

[Annexed]

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2023, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved and signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record.

44 **Update on Draft Revenue Budget 2024/25 – 2027/28**

The Finance Manager presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The Committee was informed of the changes to the draft revenue budget 2024/25 – 2027/28 which differed to what was previously reported to the Committee on 2 November 2023. Due to the current information available linked to the number of children in care and associated updated costs, changes to the required future investments and savings were required.

A discussion was held around the number and cost of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Officers confirmed that there were currently at 27 in the care of the local authority. It was clarified that the funding for this group depended on how the children had arrived in Walsall and most young people arrived via the national dispersal scheme.

Resolved

That the Update on the Draft Revenue Budget 2024/25 – 2027/28 was noted.

45 **Private Fostering**

The Group Manager presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The Committee was provided with a definition of private fostering and the difference between this and kinship care. Members were informed that private fostering was often under reported with 18 children identified as being in this type of arrangement in Walsall. This was an increase from 5 in the previous year, which indicated that the awareness raising activity has had some success.

In response to challenge, Officers stated that at the point of referral, the service would identify a private fostering arrangement - however it was recognised that that some private fostering arrangements would be unidentified. Partners were referring into the service; however, it was hoped that the numbers would increase. Officers stressed that identification of these arrangements was a positive step – and could lead to children being supported to go home or achieve permanence.

In acknowledgement of the low number of children identified as being in private fostering arrangements Members challenged what more could be done to identify such arrangements. It was also suggested that as diverse community, information should be made available to all sections of the community. The Director stated that it was nationally recognised that private fostering was under reported and assured the Committee that the service was continually seeking to improve.

Officers assured Members, that they worked extensively with schools to encourage professional curiosity and it was embedded in the work of Designated Safeguarding Leads. It was clarified that young people in private fostering arrangements did not qualify for the Holiday Activity Fund programme (HAF) - unless they qualified under other criteria.

Following a question in relation to the engagement of extra curriculum groups, Officers stated that this was a work in progress and included providers of HAF's who all received safeguarding training. Members suggested that the issue of private fostering was fed into sporting organisations safeguarding policies to ensure this group knew what to look out for.

Resolved

That the Private Fostering report be noted.

46 Early Help Young Carers Services

The Group Manager presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The Committee was provided with the definition of a young carer and the requirements on local authorities to deliver support to young carers and their families. This included a needs assessment, taking a whole family approach and a need to improve the support for young carers transitioning into adulthood.

In Walsall there was currently 314 young carers, mostly aged 8 upwards who were caring mainly for parents and siblings. The identification of young carers increased each year due to awareness raising campaigns. All young carers in Walsall had been assessed and received regular reviews of their roles and responsibilities.

A video was played which contributed to the awareness raising campaign in relation to Young Carers.

Members commended the service and the benefits that it provided to young people in Walsall. Members challenged if all schools were willing to engage with training on this issue and questioned how Members could support. Officers suggested that Members could help through conversations with families which would raise the profile of the service.

The Committee was informed that it was hoped to minimise the caring role for young people, and critical to the transition to adulthood was work with GPs. Work was underway to encourage specific apprenticeship opportunities for this group as they often had transferable skills. Further to discussion around opportunities for this group to attend university, Officers confirmed that they had linked into Wolverhampton university for this purpose.

It was confirmed that there was a bespoke HAF for young carers and that leisure passes were still available (alongside a reduction for families).

Officers confirmed that success was measured through monthly performance which measured the journey around health and well being and was an evidence-based tool. The skills of this group of young people were recognised and work was underway to identify apprenticeships to match this.

Resolved

1. That the Children's Services Overview Committee thanked the team working hard to provide opportunities for young carers.
2. That the Young Carers report be noted.

47 Recommendation Tracker

The Committee received the tracker of recommendations from previous meetings, including progress made and outstanding items.

[Annexed]

Resolved:

That the recommendation tracker be noted.

48 Areas of Focus

Resolved that:

The Areas of Focus be noted.

49 Date of next meeting

The next meeting would be 11 March 2024.

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

Signed:

Date: