

2 January 2014

**Delivery of the “Working Smarter” Programme:
Theme 4 - ‘Improving safeguarding, learning and the life chances
for children and young people’**

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Councillor R Andrew – Children & Young People

Purpose of Report

This report and **appendices** provides the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel with an update on progress in delivering key priorities set out in the Working Smarter Programme – Theme 4: *‘Improving safeguarding, learning and the life chances for children and young people’*.

Executive Summary

A comprehensive programme of change, transformation and improvement is being implemented across Children and Young People’s Services in Walsall. The key drivers for this programme which directly relate to Working Smarter Theme 4 include:

- Delivering sustainable improvements to Safeguarding and Child Protection services following the serving of the DfE Improvement Notice in November 2012.
- Reshaping of School Improvement functions to secure more effective and better quality provision following the transition of education services back into Walsall Council from SERCO.
- Securing the most effective impact of our collective finite resources across Children’s Services and the wider Children and Young People’s Partnership.
- Robust preparation for intensive new regulatory frameworks, including school improvement inspection and the new Ofsted single inspection of local authority arrangements for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers, including a review of the local safeguarding children board.

The attached **appendices** provide a selection of reports which give an up-to-date overview of key developments and priority areas for action relating to Theme 4. These include reports prepared for the DfE to inform ministerial assessment of Walsall’s progress under the Improvement Notice, and our approach to a new direction for our school improvement function.

Reason for scrutiny:

Update requested from Scrutiny Panel.

Recommendations:

That the report is noted.

Background papers attached:

- Reports for DfE 12 Month Review
- Reports on School Improvement

Resource and legal considerations:

There will be resource and legal considerations which arise as we deliver the change resulting from this programme. There are no specific implications from this report.

Citizen impact:

The effective delivery of the priorities set out in theme 4 will have a direct and positive impact on the safety and wellbeing of children and young people in Walsall, with related improvements in education, learning and life outcomes.

Environmental impact:

None.

Performance management:

A new performance management framework to support the 'Working Smarter' Programme in its entirety is currently under development. For each Theme within the Programme, there are defined outcomes which are detailed in the Corporate Plan [2013]. Each change activity will also define its own detailed measures which will contribute to and underpin those outcomes as defined within the Corporate Plan. At a directorate level, increasingly robust performance management and quality assurance arrangements are in place across the full spectrum of children and young people's services.

Equality Implications:


Equality Impact Assessments will be undertaken as each initiative is defined and delivered. In line with Council process, this will be in promoting equality of opportunity and to treat every citizen fairly whatever their race, religion or sexual orientation.

Consultation:

Consultation on the priorities set out in theme 4 takes place within the context of a broad range of partnership fora that provide governance and oversight of the delivery and impact of the wider Children and Young People's Plan and safeguarding improvements in Walsall. These include the Children and Young People's Partnership and Walsall Safeguarding Children Board. Consultation has taken place at both a strategic and operational level, supported by a programme of direct consultation with children, young people and their families.

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‘Better Together For Children’

**Moving Towards Good
Safeguarding
& Child Protection Services in
Walsall**

**Summary Overview Of
Our Progress & Next Steps**

**Report & Presentation to DfE
3rd December 2013**

Our Story At 12 Months

This summary report supports a slide presentation and is accompanied by a performance report which provides a more detailed account of progress in specific areas of most concern to DfE.

We will share with you ...

'How we are transforming our improvement activity into core business throughout the partnership and across Children's Services'

- 1.1 The serving of the Improvement Notice in 2012 provided the political and organisational focus and momentum for an intensive programme of change and service development within Safeguarding and Child Protection Services. The governance and leadership arrangements that were put in place to secure strong grip and oversight of the Strategic Improvement Plan (SIP) drew in the wider partnership and have been informed by increasingly robust performance management arrangements.
- 1.2 This framework has delivered on significant improvements to the quality of practice with increasing evidence of better safeguarding outcomes for children and young people in Walsall.
- 1.3 With our ambitions targeted firmly on moving towards a sustainable judgement of 'good' across all of our services, we have progressively woven our safeguarding improvement activity into the core business of Children's Services and the wider partnership. Our primary focus is on the child and young person's whole journey through support from needing to receiving help, and to moving on to better outcomes and life chances. In order to achieve this, our safeguarding improvements are increasingly driven forward and embedded into the whole continuum of Children's Services and Partnership provision in Walsall.
- 1.4 To reflect this approach, in planning for 2014/15 we are widening the three Improvement Plan themes as a sustainable framework for transforming the full range of Children's Services provision.

'How we will secure our achievements on a long-term sustainable basis as part of the wider development of the full range of services provided by the Council and our partners'

- 1.5 We have achieved major improvements in the strategic oversight, ownership and accountability arrangements for Children's Services under the auspice of the Improvement Notice. The strengthened Children and Young People's Partnership, the Walsall Safeguarding Children Board and developing Health and Well-Being Board, informed by increasingly robust and reliable performance data, provide a robust framework for picking up and sustaining the focus, momentum and challenge which has been provided by the Improvement Board.
- 1.6 We believe as a partnership that we are now in a strong position to take on this responsibility. In doing so, we will maintain a sharp focus on safeguarding improvement priorities within the context of the wider development of the full range of Children's Services.
- 1.7 The integration of Education and School Improvement functions into the Council, following a longstanding outsourced model, coupled with an emphasis on achieving a step-change in our approach to Commissioning and Workforce Development, and the provision of an ambitious Early Help offer creates an exciting and dynamic platform for transforming service quality, impact and outcomes for children and young people in Walsall.

'Action we are taking as a partnership to tackle the challenges we still face'

- 1.8 Whilst we are proud of the step-change we have achieved over the last 12 months, we face continuing challenges and are acutely aware of the need to maintain a relentless and forensic focus on driving forward our safeguarding improvement priorities. This is particularly critical in the midst of a wide programme of organisational change, both for the Council and our partners. Our performance management, data and quality assurance arrangements, including an increasingly dynamic self-assessment process, are giving us the information we need to build on our improvements and to drill-down into areas of weakness, enabling a clear focus for action.
- 1.9 We are undertaking a phased and measured approach, with strong Member and partnership oversight, to strengthening and stabilising our leadership and management arrangements. Our incoming leadership team will be overseen by the Interim Executive Director with a critical focus on maintaining and building on our achievements to date, mindful of the risks associated with changes to leadership at this crucial stage in an improvement process, and the potential adverse impact of a change of approach.

'How we will continue to self-assess our progress and our partnership with a relentless focus on impact and improvement'

- 1.10 A key feature of our approach to safeguarding improvement has been to maintain a highly critical self-assessment dialogue within the partnership throughout the last 12 months. We have increasingly well-developed arrangements for this with an evidence base drawing from a mix of performance data, internal quality assurance (including systematic case file auditing), direct observation of staff practice, improved supervision and appraisal arrangements, the annual social care healthcheck, customer, practitioner and Safeguarding Board feedback and the outcomes and recommendations from inspections.
- 1.11 We are continuing to develop our rapidly improving performance and quality assurance framework, led by a highly regarded specialist colleague who is transferring learning and skills across the organisation and partnership. The improvement notice has instilled within and across Walsall an intensive and forensic focus on performance, building on some difficult and challenging experiences for the partnership. We are determined to ensure that the legacy of this approach, and the organisational experience behind it, continues to inform our approach to improvement.

Our Progress & Achievements at 12 Months

Our Strategic Improvement Plan provides a clear framework for clearly identifying and progressing the improvement priorities. Since the serving of the Improvement Notice we have applied a consistent model for driving forward performance around the three improvement themes. Previous progress reporting to DfE has been configured on this basis.

The December 2013 Improvement Plan update, and further supporting information for the DfE 12 month review provides evidence that we are continuing to secure improvement and impact across Children's Services and the wider partnership:

Our Partnerships & Governance

- Clear progress in developing and starting to embed a strategic approach to driving service improvement and transformation which links the safeguarding improvement activity to action across the full spectrum of Children's Services and the wider partnership.
- A stronger culture of challenge and accountability between partners, evidenced through both strategic and operational dialogue between Children's Services and critical partners including the Police, Health and Schools.
- Active and effective Children's Partnership, Safeguarding Board, Corporate Parenting Group, Scrutiny and Performance Panel and the emerging and Health and Well-Being Board. The Lead Member and other elected members have continued to provide increasingly effective and high-profile support, scrutiny and challenge to the improvement process, including through active involvement of members in developing their own challenge and quality assurance arrangements.

Our Capacity, Capability & Culture

- We are stabilising the Social Care workforce and reducing reliance on agency staff. Social Worker recruitment campaigns have received a positive response. Our planned approach to filling vacant posts has released short-term additional resources to enable experienced agency staff to work alongside newly qualified incoming staff to secure a smooth transition to a more stable operational workforce.
- Action to secure a safe and effective succession to new leadership arrangements is well underway with a phased approach to the appointment of a new senior leadership team in

early 2014. This is being led by Members and the Chief Executive with a firm emphasis on maintaining consistency of our approach to improvement as the organization moves through leadership changes.

- A relentless focus on impact, supported by improved quality and reliability of our information. It is a particular strength of our approach that we have developed a challenging, forensic and ongoing self-assessment process, informed by rapidly improving data and quality assurance processes. We understand the challenges that we still face, and we have plans in place which are dynamic, responsive and which change to reflect our ongoing learning.

Quality & Effectiveness of Our Frontline Practice

- Embedding our new multi-agency 'Front Door' services. Since implementation in April 2013 we have progressively improved the functioning and impact of this critical service area. This is being achieved through a combination of staff development, improved data and supporting systems, a more active buy-in from partners and a culture at all levels of leadership that is relentlessly focused on getting a better deal for vulnerable children and young people.
- Impact of our Early Help framework and Lead Professional arrangements. The DCS has directly led face to face discussions with staff at all levels of the organisation to ensure that learning from the early implementation of the new arrangements is swiftly translated into action and improvements to practice. We are increasingly focused on securing and evidencing early impact from the new arrangements.
- Significant improvements in the quality and timeliness of initial assessments. An initial backlog in the completion of initial assessments has been tackled effectively. This reflects the way in which we are increasingly well-positioned to use robust and targeted performance data to tackle blockages effectively, and as a platform to move swiftly and sustainably to a single assessment framework.

Next Steps – Moving to ‘Good’

Our Assurance Arrangements

We have previously set out for DfE in a letter of assurance our arrangements for securing the focus and sustained momentum of improvements to safeguarding and child protection services in Walsall, in anticipation of a lifting of the Improvement Notice. Our increasing confidence that we have a strong platform for sustained improvement has led us adapt this as a framework for the transformation of the wider spectrum of children and young people’s services across the partnership.

In summary, the key features of our assurance arrangements are:

- Significant improvements to our robust, timely and targeted performance data and its use to inform both strategic and operational decision-making. Crucially, this is supported by a performance-aware culture and the systems in place to adapt and apply the data to the best possible effect across the full range of Children & Young People’s Services. In addition to ‘real-time’ performance management, our self-assessment is increasingly well-developed, both internally and with the support of regional peer challenge and sustained independent challenge.
- A high level of active buy-in from across our partnership and from our political and senior officer structures. This reflects the significant investment of time and resources in Walsall in creating the right conditions for sustainable change within the organisation and wider partnership, in parallel with a direct approach to tackling frontline practice and making the changes to delivery that will make a tangible difference to outcomes for children and young people.
- Our increasingly responsive strategic partnerships have clear priorities which reflect the Strategic Improvement Plan and are overseen by a robust governance framework. The new Ofsted single inspection framework is providing a helpful focus for the partnership to engage with a much broader range of whole-system improvements to services with an acute focus on the child and young person’s journey through our services. There is a clear and well-communicated understanding that we have high aspirations our children, and that providing the right services to the right children, as early as possible is the best way to maximise their outcomes.
- A high profile and visible leadership and management structure continues to directly engage staff across the partnership. This approach will continue to be central to the way we lead and transform all of our services. The appointment of the incoming senior leadership team will be managed on a phased basis, overseen by members and the Chief Executive, with a focus on maintaining the key conditions for success that have characterised the leadership approach throughout the period of the Improvement Notice. This will provide strong leadership and stability during the transition from the Improvement Board to our local governance arrangements.

Our Next Steps to Secure 'Good' Services

Key priorities for the next phase include ...

Our Partnerships & Governance – Next Steps

- *Implementing whole-system improvements & reshaping Children's Services.* Building on our learning from the improvements we have secured in safeguarding and child protection services, our priorities for the next phase include transforming our Commissioning and Workforce Development functions, wholly integrating School Improvement and Education services and embedding our Early Help offer.
- *WSCB readiness for leading the safeguarding improvement priorities.* Our Safeguarding Board is now well-positioned to take on the accountability and oversight of the key improvement priorities – the Board is geared-up for this challenge, with strong support from political and senior officer structures within the Council, and from the wider Children and Young People's Partnership. Taking on this key responsibility will enable the Safeguarding Board to reach its full potential as a strategic force for change in Walsall.
- *Evidencing impact of the Children and Young People's Plan, Safeguarding Board, Corporate Parenting Group and internal governance arrangements.* Having built the partnerships, and the structures that will ensure they deliver, we are challenged with evidencing that this is making a real difference to outcomes for children and young people in Walsall. Our quality assurance and performance management arrangements are acutely focused on supporting and challenging our governance and oversight bodies to demonstrate impact. The strategic plans now being delivered have a clear focus on ensuring the measurability of progress and impact.

Our Capacity, Capability & Culture – Next Steps

- *Full implementation of Workforce Development Strategy & increased workforce stability.* We have taken decisive and effective action to tackle the central issue of workforce stability, reliance on agency staff and wider staff development. But the full implementation of our Workforce Strategy will require a determined and sustained programme of implementation. This is at the core of our plans for securing our hard-won achievements

to date, and creating a sustainable and good quality organisation in the longer-term.

- *New leadership arrangements in place to support our critical next phase of improvement.* Members and the Chief Executive are leading the oversight of a phased approach to making key permanent appointments to leadership and management roles which are critical to sustaining the pace of change and improvement across the full range of Children's Services functions.
- *Progressive improvements to how we use data to inform change and ensure impact.* Building on significant improvements in this area, we have prioritised improvements to the functioning and effectiveness of the current PARIS ICS system. This is in relation both to the availability, quality and integrity of data, and to the functionality and ease of use of the system for supporting and informing good social work practice.

Quality & Effectiveness of Our Frontline Practice – Next Steps

- *Evidencing effective implementation of a wholly integrated 'Front Door' service.* There is good evidence of early impact from the new MAST arrangements as we continually refine the new service model – with the active involvement of the DCS. It is a key priority for us to continue to work with 'real-time' performance information to review and refine this critical entry point to provision and to ensure that the most effective support is provided to the right children, in the right time and in the right place.
- *Embed the Early Help offer with a clear evidence base for measuring impact.* The first phase of our Early Help strategy has focused on putting the key building blocks in place: ensuring that staff, teams and service delivery arrangements are deployed and configured most effectively. We are now challenged with evidencing impact and with taking swift action to learn from our evidence base and refine our service model to deliver the best possible outcomes for local children and young people. This includes service throughput, distances travelled by children, and the extent of positive outcomes achieved, including 'step-down'.
- *Progressively strengthen the voice of children and young people across Children's Services.* Creating a stronger voice for children and young people with tangible evidence of impact on how we shape our services, has been a core principle of the improvement process. However, we believe that despite some improvements, 'voice' is under-developed and remains a headlining priority for the next phase of development –

supported by the new strategy for active involvement which has been signed-off by the Children and Young People's Partnership Board. This organisational learning will also build from Serious Case Review findings, ongoing learning from complaints, and the degree and quantity of children's participation in their progress review and planning.

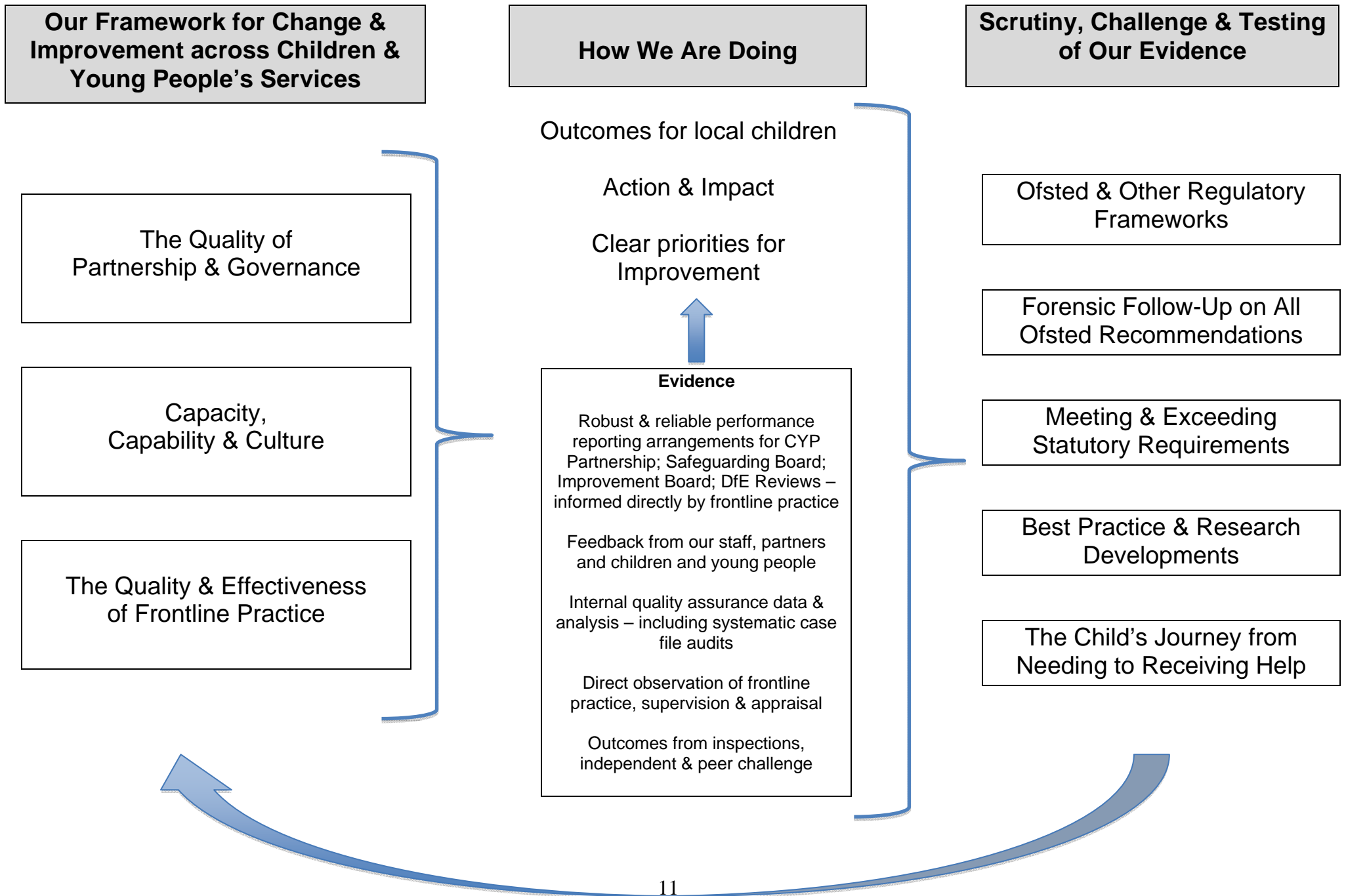
Better Together – One Year On

We are confident at 12 months that we can evidence significant and sustainable improvements as a firm platform for moving forward with a lifting of the Improvement Notice. All of our achievements and future plans are driven by an absolute determination to secure the best possible outcomes and life chances for children, young people and their families in Walsall.

- **Proving** – The rapidly improving quality of our data continues to inform a culture of rigorous self-assessment – sharply focused on the new Ofsted inspection framework. This is key to sustaining the momentum of improvement and transformation. Good information, sharpened by critical internal and independent challenge, is at the core of our assurance arrangements and provides a strong platform for the lifting of the Improvement Notice.
- **Improving** – We can evidence significant improvements in our support for children and young people over the last 12 months, and are clear about where we still need to improve. We are growing our learning from the improvement process and applying this to our action to transform the full spectrum of Children & Young People's Services.
- **Learning** – We have instilled a culture of learning and improvement across all levels of the organisation. There is clear ownership and commitment to this approach from elected members and the Chief Executive who are leading a phased programme of recruitment to critical new senior leadership roles. This will ensure that the hard-won improvements to the culture of Children's Services are sustained and built-on as the organisation and wider partnership continues to develop.

Councillor Mike Bird, Leader of Walsall Council
Paul Sheehan, Chief Executive
Rose Collinson, Interim Director of Children's Services

Self-Assessment in Walsall





‘Better Together For Children’

**Moving Towards Good
Safeguarding
& Child Protection Services in
Walsall**

**Supporting Information on Key
Performance Priorities**

**Report to DfE
3rd December 2013**



Walsall Council

INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report has been prepared specifically for the DfE 12 Month Review to complement the overview report and presentation and to provide more specific information on action and improvement against key themes highlighted in dialogue with DfE colleagues. These include some areas which were also in scope of recommendations arising from the recent Ofsted inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children. The areas covered in this report have been expanded to include an update on progress against the Ofsted 2013 recommendations.
- 1.2 Wherever possible throughout this report we have made direct reference to performance data and other sources of evidence to support our account of achievements or emerging trends. Our ability to present data with confidence in support of this report is a direct reflection of the significant improvements in the quality and reliability of our data in the 12 months since the serving of the Improvement Notice.
- 1.3 However, the development of our information base is a continuing priority and there remains much to be achieved to secure comprehensively robust data across the full range of Children's Services provision. Within this context we have applied a highly measured approach to the presentation of supporting data in this report. Evidence is only cited where there is firm collective agreement about the baseline, reliability of data sources and analysis. This reflects our approach to self-assessment, which has been increasingly challenging and robust.
- 1.4 A key characteristic of the improvement process in Walsall has been our absolute determination to challenge ourselves and other stakeholders in order to secure a better deal for children, young people and their families in Walsall. Our hope and ambition for children drives our work and in particular our persistent focus on getting and using better information to inform decision-making and to measure impact and outcomes for local people.

Councillor Mike Bird, Leader of Walsall Council
Paul Sheehan, Chief Executive
Rose Collinson, Interim Director of Children's Services

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

CIN	Child In Need
CP	Child Protection
CPG	Corporate Parenting Group
CWD	Children With Disabilities
CYPB	Children & Young People's Board
DCS	Executive Director of Children's Services
EH	Early Help
H&WB	Health & Well-Being Board
IA	Initial Assessment
IB	Improvement Board
ICS	Integrated Children's System
IRO	Independent Reviewing Officer
IRS	Initial Response Service
JSNA	Joint Strategic Needs Assessment
LAC	Looked After Children
MAST	Multi-Agency Screening Team
NFA	No Further Action (by Children's Social Care)
QA	Quality Assurance
QA&P	Quality Assurance & Performance Sub-Committee (WSCB)
PARIS	Children's Social Care Information System Software
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SFS	Safeguarding & Family Support Service
WSCB	Walsall Safeguarding Children Board

THRESHOLDS

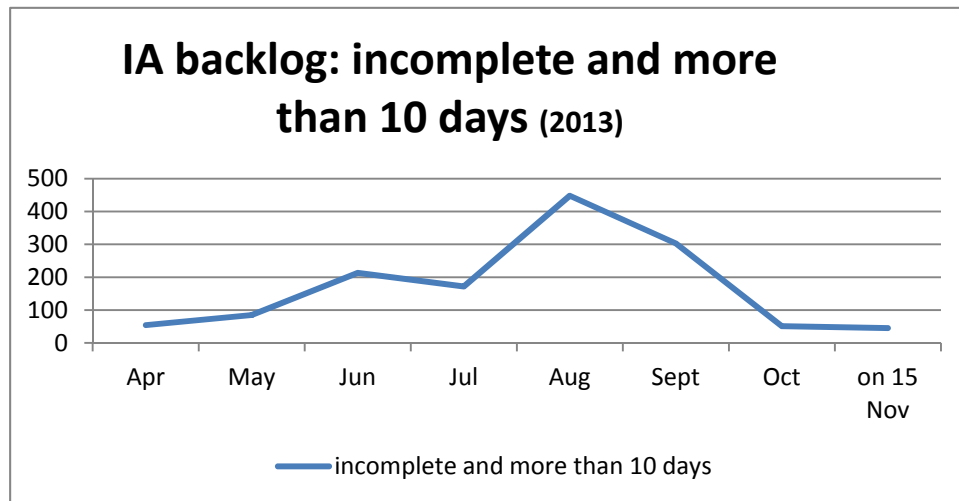
ACTION TAKEN

- We have completed a comprehensive review of policy and practice guidance for staff and partners on the application of thresholds to enable the most effective and timely support for children and young people. This was developed in consultation with staff at all levels of the organisation and with formal sign-off from the Walsall Safeguarding Children Board.
- We have embedded systematic peer auditing of case files across safeguarding services that includes analysis of decision-making and action on thresholds. Learning from this process is increasingly influencing policy, practice and service development. For example, this approach has helped to re-define the thresholds guidance. Feedback on the outcomes of the casefile audits is given to staff teams on a monthly basis to inform improvements in compliance and quality of practice. These include over the last 15 months (up to October 2013) 312 peer and internal audits; 40 external challenge audits; a systematic audited review of 195 Children with Disability cases and further ongoing independent thematic audits. Summary reports of learning and actions have commenced and key messages are being reported to governance bodies. A key next step is to ensure that this learning is translated into action and impact swiftly.
- The introduction of MAST and the link to the emerging Early Help Offer (referenced separately in this report) is actively supported by direct and ongoing engagement and face to face dialogue between the DCS and operational staff to ensure that service planning and implementation is clearly informed by frontline practice.
- We undertook a 'deep dive' audit of cases where Initial Assessment resulted in NFA for children's social care. This identified some weaknesses in the joint working arrangements between MAST, Social Care and the Early Help Offer. The findings directly informed a swift management response which has resulted in material improvements in the quality and consistency of decision-making.

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT & IMPROVED OUTCOMES

- The deep dive audit and subsequent staff engagement sessions have resulted in swift communication around the need to ensure the right decisions are made as early on in children's journeys as possible. A renewed vigour in utilising early help, the firming up of the Early Help Strategy and Pathway, re-directing 120 cases from SFS to Early Help and consultation on the thresholds guidance followed as a direct result.

- There is increasing evidence to illustrate positive movement and a stronger collective understanding of our thresholds. Evidence includes a reduction in the backlog of initial assessments from 448 in August 2013 to 22 (on 22 November 2013), increasingly consistent decision-making and less adverse impact in the system. The thresholds were clearly too low, but we now have a fluid, responsive and functional framework in place that quickly identifies and actions system improvements. When changes are made they are swiftly and widely communicated to ensure prompt implementation.



WHAT WE STILL NEED TO DO

- Further improvements to the range and clarity of data captured by the electronic management system.
- Forensic monitoring of the application of thresholds through QA and performance management approaches, including the implementation of detailed step-up / step down monitoring – the numbers, duration and closure reasons / outcomes at each stage of the journey.

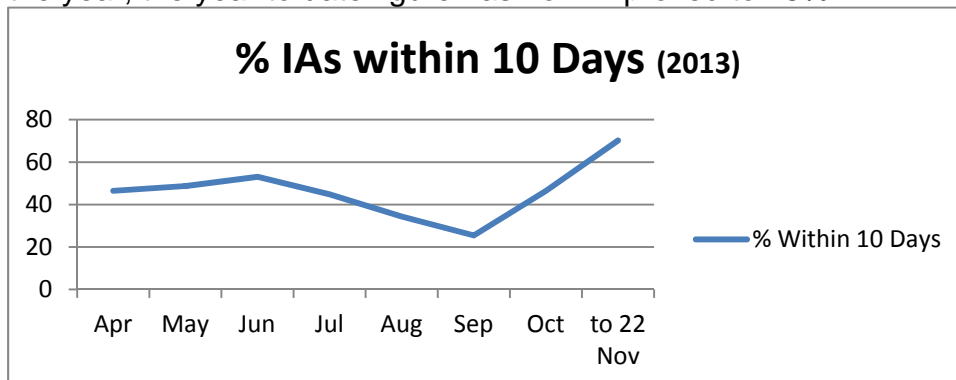
Multi-Agency Screening Team (MAST) & Initial Response Service (IRS)

ACTION TAKEN

- Following the April 2013 launch of the new MAST arrangements we have placed a continuing priority on analysing and refining the effective operation of the new model.
- A direct dialogue between DCS, Leadership Team and operational staff ensures that frontline experience quickly informs service delivery and design.
- Forensic case file auditing of MAST referrals has provided a strong evidence base to inform practice, improve communication and the development of critical linkage between front door provision and the Early Help Offer.

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT & IMPROVED OUTCOMES

- The timeliness of initial assessment completion has improved considerably since the re-organisation of the duty rota. So far in November, 72.8% of initial assessments have been completed within 10 working days which suggests Walsall is in-line with the national average for March 2013. Whilst still low due to significant dip earlier in the year, the year to date figure has now improved to 45%.



- There has been good progress made on this priority. A good level of understanding exists amongst staff and partners of the new MAST arrangements and how to make contact. Anecdotal and audit evidence supports this through an ongoing DCS-led programme of operational staff engagement, and dialogue with partners at the Safeguarding Board, Improvement Board and with schools.
- IRS caseloads are reducing significantly as the backlog of initial assessments is reduced. This reflects increasingly consistent decision-making at point of contact and signposting to the Early Help Offer. Since September 2013 approximately 22% of contacts to MAST have resulted in a recommendation for an early help assessment, 36% for an initial assessment and 35% requiring no further action (NFA) by

children's social care. NFA also includes onward referral to a single agency and/or information and advice.

WHAT WE STILL NEED TO DO

- Direct work with staff across the full spectrum of safeguarding and early help provision to further develop practice and embed the cultural change and new working practices which will secure the best possible impact for children and young people from the Early Help Offer.
- Further potential for systematic recording improvements on PARIS (our ICS system) has emerged and these improvements are being addressed to ensure the quality of tracking this data going forwards.

STEP-UP / STEP-DOWN & LEAD PROFESSIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

Links to Ofsted 2013 Recommendation

'Ensure that, where children are ready to step down from a child in need plan, a lead professional is identified that can effectively coordinate early help services that continue to support improved outcomes'

ACTION TAKEN

- Our Early Help Pathway is in place with guidance on how the Early Help Assessment process is delivered. This sets out clear expectations of timeliness and multi-agency practice that links the Early Help Offer and statutory Child Protection Services. This is supported by the Thresholds Guidance and Step-Up / Step-Down practice guidance.
- Lead Professional arrangements are increasingly effective – there is a robust system in place for Early Help Assessments and interventions to be delivered in a timely way, resulting in direct work being undertaken with families. An identified senior operational manager takes responsibility for authorising the next steps. This provides a professional oversight of Early Help referrals.

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT & IMPROVED OUTCOMES

- It is known that the figures currently being reported via the PARIS system significantly under-represent the number of children receiving early help assessments and support. Work is underway to rectify this.
- Manually recorded figures by MAST provide a better picture of the number of contacts forwarded to early help from this source – an average of 55 per week or 22% of the support request contacts received. This equated to 260 cases which have been redirected to an Early Help assessment since October 2013. Further work is underway with staff to increase this proportion.

WHAT WE STILL NEED TO DO

- Early Help briefing sessions are being delivered on a localised multi agency basis to provide an opportunity for frontline staff from across the partnership to discuss and agree how Lead Professional roles will operate at a local level.
- Action to improve & embed the pace of response to Early Help referrals includes: (a) Continuation of monthly peer audit of cases to evidence improvements in capturing the child's journey and (b) Changes to the recording system to track volume, outcomes and step up and step down at each stage of the child's journey

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

LINK TO 2013 OFSTED RECOMMENDATION

'Ensure a review of the workforce planning strategy and take action to improve stability in the social workforce and reduce dependency on agency staff'

ACTION TAKEN

- The Workforce Development Strategy has been comprehensively revised with a sharper focus on measurable targets and outcomes reflecting the improvement priorities.
- We have implemented a staff supervision and appraisal framework which is monitored through robust performance monitoring arrangements with direct oversight from the Improvement Board. We have introduced the Professional Capabilities Framework and a wider programme of work to ensure we deliver on the Employer Standards for Social Work. This was carried out in 2012 and is currently being undertaken for 2013. The Interim Executive Director of Children's Services is the regional DCS lead on workforce development.
- A workload management tool is in place – initially in SFS, LAC and CWD to support and inform the effective operational management of social work caseloads and wider strategic decision-making on resources and the shape of local services. The tool is under continuing review to ensure effectiveness in the context of evidence of an overall reduction in caseloads from 25.2 (open CIN cases per worker, March 2013) to 20.7 in October. A strategic exercise has been undertaken in conjunction with HR, Finance & Workforce Development to ascertain exactly how many Social Workers are needed across Children's Services – informed by a balance between caseload averages and need.
- Our recruitment campaigns for social workers are consistently resulting in high numbers of applications and appointments to vacant posts. We are submitting an invest to save proposal to release resources from reserves to fund additional capacity for the induction and development of incoming newly qualified Social Workers, and to ensure a smooth transition to new staffing arrangements which will release agency staff from their roles.

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT & IMPROVED OUTCOMES

- There are significant improvements in the recruitment of social work posts and a reduction in staff turnover. Taking the last 3 months in isolation this is 4.8%. The rolling 12 months figure is 16.6% to the end of October.
- Use of agency staffing has reduced from 65.6% to 53.9% (full-time equivalent) over the August to September period. It is anticipated that progressive implementation of the refreshed workforce development strategy will continue to address this against a background of the improving stability in the workforce.
- Vacancy rates are at 22% (36 vacancies). If the 13 posts under conditional offer were included, this rate would be 14.4%.

WHAT WE STILL NEED TO DO

- Continued implementation of the priorities set out in the Workforce Development Strategy.
- Actively support newly qualified social workers (who form the main part of the recent intake) to acquire skills and knowledge that will enable them to take on the more complex cases. This will facilitate the release of more experienced agency staff.
- Support & direction to operational managers on interpretation and application of workload management tool.

SUCCESSION PLANNING

LINK TO 2013 OFSTED RECOMMENDATION

Ensure suitable succession arrangements are in place at senior management level to ensure that current improvements in service delivery and outcomes for children and young people can be sustained

ACTION TAKEN

- Assistant Director posts for the new organisational model are scheduled for interview in early December following positive response to national advert. We are on target for initial appointments in early 2014. The new service model has been developed in parallel with the timelines and consultation arrangements for the whole Council budget-setting process for 2014/15.
- There is strong political and Chief Officer level support for securing a smooth transition to the new arrangements that maintains the focus and direction of the current Strategic Improvement Plan for Safeguarding.
- A continuing programme of DCS led staff engagement across all levels of the organisation contributes to a progressive improvement in communication, culture and motivation across all levels of Children's Services. We have prioritised staff training, development, supervision and appraisal programmes to develop and sustain workforce stability.

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT & IMPROVED OUTCOMES

- Reference turnover, recruitment and vacancy data in *Workforce Development* section above

WHAT WE STILL NEED TO DO

- Completion of appointment process and phased handover arrangements agreed from early 2014.
- Reshaping services to sustain delivery and outcomes through a process of organisational change and new appointments to key posts.

WALSALL SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD

ACTION TAKEN

- The establishment of the WSCB and agreement on the Business Plan enables effective prioritisation of relevant service improvements for children and young people.
- The committee structure is now fully operational.
- Development and implementation of the Learning & Improvement Plan is being closely aligned with the wider Quality Assurance framework for children & young people's services to maximise resource capacity and impact.
- An independently facilitated WSCB review meeting was undertaken in October to review WSCB effectiveness & readiness for the single inspection framework and pick-up from IB. A report was presented to the November Improvement Board on the outcomes from this session.

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT & IMPROVED OUTCOMES

- Increased culture of challenge and accountability amongst partners – evident in the WSCB review
- Attendance & engagement from across partnership is good with 68% overall attendance at WSCB meetings this financial year, 73% at Quality and Performance Committee, 49% at Policy, Procedure Learning and Development Committee and 71% at SCR Committee. Low representation of probation colleagues in committee meetings has been addressed and agreement on attendance reached.

WHAT WE STILL NEED TO DO

- Produce evidence of the strategic influence of WSCB and impact on making a positive difference to outcomes for children and young people in Walsall. Central to evidencing impact will be early analysis of progress in delivering the priorities set out in the WSCB Business Plan.
- WSCB to lead responsibility for oversight and accountability arrangements for the continuing delivery of the Strategic Improvement Plan for Safeguarding following the lifting of the DfE Improvement Notice. In the short term, the Chair of IB is attending WSCB and a number of key former IB agenda papers will be considered first by WSCB and their recommendations communicated to IB. These measures will support the smooth transfer of accountabilities.

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTNERSHIP

ACTION TAKEN

- Following full launch of the performance management framework for safeguarding in September 2013 and alignment to the WSCB, Corporate Parenting Group and Scrutiny and Performance Panel, the CYP Board has implemented a refreshed performance reporting arrangement. This will ensure robust strategic alignment between governance bodies to secure maximised impact of resources on prioritised areas of need.
- At the September meeting the CYP Board signed off the Terms of Reference and the Strategic Direction. Each of the CYPB Priority delivery plans is now complete and work is in progress to identify and use a partnership scorecard approach to drive progress and improve outcomes for children and young people.
- The Children and Young People's Plan and associated delivery plans have been reviewed and redrafted, strategic linkage with other relevant strategies ensured and critical challenge undertaken around the measurability of progress. This means that when the CYP Board receives quarterly performance reports and requests drill-down where necessary, the intelligence informing decisions is robust and action well-informed.

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT & IMPROVED OUTCOMES

- There has been value demonstrated in the process of bringing partners together to champion and sponsor priorities. Each Sponsor led work across multi-agency teams to produce a delivery plan, detailing who will do what, over what timescale and with what outcomes.
- The partners were able to set aside organisational drivers to focus on the key needs of children and young people.

WHAT WE STILL NEED TO DO

- Move into the delivery phase of the Children & Young People's Plan – including measuring the impact of CYP Plan delivery, understanding the outcomes for children and young people, and continually refining our plans and our activity to reflect learning from early delivery of the CYP Plan priorities.
- Maintain and build on the established culture of accountability and professional challenge between CYP partners which has been forged through the development of the CYP delivery plans. This will be reflected in detailed joint working between meetings, as well as within the formal CYP Board process.

PARIS / ICS IMPROVEMENTS

Linked to Ofsted 2013 Recommendation

'Ensure that the child's electronic recording system facilitates and supports social work practice, quality assurance and performance management processes'

ACTION TAKEN

- We are taking priority action to identify and commission a new ICS system provider, whilst delivering a programme of comprehensive improvements to the current PARIS system. This will ensure longer-term systematic and sustainable change as a platform for improvement, whilst not compromising the need for swift and immediate improvements to the functionality and effectiveness of the system to support good social work practice. The commissioning of a new system is informed by our understanding of the requirements of the new Ofsted inspection framework.
- A broader base of professionals are using PARIS – leading to a widening the scope of usage across Children's Services (for example Fostering and Adoption Teams) in addition to increased direct inputting by partnership colleagues including Health professionals.
- Revised forms for inputting CP Plans, Child Protection Enquiries, Core Groups and Children's Placement Plans have gone live on the system for a 3 month trial period. This reflects a clear, measured and consultative approach to implementing improvements to the system that are informed by practice.
- From October, we have introduced a mechanism for recording of the reason for the conclusion of early help interventions. This will directly inform and influence the way in which the Early Help Offer is refined to secure maximum benefit for children and young people.

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT & IMPROVED OUTCOMES

- Weekly client, worker and team level data confirms considerable improvement in data quality scores: e.g. average IRS team score has increased from 88.2% accurate completion to 98.2% between August and October 2013.
- Staff are actively using data to support targeted improvement areas, and their managers are maintaining a detailed view of individual and team performance – this intelligence has recently influenced decisions around whether to retain particular workers.

WHAT WE STILL NEED TO DO
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Urgent action is underway to ensure our ICS system fully complies with CIN return specification 2013/14 and that the new additional inspection requirements of Annex A can be fulfilled• The current procurement of a new ICS system is a key priority and is a critical platform for moving forward and securing longer-term improvements to evidencing practice, measuring the impact of our work and swiftly and effectively targeting improvement activity. In parallel with this we will continue to prioritise improvements to the current PARIS system.

EARLY HELP OFFER

ACTION TAKEN

- The Early Help Strategy and Early Help Pathway process are in place with supporting staff training and briefings undertaken to support implementation. The Early Help multi-agency advisory group has been established to oversee the implementation of the strategy. A planned programme of communication and engagement with all key partners is in place and being delivered. Staff engagement sessions with the leadership group & DCS have focused on the Early Help Offer.
- Tracking mechanisms for Walsall's Troubled Families programme are in place supported by staff training. To date we have identified 413 eligible families and the lives of 92 families have been turned around since work with the families started in September 2012. This has been referenced as 'great work' by the Director General of the Troubled Families programme.
- Locality Early Help Teams (Area Family Support Teams) have been reshaped and strengthened to directly support the Early Help Offer with increasingly effective targeting of cases referred through the MAST service. This includes step-down from Child in Need cases. Refreshed Family Support Panel arrangements are in place to quality assure and monitor impact of Early Help assessments & interventions

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT & IMPROVED OUTCOMES

- First report on impact of Early Help assessments & MAST linkage will report end November 2013 – this is the earliest credible date for measuring impact.

WHAT WE STILL NEED TO DO

- Walsall's 18 Children's Centres are being reshaped to be an integral part of the locality-based Early Help Offer. This is against a background of increasingly strong inspection outcomes for our Children's Centres.
- Implementing and learning from the outcomes of our 'Distance Travelled Tool' (Outcomes Star) supported by staff training (200 staff trained by end December).
- Building on performance and quality assurance data to continually develop service quality and impact of the Early Help Offer, to match need with provision and communicate it well.

OFSTED 2013 RECOMMENDATION
Ensure that social worker caseloads are manageable so that children receive good quality input and this is recorded promptly

ACTION TAKEN

- A workload management tool is in place – initially in SFS, LAC and CWD service areas to support and inform the effective operational management of social work caseloads and wider strategic decision-making on resources and the shape of local services. The tool and its results are under continuing review to ensure effectiveness in the context of evidence of an overall reduction in caseloads.
- A strategic exercise has been undertaken in conjunction with HR, Finance & Workforce Development to ascertain exactly how many Social Workers are needed across Children’s Services – informed by caseload averages.
- These developments are aligned with improvements to staff support, supervision and appraisal to enable staff to deliver the most effective and best quality professional practice to secure the best possible outcomes for local children and young people.

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT & IMPROVED OUTCOMES

- There is firm evidence of reduction in caseloads – decreased from 25.2 at the end of March 2013 to 22.9 at the end of September and 20.7 at the end of October. (Measured by no. open Child in Need, CPP and LAC cases divided by no. workers)
- Following audit activity, approximately 120 child in need cases have been diverted to Early Help, and the threshold descriptions consulted upon and consolidated.

WHAT WE STILL NEED TO DO

- Support & direction to operational managers on interpretation and application of workload management tool.
- Further work to develop the tool more effectively for CWD application.
- Develop a tool suitable for IRS use.
- Take action on the outcomes of the strategic review of workloads.

OFSTED 2013 RECOMMENDATION

Ensure that children and young people are actively encouraged to participate in child protection conferences in the most appropriate way, including the use of advocacy support

ACTION TAKEN

- The Children's Society has been invited to represent children's views when appropriate at CP conferences and will report on this on a quarterly basis moving forward.
- Conferences invites have been strengthened to reflect the need for advocacy at CP conferences. A systematic method has been devised for child protection conferences and LAC reviews to track and quantify: the engagement of children and young people, the use of advocacy, the timeliness of contributions of partners and the quality of progress. This system goes live from December 2013.
- Action in this area is further supported by the development and implementation of the strategy for children and young people's active involvement across the full range of Children's Services provision and by the core principle that children should be regularly seen and seen alone as a critical element of any social work intervention.

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT & IMPROVED OUTCOMES

- Systems are in place but limited data is available on impact at this stage.
- Evidence from CP conference minutes and from a quantifiable quality assurance system being operated by Independent Chairs around CYP attendance, engagement and advocacy use.

WHAT WE STILL NEED TO DO

- Continued implementation of this theme as a priority across the partnership
- A specialist IRO booklet to inform CYP attendance at conference is currently being piloted for CP conferences and reviews across a broad range of cases of children up to age 11.

OFSTED 2013 RECOMMENDATION

Ensure that social workers undertaking enquiries into child protection concerns regarding disabled children work closely with the social worker from the disability team so that the information is clearly recorded and coordinated resulting in well informed evidence and findings and that this work receives sufficient management oversight

ACTION TAKEN

- Management action has been taken to strengthen joint working between CWD & Safeguarding Teams. This includes the implementation of a protocol and practice guidance to inform joint working arrangements.
- A staff development programme is being delivered to CWD staff to enhance their skills for undertaking their own child protection casework. This will negate the need for two workers to be involved in cases of this type.
- A development on PARIS is being implemented to identify clearly the lead key worker for each child

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT & IMPROVED OUTCOMES

- Communication and roles and responsibilities are now clearer as is the process for dispute resolution.

WHAT WE STILL NEED TO DO

- Case file audit in January 2014 to capture significant number of relevant cases to inform further development of the protocol & related practice.

OFSTED 2013 RECOMMENDATION

Ensure appropriate responses to complaints processes and demonstrate learning from complaints

ACTION TAKEN

- The new framework for managing complaints has been developed, including the protocol for embedding organisational learning from complaints. This is being piloted during November 2013.
- A weekly report is provided to Assistant Directors detailing the status of all open complaints and where / how these are being responded to. This enables a direct drill-down where required to secure progress and tackle delay.
- The approval process has been tightened to reduce delay and increase the direct accountability of operational staff for the content and timeliness of complaints responses. The authorisation now sits at Head of Service level, minimising unnecessary tiers of corporate approval. By freeing up the Complaints Team from the chasing and administrative activity, they are available to give guidance and advice to Children's Services staff in building the response to the service user.
- Regarding dissemination of learning from complaints and serious case reviews, senior practitioners are now able to share learning whenever this is beneficial.

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT & IMPROVED OUTCOMES

- Emerging trends from analysis of complaints are being identified and reported as appropriate to senior managers and the Corporate Parenting Group to inform service development and management action. Headline themes include:
 - **Delays.** A common issue in complaints related to the time taken to complete a particular action, including arranging for something to happen or sending a copy of information promised. In looking at the reasons for these delays, whilst they often related to capacity issues there is a clear lesson in terms of managing the expectation of service users, planning workloads to take account of leave and in staff asking for help early where they are going to struggle to meet timescales.
 - **Voice of the child.** A number of those complaints that came directly from a child or young person related to them feeling like they were not being listened to, or that their wishes were being ignored. Improvements taking place elsewhere within the improvement plan should impact on this but it is important to recognise that complaints of this nature are themselves another expression of the child's voice and the culture of complaint handling should reflect the importance of this.

- **Communication.** A number of complaints relate to the way the customer feels about the way they were spoken to. Whilst these types of complaints are often difficult to reach a judgement on, as they are based on perception and are often one person's word against another, they do provide an opportunity for social workers and teams to reflect on their communication skills, whilst recognising that having to deliver difficult messages may result in some unhappy service users.

WHAT WE STILL NEED TO DO

- Embed the new complaints handling process, with regular review and refinement informed by staff and service user feedback.
- Develop an increasing evidence base of learning from complaints, including analysis of trends and details of how practice and systems have been changed to reflect this.
- Collate evidence of impact, where staff performance and children's outcomes have improved through our learning from complaints.

OFSTED 2013 RECOMMENDATION

Ensure the new quality assurance and performance framework is embedded to enable effective monitoring of service delivery, such as early help and commissioning

ACTION TAKEN

- The Performance and Quality Assurance Framework has been agreed and is being implemented across Children's Services. Findings are being actively used to address areas for improvement. Our QA Framework identifies a range of sources of learning & evidence to inform service planning & review. There are increasingly well-developed and embedded peer audit processes across frontline social care teams.
- Progressive improvements have been made to the quality and availability of management information, and to the performance monitoring arrangements that draw from this data. Performance scorecards are in place across all key strategic fora (e.g. IB, WSCB, CYPB,CPG, Scrutiny).
- We have applied the Youth Of Walsall survey, co-designed with young people, to gather intelligence on CYP views across a broad range of client groups to directly inform commissioning and planning decisions.
- Our JSNA is being used to inform commissioning and planning, drawing on information and intelligence from across children's and health services.
- Changes to the PARIS system increasingly enable reporting on Early Help impact. Communication has been undertaken to encourage consistently complete recording using the appropriate options.

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT & IMPROVED OUTCOMES

- Significant improvement in areas such as completed IA timeliness has been supported by managers using worker level reports
- New tracking of incomplete IAs by named workers is proving useful
- We have met with parents to improve SEN Transport services and short break services. Parents were involved in the evaluation of quality of short break tenders and their scoring has helped us award contracts and has informed future purchasing choice.
- Staff retention is actively supported by data and management information on casework outcomes being fed directly back to staff.

- Feedback from staff is that motivation and retention are increased by affirmation of good practice using evidence and feedback based on management information and oversight.

WHAT WE STILL NEED TO DO

- Continue to support managers to embed audits across Children's Services and to use the information and learning from audits to develop practice.
- Embedding systematic QA information and evidence into commissioning and contracting arrangements.
- Support around the QA measures available to commissioners to build more explicit outcome measures into contracts and outsourced arrangements.

OFSTED 2013 RECOMMENDATION

Ensure that parents are able to see all agency reports to child protection conference in advance so they appreciate the full range of professional staff's views of risk and protective factors

ACTION TAKEN

- A quantifiable quality assurance system to be completed by conference chairs following each CP conference has been agreed. Systems are now in place and are being built on the PARIS system.
- System in place to evidence of feedback from parents / families indicating level of satisfaction with the quality of relationships with social workers and services received. Improvements in timeliness of family receipt of agency reports to be captured via the IRO QA system and reported to QA&P Committee of the Safeguarding Board.

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT & IMPROVED OUTCOMES

- Feedback from IROs suggests that Social Work reports are increasingly being made available to parents in good time before conferences. Reports from other agencies remain more variable.

WHAT WE STILL NEED TO DO

- Actively engage partner agencies in providing advance reports.
- Implement PARIS / ICS data capture for the quality assurance system above – on target for completion early December.

OFSTED 2013 RECOMMENDATION

Ensure that everyone in the community, including key professionals, is aware of the requirements about safeguarding to children who are privately fostered

ACTION TAKEN

- Training for staff and partners has been delivered as a priority.
- Children and young people who are identified as being in private fostering arrangements are fully considered at private fostering panel and issues arising from the panel are immediately followed up. Case file audits were undertaken in August 2013 and all follow-up action that was required has been progressed.
- New promotional materials have been produced, in consultation with children and young people, to promote awareness of private fostering across professional and stakeholder groups.
- Staff have taken part in local radio programmes to raise awareness among ethnic minority communities of private fostering.

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT & IMPROVED OUTCOMES

- Systematic audits of visit records show there is good partnership awareness of private fostering arrangements and how the safeguarding, health and wellbeing needs of these children have to be met.

WHAT WE STILL NEED TO DO

- Continue to actively raise awareness of partners to support the identification of children in private fostering arrangements.

Appendix

School Improvement in Walsall: A new direction for our school improvement function

Summary:

This paper summarises the role of the local authority in school improvement, within the national and local context. A way forward for reshaping the school improvement service in Walsall is identified, including a 'core offer' to all schools as well as additional support for underperforming schools.

1. Background:

The vision for school improvement services in Walsall is expressed within the school improvement strategy document and has at its heart Walsall Council's ambition to "champion children" and ensure that all pupils and students attend a good or outstanding school and achieve their potential.

The vision also states that: *"we shall work to raise aspirations, raise expectations and raise achievement through the learning community of Walsall"* and *"every learner will develop world class aptitudes, qualifications and skills for employability and life"*.

There is some way to go in achieving this vision and the school improvement service has a vital role to play in this challenge. The policy direction from DfE and the changing role of the Local Authority sets the context in which we can identify the actions required to deliver the vision, namely:

- Increased autonomy and freedoms for all schools
- Increased accountability and requirement to deliver value for money – across all services
- Increase in diversity and range of schools available to children, young people and their parents (academy, free, UTCs, all through etc)
- Drive towards a sector led improvement, i.e. a school led system in which school leaders take responsibility for developing and improving the system

Clearly, all schools and other educational settings are the main agents of change, responsible for their own improvement and for making the best use of any support and challenge that is available to them. As some schools will need more support/challenge than others, the policy direction puts a premium on the concepts of school-to-school support and collaboration between schools. For school-to-school support to work effectively, commitment and action is needed from good / outstanding leaders and their schools. Building leadership capacity and improving quality of leadership is, therefore, critical.

Walsall's School Improvement Strategy sets out the vision, values and improvement priorities to 2016, along with the accountabilities of the LA, headteachers and governing bodies. Success criteria for each of these groups are identified and delivery plans have been developed with benchmarks, timeframes and quantified outcomes.

2. Role of local authority school improvement service

In a school led system, the purpose of a central LA school improvement service (SIS) is to:

- Provide strategic leadership for school improvement and promote a culture of ambition and continuous improvement for all schools / pupils
- Monitor, challenge and support schools, intervening, where appropriate, in a timely and effective manner
- Maintain an overview of all schools' performances – strengths and weaknesses – using data driven-evidence base, i.e. know its schools well

- Act as broker and commissioner of improvement services on behalf of schools – and achieve best value for money
- Support and challenge schools to build leadership capacity and improve governance, leadership and management

The role of the LA is clearly now smaller and more tightly focused, one consequence is that the School Improvement Service will need to shrink, along with other council services.

The above functions are drawn from the Ofsted Framework for Inspection of School Improvement Service and form the basis of local authority school improvement inspections.

3. Accountability of school improvement service

The service is fundamentally accountable for ensuring all children go to a good school and that social/economic background is not a barrier to accessing a good school. And where this isn't the case, the service is accountable for supporting and challenging schools to achieve rapid improvement. It is accountable for having an impact – and by this we mean adding value to pupil outcomes.

4. So what are the priorities?

Given the policy direction, the Council's vision and the significant challenges facing Walsall schools, there are some key question about how we should organise school improvement, both across the borough and in the central service. Four interdependent work streams have been identified – four work streams that should be tackled simultaneously and can be linked into the School Improvement Strategy working group. These are:

1. To develop a robust and effective system of school-to school support - as part of the School Improvement infra-structure - which is used by and held in high regard by serving school leaders

Increase in number of National Leaders in Education (NLEs) (3), Local Leaders in Education (LLEs) (8) National Leaders of Governance (NLGs) recruited from nursery, primary, secondary and special school leaders and existing NLEs, LLEs and NLGs, and their schools, deployed to support schools requiring improvement (with positive feedback from supported schools).

Increase in number of Sector Leaders in Education (SLEs), particularly at primary level – 80% of existing regularly deployed to support other aspiring and serving middle leaders.

As 100% nursery schools are currently outstanding and special schools draw on leadership expertise to support other schools.

2 To develop a stronger climate of collaboration and exchange of good practice between schools

Increase in number of teaching school alliances or number of schools participating in alliances.

Promote use of website by schools to log effective practice: schools across LA access and use.

Develop approach to a learning consortium (led by Headteachers) and join up with school improvement strategy.

3. To strengthen schools' leadership capability and capacity

Develop a programme of school based leadership development – particularly at middle level leadership - using licensed provision.

Ensure all newly appointed heads access appropriate support, make an effective start to their role and report positively on their role and the work they are undertaking in school.

Investigate developing a programme of talent management (overseen by headteacher working group – link to learning consortium?), with a particular focus on new teachers.

4. To review central approach to school improvement

Develop LA approach to “core offer” for all schools – including academies: develop offer for schools requiring additional support, including clarity around triggers.

Develop LA approach to school improvement processes, e.g. recording school visits, executive summaries, data analysis, improvement strategies, category schools, LA intervention powers.

Clarify the role of SI and how the role operates in practice for core offer and levels of additional support needed for schools causing concern / under performing.

Develop processes to ensure early and effective intervention for underperforming schools - catch schools before underperforming.

Broker support for schools – from quality assured providers, within and beyond LA.

Provide support and challenge for governance and leadership which is targeted appropriately.

5. Next Steps

- Implement a school to school support model in Walsall, which maximises school leaders to work with more schools / settings that are requiring support.
- Initiate a Walsall Learning Consortium which provides partnership arrangements for ‘practice worth sharing’ across educational settings in Walsall.
- Provide feedback to Headteachers and Governors on the outcome of the review of Walsall’s school Improvement Strategy, together with related action plan.
- Implement revised strengthened Headteacher induction programme for Summer 2014 onwards.
- Produce a Walsall leadership development programme which provides training and development for Headteachers, deputy Headteachers, governors, and other managers together with a robust succession planning framework to strengthen educational leadership in Walsall schools and sustain improvements.
- Implement the school improvement ‘core offer’ with all Walsall schools in January 2014.