

EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

TUESDAY 19 APRIL, 2016 AT 6.00 P.M. AT THE COUNCIL HOUSE

Committee Members Present	Councillor R. Burley (Chair) Councillor E. Hazell (Vice Chair) Councillor A. Ditta Councillor T. Wilson
Portfolio Holders Present	Councillor E. Hughes (Care and Safeguarding) Councillor C. Towe (Learning, Skills and Apprenticeships)
Non elected voting Members present	S. Raynor (Lichfield Diocesan Education)
Non elected non voting Members present	R. Bragger (Primary Teacher Representative) P. Welter (Secondary Teacher Representative)
Officers Present	David Haley - Director (Children's Services) Lynda Poole – Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) Debbie Carter - Assistant Director (Children's Social Care) Karen Marcroft - Head of Service - Quality Assurance & Performance Information Connie Bernie - School Improvement Partner Ross Hutchinson - Lead Accountant Neil Picken – Senior Committee Business and Governance Manager

574/16 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors M. Follows, G. Perry and D. Shires.

575/16 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions.

576/16 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

None

577/16 **LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985 (AS AMENDED)**

There were no agenda items that required the exclusion of the public.

578/16 **MINUTES**

Members considered the minutes of the meeting held on 23 February, 2016. The Senior Committee Business and Governance Manager was requested to include Mr S. Raynor in the list of attendees and remove Brenda Etchells.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 23 February, 2016, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record subject to Mr S. Raynor being included within the list of attendees and Brenda Etchells name being removed.

579/16 **WALSALL SELF ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES**

The Committee considered a report [annexed] which provided data analysis and commentary on a number of areas within Children's Social Care.

The Portfolio Holder (Care and Safeguarding) addressed the Committee explaining that he had sought assurance that the information provided could be trusted in light of reduced resources. It was made clear that prior to data being released a certain amount of data cleansing would be carried out. It was important that data was accurate, open and transparent. Reference was made to reports from Mosaic which was still being embedded. He suggested that all Members should visit the staff using the Mosaic system to gain a better understanding of the work carried out to produce the statistics.

A Member queried whether the Portfolio Holder (Care and Safeguarding) was suggesting that data produced was inaccurate. The Portfolio Holder advised that there would always be slight variances with data as it constantly changed (such as when Looked After Children becoming 18). However, issues were very mild and never enough to skew matters significantly.

The Head of Service (Quality Assurance & Performance Information) advised that in year figures were un-validated but were 'sense checked'. It was confirmed that the figures became validated and 'fixed' when submitted to Government as part of the statutory returns process. This information would be published toward the end of September/early October each year. It was confirmed that there had been some

recording backlogs with Mosaic and that plans were in place to bring this up to date. Mosaic was a new system which would take time to get right.

The Assistant Director (Children's Social Care) advised that data input into the system was undertaken by social workers. It was explained that some data collection entries were mandatory whilst others were left to social workers discretion. It was clear that there was still a challenge in respect of quality of practice. Any inaccurate recording would impact on the data set.

Members pushed for clarity as to some of the anomalies reported within the system. The Head of Service (Quality Assurance & Performance Information) advised that the adoption service had historically used manual records as they did not have access to the previous computer system – Paris. The new system was a large change in working practices and so would take time to embed. Members were advised that the system was new and a full year of data wasn't yet available for analysis.

The Assistant Director (Children's Social Care) advised that social workers had a lot of cases which required a lot of recording. Social workers main focus was children and families but work needed to be undertaken to encourage data entry.

The Head of Service (Quality Assurance & Performance Information) sought the Committee's view on the type of data provided within the report explaining that it could be tailored to the Committees requirements. Members advised that it was a good overview and further detailed reports would be useful in future. The Portfolio Holder (Social Care) confirmed that detailed reports were available should Members have any specific areas they wished to consider in more depth. He added that there were difficulties with social worker recruitment nationally and he hoped that the Combined Authority may help to impose a pay agreement amongst local authorities, as previous attempts had been unsuccessful.

A Member stated that it was difficult to know what information should be included within the scorecard as the Committee had not been advised of the full extent of information available. He referred to gaps in attainment which were not included within the scorecard. The Head of Service (Quality Assurance & Performance Information) advised that there were areas in which a lot of work was being undertaken but a graph was not the most appropriate way of representing the data. It was confirmed that the Education Challenge Board had considered gaps in attainment and other matters in great detail. It was clarified that the Committee could request exception reports into any area within its remit.

A Member queried why there were still problems with MOASIC, stating that she was aware that reports and letters, especially in fostering and adoption, generated by the system were not quite right. The Portfolio Holder (Care and Safeguarding) advised that the transition from paper files to MOSAIC was a huge task. He acknowledged that there were still issues but stressed that a lot of work was being undertaken to ensure that the system runs as smoothly as possible. The Member acknowledged the point but stressed that development could not go on forever as the system needed to be effective. The Assistant Director (Children's Social Care) stated that it was early days in terms of implementation advising that systems take a long time to

embed. There was specific focus on the work of fostering and adoption and data was checked and reviewed. It was made clear that by the end of April, 2016 a full year of data would be available.

The Chair suggested that the performance scorecard be included as a standard item on future agenda considering two specific areas in depth at each meeting. The Committee agreed.

The Director (Children's Services) addressed the Committee stating that a self evaluation of services had been completed along with a detailed action plan and equality impact assessment. A presentation would be provided to the first meeting of the Committee in the new municipal year. The Committee would then be able to plan its work programme for the year. He suggested that the Committee may wish to focus on social care and safeguarding matters.

Resolved:

That the performance scorecard be included as a standing item in the 2016/17 Municipal year.

580/16 OUTCOME OF THE OFSTED INSPECTION

The Portfolio Holder (Learning, Skills and Apprenticeships) provided a verbal update on the outcome of the recent Ofsted Inspection.

He stated that the report was pleasing. Improvements had been made thanks to the hard work and efforts of all staff and school governors in schools and at the council. Whilst the outcome was positive it was important not to become complacent and so a strategy was in place to continue to improve in future. Inspectors had noted that the Council knows itself well and that improvements had been made in school governance.

A debate ensued as to the Councils own evaluation of schools and whether this information should be discussed publicly. There was a clear feeling by many committee members and officers that this information should remain confidential as it facilitated trust between schools and the local authority. All Ofsted results were available publicly and this should be the measure used by anyone wishing to gain a better understanding of a specific school.

A Member referred to the outcomes of the section 5 and 8 inspections on the 9 schools inspections reported and commented that whilst she welcomed the positives, she had hoped for better outcomes. The Portfolio Holder (Learning, Skills and Apprenticeships) advised that improving education takes time. He referred to Barr Beacon which had taken 4 years to improve as stated by the Head Teacher at a previous meeting of the Committee. He advised that some children were a year and half behind where they should be. It was agreed that the school which had slipped from 'outstanding' to 'inadequate' was very disappointing. The Committee expressed the view that this should not be allowed to happen in future.

A Member queried whether the inspection had thrown up any surprises. The Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that the councils self assessment had been accurate. In doing so he explained that there was a sense of momentum, positivity and culture – the ethos of partnerships had been tested and the outcomes had been positive. This was a strong position moving forwards.

Discussion ensued on the allocation of resources across schools. The Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) advised that a decision had previously been made by schools forum to distribute funding evenly to clusters and to allow each cluster to decide where it then goes. At that time this approach galvanised schools together. There was now a need to refocus on priority areas and so changes would be made.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

581/16 SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT ACTION PLAN

The Committee considered a report [annexed] providing a summary on the progress and impact of the work undertaken to address the school improvement action plan.

The Portfolio Holder (Learning, Skills and Apprenticeships) advised that he had visited a number of schools and confirmed that the Local Authority had a representative on most Academy Improvement Boards. Academy leaders were also working in partnership with maintained schools and as a result, the Walsall Association of Secondary Headteachers was much stronger and more effective.

A Member referred to the revised strategic priorities of the school improvement action plan and asked whether they were achievable. In response, the Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) advised that they were achievable but innovative ways of working needed to be considered. She advised that a senior manager had been appointed as lead for school to school support and would take up post in September, 2016. This was welcomed by the Committee.

A Member sought clarity on the admissions process indicating that some parents were not successful with their preferences. Clarity was sought on the process in respect of Academies. The Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that Academies were their own admission authorities but do publish their admission criteria. He advised the Member who raised concerns to contact the Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) with any specific queries.

The Fair Access Policy was questioned with a Member commenting that in some ways, it didn't seem fair at all. Officers advised that there were challenges in respect of some Academies. The level of exclusions had risen with 49 children excluded during the Autumn term. These were mainly from Academies. It was stated that tolerance levels for challenging behaviour within Academies appear to be low and that it was an issue being tackled by the council.

A Member stated that the position may get worse should all schools become Academies and asked what happened to those children who could not get a school place. The Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) advised that the issue had been raised with the regional schools commissioner. The council had also successfully challenged the admissions policies of two Academies. The Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that there were sufficient places available for all children within the borough. The Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) supported this advising that 97% of pupils received a place at a school of preference and confirmed that there were 200 surplus places. The committee suggested the application form for parents should make it mandatory to identify five preferred schools as often parents would only provide one or two. This was acknowledged by officers who agreed to revisit the form to ensure that it was clear.

The Chair expressed concern that in terms of admissions, children in more deprived areas did not have access to a good or outstanding school which was a serious issue for Walsall. She also stated that it would be useful to have numbers of children as oppose to percentages detailed within the appendix [annexed]. The Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that he would circulate a revised appendix as requested. He also explained that there was a challenge as parents prefer to send children to the higher performing schools.

Further to debate, Members requested:-

- Details of the number of children currently attending a nursery attached to a Walsall primary school who were not offered a place at their preferred school in the 2016 admission round (1st preferences only);
- The number of children with a sibling already on roll who could not be offered a place at the same school (1st preferences only);
- The number of children whose parents listed a 1st preference for a school rated by Ofsted as good or outstanding whose child has been allocated a place at a school in a lower Ofsted category.

A Member raised a query regarding a possible merger of schools into a federation. Officers advised that full consultation would be undertaken and provided assurance that this would include elected Members.

Resolved

That the following details be circulated to the Committee:

1. Details of the number of children currently attending a nursery attached to a Walsall primary school who were not offered a place at their preferred school in the 2016 admission round (1st preferences only);
2. The number of children with a sibling already on roll who could not be offered a place at the same school (1st preferences only);
3. The number of children whose parents listed a 1st preference for a school rated by Ofsted as good or outstanding whose child has been allocated a place at a school in a lower Ofsted category.

582/16 CHILD POVERTY WORKING GROUP

The Committee considered a report [annexed] which provided an update on the work of the working group.

Resolved:

That the Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee re-establish the child poverty working group in the 2016/17 municipal year.

583/16 FEEDBACK FROM MEMBERS THAT UNDERTOOK VISITS TO WALSALL CHILDREN'S HOMES

Members provided feedback after visiting a number of Children's Homes in Walsall.

Feedback was provided on Bluebells, Lichfield Road and Redruth with each receiving positive reviews. Members were complimentary about the staff at each of the homes stating that they provided good care for the children.

Resolved:

That the feedback be received.

584/16 QUARTER 3 FINANCIAL MONITORING POSITION FOR 2015/16

The Committee considered a report [annexed] detailing the forecast revenue and capital outturn position for 2015/16 based on the first 9 months of the financial year (April, 2015 to December, 2015), for services within the remit of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

585/16 AREAS OF FOCUS AND FORWARD PLANS

Members considered the Areas of Focus and Forward Plans of the Council and the Black Country Executive Joint Committee.

Resolved:

That the Areas of Focus and Forward Plans be noted.

586/16 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting would be agreed by Council in May, 2016

The meeting terminated at 7.45 p.m.

Chair:

Date:.....