challenge for the service. There has been a fluctuation in the market with several providers exiting the market and new providers who have yet to secure Ofsted registration. The market remains volatile, and this is further compounded by a lack of sufficiency of foster placements locally and nationally.

In addition to this, there has been further cost pressures mainly caused by a larger portion of adolescents entering care with complex needs and vulnerabilities including exploitation, mental health difficulties and emotional dysregulation, some of whom required Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards. These children are placed in the main in high cost homes and in solo provision. There are mitigations in place that include Walsall expanding the internal residential provision and the development of an offer for adolescents with complex needs. Overall, the number of children in care has reduced to 622 at the end of July 2024 compared with 663 at the end of March 2024, following the implementation of the family safeguarding model. The principles of the model have been applied to offers that support children to remain within families or seek to stabilise children through the provision of multi-agency coordinated support that aims to stabilise children and avoid placement moves that inevitably increase placement cost.

### **Children in Care of the Local Authority**

It should be noted that the forecast position reported in year is calculated based on the number and mix of children and young people (C&YP) at a point in time and is adjusted for anticipated placement moves and inflow/ outflow for the remainder of the financial year.

Due to the on-going pressures described above, there was approved additional investment of £11.38m included in the budget for the financial year 2024/25, with savings of £3.40m identified during the financial year and a further £0.50m of unachieved savings carried forward from 23/24.

As at quarter 2, the total forecast for current placement and support costs for 2024/25 is **£48.75m**. This forecast is based on the current mix of children in care and the projected future demand for the remainder of the financial year. The current budget is **£47.35m**, therefore there is a forecasted overspend of **£1.40m**. The overspend is made up of the following:

- **£0.66m** – full year impact of 2023/24 pressures, primarily linked to the increased net inflow/ outflow, offset by identified cost reductions and contributions totalling (£2.11m), of which £1.22m is yet to be realised;
- **£0.28m** – inflationary cost increases linked to the retender of the Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) framework;
- **£0.14m** – cost increases linked to increased support within placements;
- **£0.26m** – net pressure within the inflow / outflow and placement moves budget following an in demand on secure placements;
- **£0.08m** – pressures within the internal residential homes including increased overtime;
- **(£0.01m)** – minimal variances linked to the family drugs and alcohol contract.

### **Movement from June 2024**

The forecasted outturn position for September 2024 has increased by **£0.43m** since June 2024. The main reasons for this movement are:

- **£0.37m** – increased requirement for secure placements and a number of high cost external residential placement moves during the period;
- **£0.07m** – pressures within the internal residential homes including increased overtime;
- **(£0.01m)** – minimal variances linked to the family, drugs and alcohol contract.

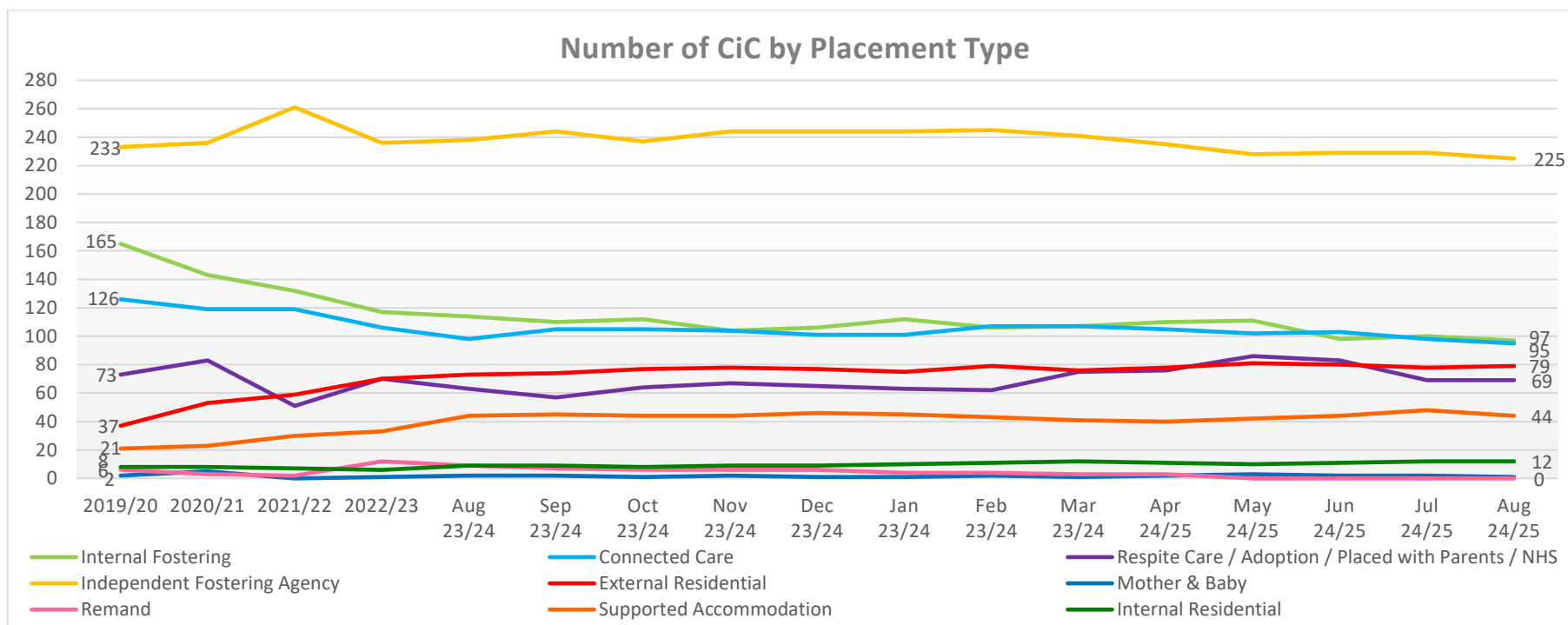
As part of the Proud Transformation Programme £3.40m of benefits have been identified during the financial year, with a further £0.50m of unachieved savings carried forward from 23/24, which specifically relate to Children in Care. £2.09m of which have been or are expected to be achieved by March 2025. There is a risk that the remaining £1.81m may not be fully delivered in this financial year due to external factors that can influence the achievement. Extensive work is underway in the service to prevent further pressures on the financial position and support the full delivery of all identified benefits.

## Children's Social Care Demand trends as at Quarter 2 2024/25.

### Number of Children in Care by Placement Type

Year	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	Aug 23/24	Sep 23/24	Oct 23/24	Nov 23/24	Dec 23/24	Jan 23/24	Feb 23/24	Mar 23/24	Apr 24/25	May 24/25	Jun 24/25	Jul 24/25	Aug 24/25
Total CiC	671	673	661	651	650	653	654	658	655	655	659	663	660	663	650	636	622

As of August 2024, there was 622 children in care in Walsall. The graph below shows these children and young people (C&YP) by placement type and demonstrates the continuing placement sufficiency pressures, which has resulted in a change in the mix of placement types.



The graph shows how the reliance on higher cost placements has increased over the 12 month and 5-year period, with the number of External Residential placements increasing from 37 in 2019/20, and 73 in August 2023, to 79 in August 2024. Although, the use of Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) had previously continued to rise, there has been a reduction in recent months bringing the total number of IFA placements to 225. In comparison, the use of lower cost placements has decreased, with the number of Internal Fostering placements reducing from 165 in 2019/20 to 97 in August 2024, and Connected Care placements reducing from 126 in 2019/20 to 95 in August 2024.

### ***Number of children entering and leaving care***

The table below illustrates the number of children entering care to date for 2024/25 and the prior four-year inflow trends by placement type.

<b>Placement Type</b>	<b>Apr - Aug 20/21</b>	<b>% of total</b>	<b>Apr - Aug 21/22</b>	<b>% of total</b>	<b>Apr - Aug 22/23</b>	<b>% of total</b>	<b>Apr - Aug 23/24</b>	<b>% of total</b>	<b>Apr - Aug 24/25</b>	<b>% of total</b>
Internal Fostering	22	26%	11	15%	17	28%	12	15%	7	15%
Connected Care	17	20%	8	11%	9	15%	4	5%	3	6%
Respite Care / Adoption / Placed with Parents / NHS	14	16%	9	12%	9	15%	4	5%	11	23%
Independent Fostering Agency	22	26%	32	43%	13	22%	33	41%	14	30%
External Residential	5	6%	6	8%	3	5%	8	10%	3	6%
Mother & Baby	1	1%	2	3%	2	3%	4	5%	0	0%
Remand	2	2%	0	0%	4	7%	1	1%	0	0%
Supported Accommodation	2	2%	7	9%	3	5%	15	19%	8	17%
Internal Residential	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	2%
<b>Total CiC</b>	<b>85</b>		<b>75</b>		<b>60</b>		<b>81</b>		<b>47</b>	

The number of children entering care from April to August in 2024/25 is lower than that of the other prior years, with a total of 47 C&YP (as at 02/09/24). This reduced number has supported achieving cost avoidance savings in year and reduced the financial impact to the overall position. However, it should be noted that the reduced use of lower cost placements, such as internal fostering and connected care,

described above, is also mirrored for those entering care, with internal fostering reducing to 15% of total placements used and connected care reducing to 6%.

During 2023/24, 200 C&YP entered care, an increase of 20% on the prior year. In addition to the increased numbers, there was an additional reliance on IFA's and External Residential placements as seen above. This extraordinary growth and increased reliance on higher cost placements has created a pressure in 2024/25 over and above the budgeted investment of £660k.

The table below shows the number of C&YP leaving care to date for 2024/25 and the prior four-year outflow trends. To note, this excludes those that have turned 18 as the financial impact of these have been considered within the forecast and budget.

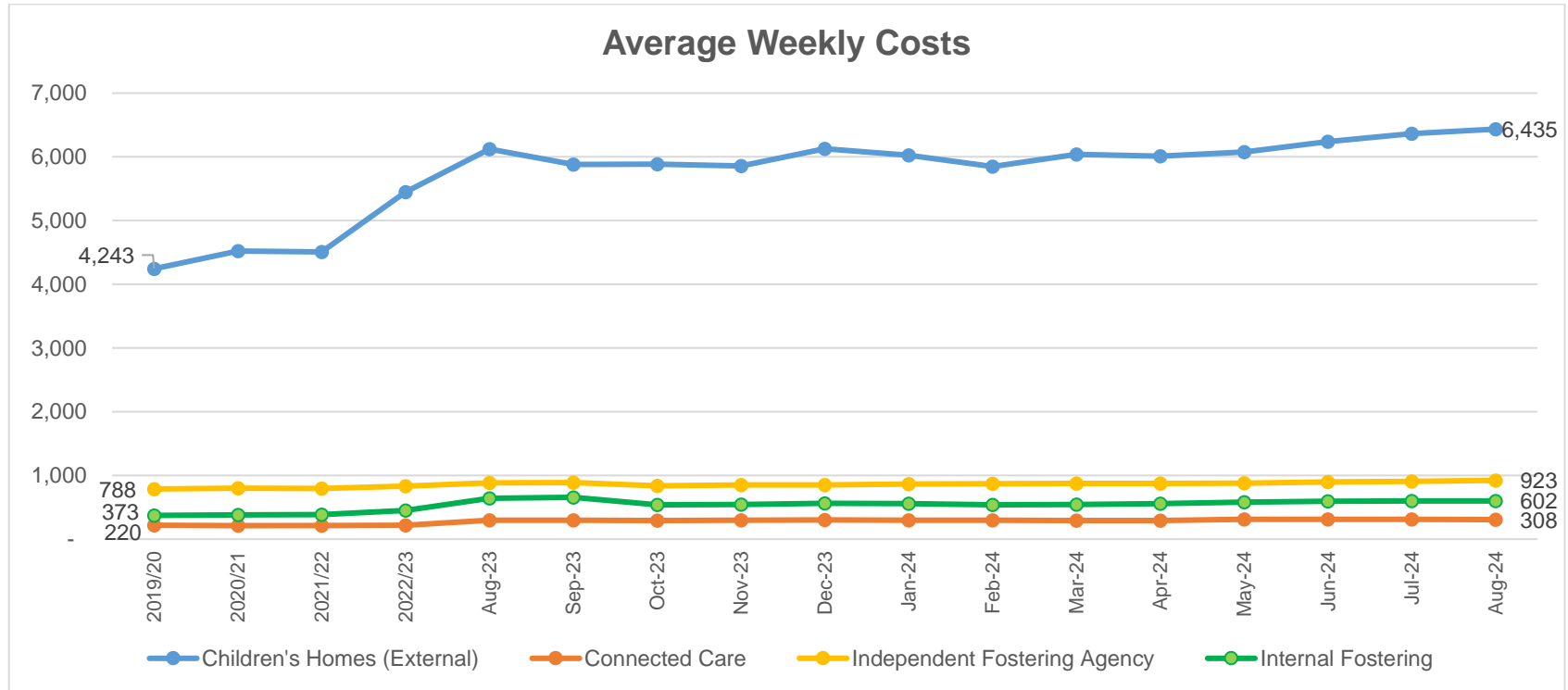
	Apr - Aug 20/21	Apr - Aug 21/22	Apr - Aug 22/23	Apr - Aug 23/24	Apr - Aug 24/25
Number of C&YP leaving care	-43	-50	-52	-49	-67

From April to August 2024, there was 67 C&YP who left care. This is higher than that of the prior four financial years, however 23 of these were placed with parents so do not have an impact on the placements budget.

### ***Average weekly costs of placements***

The chart below shows the average weekly cost of the four most utilised placement types for Walsall's CiC. The average weekly cost for an external residential placement has significantly increased from £4.2k to £6.4k (52%) over the last 5 financial years, and from £6.1k 12 months ago (5%). There are currently four placements over the cost of £10k per month which is influencing this average cost. When removed the average cost reduces to £6,121 per week. This is significantly higher than the average weekly cost of an Internal Fostering placement of £602 p/w and Connected Care placement of £308 p/w.





In recognition of the financial impacts above, the service will continue to focus on stepping C&YP down to lower cost placements where possible during 2024/25.

# **CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

## **Q2 FINANCIAL MONITORING POSITION FOR 2024/25**

**5<sup>th</sup> November 2024**

**Tanya Collier**



**Walsall Council**

**PROUD OF OUR PAST OUR PRESENT AND FOR OUR FUTURE**

# Contents

- 1 Forecast Overview
- 2 Key Variances
- 3 Movement from previous month
- 4 Reserves
- 5 Risks
- 6 2024/25 STP Summary
- 7 Capital Forecast
- 8 Children's Social Care Demand Services

# 1. Forecast Overview

The forecast revenue outturn for 2024/25 for the services under the remit of the Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee as at P6 (September 2024) is an overspend of **£2.59m** after the net use of reserves of (£1.40m).

For completeness, the forecast revenue overspend for services under the remit of the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee is an overspend of £2.52m. This gives a total forecast position of an overspend of £5.11m for Children's Services directorate as of 30 September 2024.

This is broken down further in Table 1 of the report.

## 2. Key Variances

The key variances contributing to the services overspend of **£2.59m** are:

- £1.40m children in care costs linked to the ongoing national placement sufficiency issues; an increased number of adolescents entering care with complex needs; a rising number of large sibling groups; and increased placement costs. (See Appendix 1 of the report for further information)
- £0.33m staffing and agency pressures across the service;
- £0.13m increased demand for Section 17 support;
- £0.30m other non-staffing pressures relating to travel, premises and security costs, contract increases and increased demand for OT equipment;
- £0.42m pressure within shortbreaks service linked to increased demand to avoid children entering care and increased complexities of cases.

The above is detailed in Table 2 of the report.

### 3. Movement from Jun 24 (P3) to Sep 24 (P6)

The forecast outturn position as at Period 3 (Jun 24) was an overspend of £1.79m therefore there is a net increase in the forecast overspend of **£0.81m**. The main reasons for this movement are:

- **£0.43m** increase in costs relating to children & young people in care. (A detailed breakdown of this movement is included within Appendix 1 of the report)
- **£0.20m** increases in agency and staffing costs across Children's Social Care, due to delays in recruitment and extension of current agency staff.
- **£0.17m** increased demand for section 17 support and OT equipment, and other non-staffing pressures relating to travel, premises and security costs.

The above is detailed in Table 3 of the report.



## 4. Reserves

The total allocated reserves for 2024/25 for services under the remit of this committee are £3.37m, of which (£1.45m) has been used or committed to date and £0.05m will be transferred to reserves at the year-end, ringfenced for expected spend in 2025/26.

Further information around the reserves can be found in section 3.6 and Table 4 of the report.

# 5. Risks

Low Impact (Green) **£0.85m**    Medium Impact (Amber) **£5.87m**    High Impact (Red) **£2.23m**

For the services under the remit of this committee, there are total risks of **£8.94m** which are not included in the above forecast. At this stage the risks are not a certainty and as such are not included in the monitoring position.

If any risks became a certainty, they would need to be included in the forecast position as an overspend, unless alternative action can be identified to mitigate these costs.

Further information around the risks can be found in section 3.7 and Tables 5 & 6 of the report.

## 6. 2024/25 STP Summary

Included within the budget for 2024/25 for services within the remit of this Committee are £4.22m of approved savings of which:

- £1.03m has been fully achieved to date;
- £1.06m is on track to be delivered by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025;
- £2.13m is still not guaranteed to be fully achieved by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025.

Further information around the risks can be found in section 3.8 and Table 7 of the report.

# 7. Capital Forecast

The capital programme for the services under the remit of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as at the end of September 2024, is £1.26m. As at September, it was expected that £0.95m will be fully spent within the current financial year and the remaining £0.31m will be carried forward into 2025/26.

Further information around the risks can be found in section 3.9 and Table 8 of the report.

## 8. Children's Social Care Demand Services

Walsall's Social Care demand led pressures are in-line with the national picture and, although costs continue to increase, extensive work has been undertaken to effectively manage demand.

On-going placement sufficiency issues continue to be the biggest challenge for the service, which has been further compromised by changes in legislation for Ofsted registered placements; national shortages of foster carers; a larger portion of adolescents entering care with complex needs and vulnerabilities including exploitation, mental health difficulties and emotional dysregulation; a rising number of large sibling groups and a higher proportion of children in care over the age of 15.

There are mitigations in place that include Walsall expanding the internal residential provision; the development of an offer for adolescents with complex needs, introduction of the Families First for Children Pathfinder and the expansion of the family safeguarding model.

## Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Area of Focus – 2024/25

25 June 2024	24 September 2024	05 November 2024	03 December 2024	28 January 2025	10 March 2025	08 April 2025
<p>Walsall as a Families first pathfinder presentation.</p> <p>Walsall Right for Children (WR4C) Refresh.</p> <p>Areas of focus – 2024/25</p>	<p>Complaints report.</p> <p>Update on Children’s Alliance and Children and Young People 2040 Strategy.</p>	<p>Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report.</p> <p>Budget consultation.</p> <p>Private Fostering Annual Report.</p>	<p>HAF and Youth Summer Programme.</p> <p>Youth Justice. Annual YJ plan. Invite Partners. YJ, Police, Probation and Health.</p>	<p>Young Carers.</p> <p>Pathfinder Update.</p> <p>Family Hubs-sustainability.</p>	<p>Child sexual abuse within the family environment.</p>	<p>Children at risk of exploitation.</p>

\*Quarter 1 and Quarter 3 Financial reports will be circulated via e-mail to Members of the Committee and will not form part of the Committee’s Agenda unless specially requested by the Committee.

## Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Area of Focus – 2024/25

Items to be scheduled	Notes

\*Quarter 1 and Quarter 3 Financial reports will be circulated via e-mail to Members of the Committee and will not form part of the Committee's Agenda unless specially requested by the Committee.



## Black Country Executive Joint Committee Forward Plan of Key Decisions

Published up to February 2025

<b>Date Created</b>	<b>Key Decision</b>	<b>Contact Officer</b>	<b>Main consultee</b>	<b>Date of meeting</b>
	<b>Black Country Enterprise Zone</b>			
05/08/2024	<p>Gasholders</p> <p>Approval of the Gasholders project (Walsall Council) for grant funding from the Black Country Enterprise Zone (BCEZ) business rate surpluses.</p> <p>Approval for the City of Wolverhampton Council and Walsall Council to proceed to enter into a separate Grant Agreement which will set out the terms and conditions of the funding.</p>	<p>Simon Tranter <a href="mailto:simon.tranter@walsall.gov.uk">simon.tranter@walsall.gov.uk</a></p>	Walsall Council	November date to be confirmed
	<b>Land and Property Investment Fund (LPIF)</b>			
02/09/2024	Approval for the remaining LPIF programme funds to be awarded, either on an equal grant sum split or on a full grant sum award to a single project basis; with the projects being Alfred Gunn House (Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council) and Oxley	<p>Tammy Stokes <a href="mailto:tammy_stokes@sandwell.gov.uk">tammy_stokes@sandwell.gov.uk</a></p> <p>Richard Lawrence <a href="mailto:Richard.Lawrence@wolverhampton.gov.uk">Richard.Lawrence@wolverhampton.gov.uk</a></p>	<p>Sandwell Council</p> <p>Wolverhampton City Council</p>	November date to be confirmed

<b>Date Created</b>	<b>Key Decision</b>	<b>Contact Officer</b>	<b>Main consultee</b>	<b>Date of meeting</b>
	<p>Health &amp; Wellbeing Facility (Wolverhampton City Council).</p> <p>Approval for the Accountable Body (Walsall Council) for the LPIF programme to proceed to enter into grant agreement with the Alfred Gunn House project (Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council) if funding recommendation is agreed.</p> <p>Approval for the Accountable Body (Walsall Council) for the LPIF programme to proceed to enter into grant agreement with the Oxley Health &amp; Wellbeing Facility project (Wolverhampton City Council) if funding recommendation is agreed.</p>			



## **FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS**

**Council House,  
Lichfield Street,  
Walsall, WS1 1TW**  
[www.walsall.gov.uk](http://www.walsall.gov.uk)

**7 October 2024**

## FORWARD PLAN

The forward plan sets out decisions that are termed as “key decisions” at least 28 calendar days before they are due to be taken by the Executive (Cabinet). Also included on the plan are other decisions to be taken by the Cabinet (“non-key decisions”). Preparation of the forward plan helps the Council to programme its work. The purpose of the forward plan is to give plenty of notice and an opportunity for consultation on the issues to be discussed. The plan is updated each month with the period of the plan being rolled forward by one month and republished. Copies of the plan can be obtained from Democratic Services, Walsall MBC, Council House, Walsall, WS1 1TW [craig.goodall@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:craig.goodall@walsall.gov.uk) and can also be accessed from the Council’s website at [www.walsall.gov.uk](http://www.walsall.gov.uk). The Cabinet is allowed to make urgent decisions which do not appear in the forward plan, however, a notice will be included on the agenda for the relevant Cabinet meeting which explains the reasons why.

Please note that the decision dates are indicative and are subject to change. Please contact the above addressee if you wish to check the date for a particular item.

The Cabinet agenda and reports are available for inspection by the public 7 days prior to the meeting of the Cabinet on the Council’s website. Background papers are listed on each report submitted to the Cabinet and members of the public are entitled to see these documents unless they are confidential. The report also contains the name and telephone number of a contact officer. These details can also be found in the forward plan.

Meetings of the Cabinet are open to the public. Occasionally there are items included on the agenda which are confidential and for those items the public will be asked to leave the meeting. The forward plan will show where this is intended and the reason why the reports are confidential. Enquiries regarding these reasons should be directed to Democratic Services ([craig.goodall@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:craig.goodall@walsall.gov.uk)).

“Key decisions” are those decisions which have a significant effect within the community or which involve considerable expenditure or savings. With regard to key decisions the Council’s Constitution states:

- (1) A key decision is:
  - (i) any decision in relation to an executive function which results in the Council incurring expenditure which is, or the making of savings which are, significant, having regard to the Council’s budget for the service or function to which the decision relates or
  - (ii) any decision that is likely to have significant impact on two or more wards within the borough.
- (2) The threshold for “significant” expenditure/savings is £500,000.
- (3) A decision taker may only make a key decision in accordance with the requirements of the Executive Procedure Rules set out in Part 4 of this Constitution.

**FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS  
NOVEMBER 2024 TO FEBRUARY 2025  
(07.10.2024)**

1	2	3	4	5	6	
7						
Reference No./ Date first entered in Plan	Decision to be considered (to provide adequate details for those both in and outside the Council)	Decision maker	Background papers (if any) and Contact Officer	Main consultees	Contact Member (All Members can be written to at Civic Centre, Walsall)	Date item to be considered
58/24 (17.9.24)	<p><b>Contract Award for Interpreting, Translation, Transcription and Easy Read Service:</b></p> <p>To approve the award of a contract for the Interpreting, Translation, Transcription and Easy Read service and to delegate authority to the Executive Director to enter into a contract.</p>	Cabinet  Key Decision	Irena Hergottova  <a href="mailto:Irena.Hergottova@walsall.gov.uk">Irena.Hergottova@walsall.gov.uk</a>  Harjinder Lal  <a href="mailto:Harjinder.Lal@walsall.gov.uk">Harjinder.Lal@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal Services	Cllr Statham	16 October 2024
52/24 (2.9.24)	<p><b>Disposal of Links to Work Building, Stephenson Avenue, Beechdale, Walsall, WS2 7HF</b></p> <p>To approve the disposal of the Links to Work Building.</p> <p><i>This will be a private session report containing commercially sensitive information.</i></p>	Cabinet  Key Decision	Ian Jeavons  <a href="mailto:Ian.Jeavons@walsall.gov.uk">Ian.Jeavons@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal Services	Cllr Andrew	16 October 2024

40/24 (1.7.24)	<b>Draft Revenue Budget and Draft Capital Programme 2025/26 to 2028/29:</b>  To provide an updated medium term financial outlook, draft revenue budget and capital programme for 2025/26 to 2028/29, including savings proposals.	Cabinet  Non-key Decision	Ross Hutchinson  <a href="mailto:Ross.Hutchinson@walsall.gov.uk">Ross.Hutchinson@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Council tax payers, business rate payers, voluntary and community organisations,  Internal Services	Cllr M. Statham	16 October 2024
41/24 (1.7.24)	<b>Corporate Financial Performance 2024/25:</b>  To report the financial position based on 6 months to September 2024.	Cabinet  Non-key Decision	Ross Hutchinson  <a href="mailto:Ross.Hutchinson@walsall.gov.uk">Ross.Hutchinson@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal Services	Cllr M. Statham	16 October 2024
53/24 (2.9.24)	<b>Children and Young People Strategy:</b>  To approve the Children and Young People 2040 Strategy.	Cabinet  Key Decision	Isobel Vanderheernen  <a href="mailto:Isobel.Vanderheeren@walsall.gov.uk">Isobel.Vanderheeren@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal Services  Children and young people	Cllr Elson	16 October 2024
60/24 (7.10.24)	<b>Schools Local Funding Formula 2025-26</b>  To approve the proposed schools local funding formula for 2025/26 and note that once funding allocations have been confirmed by the DfE, a further report will be presented to Schools Forum in January 2025.	Cabinet  Key Decision	Tanya Collier  <a href="mailto:Tanya.Collier@walsall.gov.uk">Tanya.Collier@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal Services, Schools Forum	Cllr Kaur	16 October 2024

54/24 (2.9.24)	<p><b>Local Area Network (LAN) contract award:</b></p> <p>To award a contract for provision and support of the Council's Local Area Network (LAN).</p>	Cabinet Key Decision	Sharon Worrall <a href="mailto:Sharon.Worrall@walsall.gov.uk">Sharon.Worrall@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal Services	Cllr Lee	16 October 2024
55/24 (2.9.24)	<p><b>Service Channel Management Platform contract award:</b></p> <p>To award a contract for the continued provision the Councils Service Channel Management Platform.</p>	Cabinet Key Decision	Sharon Worrall <a href="mailto:Sharon.Worrall@walsall.gov.uk">Sharon.Worrall@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal Services	Cllr Lee	16 October 2024
56/24 (2.9.24)	<p><b>Middlemore Lane Household Waste and Recycling Centre (HWRC) &amp; Waste Treatment Service Operational Arrangements:</b></p> <p>To approve a short-term service contract for the operational management of the new waste facility at Middlemore Lane and the existing HWRC at Fryers Road and approve a new finance lease agreement for the operational equipment, HWRC containers, and other physical resources at Middlemore Lane.</p> <p><i>This will be a private session report containing commercially sensitive information.</i></p>	Cabinet Key Decision	Kathryn Moreton <a href="mailto:Kathryn.Moreton@walsall.gov.uk">Kathryn.Moreton@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal Services	Cllr Murphy	16 October 2024



<p>59/24 (17.9.24)</p>	<p><b>Procurement of consultancy support for transformation projects in ASC and Commissioning:</b></p> <p>To commission external consultancy support to accelerate the delivery of key transformation projects in Adult Social Care and Commissioning of People services.</p> <p><i>This will be a private session report containing commercially sensitive information.</i></p>	<p>Cabinet Key Decision</p>	<p>Kerrie Allward <a href="mailto:Kerrie.Allward@walsall.gov.uk">Kerrie.Allward@walsall.gov.uk</a></p>	<p>Internal services</p>	<p>Cllr Pedley</p>	<p>16 October 2024</p>
<p>47/24 (5.8.24)</p>	<p><b>Council Plan 2025-2029:</b></p> <p>To consider the final version of the Council Plan following consultation and recommend this to Council for approval.</p>	<p>Cabinet Key Decision</p>	<p>Karen Griffiths <a href="mailto:Karen.Griffiths@walsall.gov.uk">Karen.Griffiths@walsall.gov.uk</a>  Elizabeth Connolly <a href="mailto:Elizabeth.Connolly@walsall.gov.uk">Elizabeth.Connolly@walsall.gov.uk</a></p>	<p>Internal Services, external stakeholders, other interested parties (via Public Consultation exercise)</p>	<p>Cllr Perry</p>	<p>11 December 2024</p>
<p>61/24 (7.10.24)</p>	<p><b>Making Connections Walsall:</b></p> <p>To approve a contract extension for 1 year (April 2025 – March 2026) to enable collaboration and partnership discussions regarding a new social prescribing delivery model for Walsall residents.</p>	<p>Cabinet Key Decision</p>	<p>Sarah Oakley <a href="mailto:Sarah.Oakley@walsall.gov.uk">Sarah.Oakley@walsall.gov.uk</a></p>	<p>Internal Services</p>	<p>Cllr Perry</p>	<p>11 December 2024</p>

<p>48/24 (5.8.24)</p>	<p><b>Draft Revenue Budget and Draft Capital Programme 2025/26 to 2028/29 – Update:</b></p> <p>To provide an updated medium term financial outlook, draft revenue budget and capital programme for 2025/26 to 2028/29, including update to savings proposals, impact of Autumn Statement, and progress on budget consultation to date including feedback from Overview and Scrutiny Committees on the draft revenue and capital budget.</p>	<p>Cabinet Key Decision</p>	<p>Ross Hutchinson <a href="mailto:Ross.Hutchinson@walsall.gov.uk">Ross.Hutchinson@walsall.gov.uk</a></p>	<p>Council tax payers, business rate payers, voluntary and community organisations, Internal Services</p>	<p>Cllr Statham</p>	<p>11 December 2024</p>
<p>49/24 (5.8.24)</p>	<p><b>Treasury Management Mid-Year Position Statement 2024/25:</b></p> <p>To note and forward to Council, for consideration and noting (and in line with the requirements of the Treasury Management Code of Practice (2017), the mid year report for treasury management activities 2024/25 including prudential and local indicators.</p>	<p>Cabinet Council Non-key Decision</p>	<p>Richard Walley <a href="mailto:Richard.Walley@walsall.gov.uk">Richard.Walley@walsall.gov.uk</a></p>	<p>Internal Services</p>	<p>Cllr Statham</p>	<p>11 December 2024</p>
<p>32/24 (4.6.24)</p>	<p><b>Appointment of Contractor for Civic Centre and Council House Decarbonisation Works:</b></p> <p>To appoint a contractor for decarbonisation works at the Civic Centre and Council House.</p>	<p>Cabinet Key Decision</p>	<p>Nick Ford <a href="mailto:Nick.Ford@walsall.gov.uk">Nick.Ford@walsall.gov.uk</a></p>	<p>Internal Services</p>	<p>Cllr Andrew</p>	<p>11 December 2024</p>

	<i>This will be a private session report containing commercially sensitive information.</i>					
46/24 (5.8.24)	<b>Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document (SPD):</b> To approve a draft SPD for consultation.	Cabinet Key Decision	David Holloway <a href="mailto:David.Holloway@walsall.gov.uk">David.Holloway@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal Services	Cllr Andrew	11 December 2024
63/24 (7.10.24)	<b>The Walsall Borough Local Plan (WBLP) - revised Local Development Scheme (LDS):</b> To approve the progression of the WBLP under a revised LDS, and the publication of the revised LDS, to include other development plan documents and planning policy documents.	Cabinet Key Decision	David Holloway <a href="mailto:David.Holloway@walsall.gov.uk">David.Holloway@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal Services	Cllr Andrew	11 December 2024
70/24 (7.10.24)	<b>Gasholders- Black Country Enterprise Zone:</b> To approve entering a Funding Agreement with City of Wolverhampton Council for site preparation works and the approach to progressing project delivery.  <i>This will be a private session report containing commercially sensitive information.</i>	Cabinet Key Decision	Caroline Harper <a href="mailto:Caroline.Harper@walsall.gov.uk">Caroline.Harper@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal Services	Cllr Andrew	11 December 2024

62/24 (7.10.24)	<b>Adoption of the new Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy:</b> To approve the new Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy and establish a council-led steering group to undertake ongoing monitoring.	Cabinet Key Decision	Black Country PPOSS - Overarching Strategic Framework  Jaki Brunton-Douglas  <a href="mailto:Jaki.Brunton-Douglas@walsall.gov.uk">Jaki.Brunton-Douglas@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal Services	Cllr Flint	11 December 2024
71/24 (7.10.24)	<b>Net-Zero 2041 Strategy:</b> To approve the draft Net-Zero 2041 Strategy and the establishment of a 'Walsall Net Zero Partnership' to deliver the borough-wide elements of the Strategy.	Cabinet Key Decision	Kathryn Moreton  <a href="mailto:Kathryn.Moreton@walsall.gov.uk">Kathryn.Moreton@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal Services	Cllr Flint	11 December 2024
35/24 (4.6.24)	<b>Walsall Housing Allocations Policy:</b> To approve Walsall's Housing Allocations Policy which details how the Council will prioritise applicants for nomination to housing association properties.	Cabinet Key Decision	Neil Hollyhead  <a href="mailto:Neil.Hollyhead@walsall.gov.uk">Neil.Hollyhead@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Public Consultation  Internal Services  Housing Associations	Cllr Garcha	11 December 2024
39/24 (1.7.24)	<b>Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2029:</b> To approve the final version of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy following consultation.	Cabinet Key Decision	Karen Griffiths  <a href="mailto:Karen.Griffiths@walsall.gov.uk">Karen.Griffiths@walsall.gov.uk</a>  Elizabeth Connolly  <a href="mailto:Elizabeth.Connolly@walsall.gov.uk">Elizabeth.Connolly@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal Services, external stakeholders, other interested parties (via Public Consultation exercise)	Cllr Lee	11 December 2024

57/24 (2.9.24)	<b>IT Goods, Software and Associated Services contract awards:</b> To award a contract for the provision of IT Goods, Software and Associated Services.	Cabinet Key Decision	Sharon Worrall <a href="mailto:Sharon.Worrall@walsall.gov.uk">Sharon.Worrall@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal Services	Cllr Lee	11 December 2024
64/24 (7.10.24)	<b>Council Plan 2025-2029 Baseline Performance Report:</b> To consider baseline performance data aligned to the corporate priorities as set out in the Council Plan 2024-2028.	Cabinet Key Decision	Elizabeth Connolly <a href="mailto:Elizabeth.Connolly@walsall.gov.uk">Elizabeth.Connolly@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal Services	Cllr Perry	12 February 2025
65/24 (7.10.24)	<b>Place Based Strategy:</b> That Cabinet approve the Walsall Place Based Strategy (PBS) that sets the vision and delivery plan for the Single Settlement.	Cabinet Key Decision	Simon Tranter <a href="mailto:Simon.Tranter@walsall.gov.uk">Simon.Tranter@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal Services	Cllr Perry	12 February 2025
66/24 (7.10.24)	<b>Corporate Budget Plan 2025/26 – 2028/29, incorporating the Capital Strategy and the Treasury Management and investment Strategy 2025/26:</b> To recommend the final budget and council tax for approval by Council.	Cabinet Council Key Decision	Ross Hutchinson <a href="mailto:Ross.Hutchinson@walsall.gov.uk">Ross.Hutchinson@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Council tax payers, business rate payers, voluntary and community organisations, Internal Services	Cllr Statham	Cabinet 12 February 2025 / Council 27 February 2025

67/24 (7.10.24)	<p><b>Corporate Financial Performance 2024/25:</b></p> <p>To report the financial position based on 9 months to December 2024.</p>	Cabinet Non-key Decision	<p>Ross Hutchinson <a href="mailto:Ross.Hutchinson@walsall.gov.uk">Ross.Hutchinson@walsall.gov.uk</a></p>	Internal Services	Cllr Statham	12 February 2025
68/24 (7.10.24)	<p><b>Determination of School Admission Arrangements 2026-27:</b></p> <p>To determine school admission arrangements for the 2026-27 academic year.</p>	Cabinet Key Decision	<p>Alex Groom <a href="mailto:Alex.Groom@walsall.gov.uk">Alex.Groom@walsall.gov.uk</a></p>	Internal Services Schools Forum	Cllr Kaur	12 February 2025
69/24 (7.10.24)	<p><b>Middlemore Lane and Fryers Road Household Waste and Recycling Centres (HWRC) &amp; Waste Treatment Service:</b></p> <p>To approve the new long-term service provision for the operational management of two new waste facilities at Middlemore Lane and Fryers Road and approve the pre-tender budget for the operational management of a waste transfer station and two household waste recycling centres.</p>	Cabinet Key Decision	<p>Kathryn Moreton <a href="mailto:Kathryn.Moreton@walsall.gov.uk">Kathryn.Moreton@walsall.gov.uk</a></p> <p>Stephen Johnson <a href="mailto:Stephen.Johnson@walsall.gov.uk">Stephen.Johnson@walsall.gov.uk</a></p>	Internal Services	Cllr Murphy	12 February 2025

Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Recommendation Tracker 2024/25

Committee Meeting Date	Agenda Item	Recommendation	Status	Officer responsible	Target Completion Date	Notes
25 <sup>th</sup> June 2024.	Walsall Right for Children (WR4C) Refresh	That an update on the Holiday Activity Fund and summer programme be provided at the Committee in November/December.	Ongoing	IV	Scheduled for 3.12.24	
24 September 2024	Children's Alliance and Children and Young People 2040 Strategy	That the Committee is provided with an update on progress at a future meeting.	Ongoing	IV		