

# Council – 7 January 2013

## Safeguarding Children

**Service Area:** Children's Services

**Wards:** All

### 1. Summary of report

- 1.1 This report provides an update on progress since the publication of the Ofsted Safeguarding and Looked After Children inspection report in July 2012 and the Improvement Notice published to the Council in November 2012

### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Council note the progress and direction of travel against the strategic improvement priorities.

### 3. Background

- 3.1 The Ofsted inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children took place at the end of June 2012 and the subsequent report, which judged services in Walsall to be inadequate, was published at the end of July 2012. Following the Ofsted judgement, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families wrote to the Leader in August 2012 setting out his intention to issue an Improvement Notice to the Council. This is usual practice following an inadequate inspection outcome.
- 3.2 The Secretary of State for Education has a range of powers he can use in these circumstances, including statutory powers of intervention directing the Council to enter into an appropriate arrangement to secure the necessary and rapid improvements required in Children's Services. However, in his letter, the Parliamentary Under Secretary recognised that the Council had taken rapid and decisive action following the inspection and indicated he was minded to issue an Improvement Notice.
- 3.3 Following detailed work with the Department for Education (DfE) a final Improvement Notice was issued to the Council at the beginning of November 2012. The Improvement Notice sets out objectives and key milestones relating to 3 distinct themes:
- Capacity, capability and culture
  - Improving the quality and effectiveness of partnerships and governance
  - Quality and effectiveness of front-line practice
- 3.4 An independently chaired Walsall Children's Improvement Board was established in September 2012 and meets monthly. The Chair is required to provide a written report at 6 monthly intervals, providing specific commentary detailing progress

against the targets set out in the Notice. The Board Chair's reports will be supplemented by a report on progress from the Leader of the Council. The Board Chair must also provide an initial report 2 months after the publication of the Notice. The progress reports by the Board Chair will also inform reviews of improvement and impact which will be conducted by the DfE. These will take place at six, twelve and eighteen month intervals from the start of the Notice. Additional external validation of progress, for example, peer review and inspection, will also be carried out before the end of the Notice.

- 3.5 The core purpose of the Board is to have oversight of the rapid and sustainable improvements required in safeguarding services for children and young people in Walsall. This includes assurance that the Walsall Safeguarding Children's Board and the Children and Young People Partnership provide robust and complementary leadership of effective partnership arrangements at all levels in order to secure positive outcomes for children and families.
- 3.6 Based on the themes, objectives and milestones in the Improvement Notice a strategic Improvement Plan has been endorsed by the Improvement Board. A multi agency operational group has been established. The purpose of the group is to drive forward the implementation of the delivery plans which underpin the strategic Improvement Plan.

**4. Report detail**

- 4.1 Since September the interim Director of Children's Services, together with the Assistant Director (from October) of Specialist Services have focused on establishing the scale of the Children's Services improvement challenge. This has been achieved by following up the lines of enquiry from the July Ofsted report on Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services in Walsall, triangulating these with analysis of current data, and practitioner and service users' views.
- 4.2 This has led to a number of overall conclusions about the Council and wider partnership's current approach to safeguarding which are summarised in the tables below
- 4.3 The summary headline baseline position observations are detailed in the table below under the three Strategic Improvement Plan themes. It is clear that, overall, the ambition for children and young people across Walsall is not clearly understood or embedded, and has not been driving activity or impacting on improved outcomes for children

| <b>Capacity, capability and culture</b>  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ lack of visible leadership</li> <li>▪ insufficient whole systems thinking and operation</li> <li>▪ patchy and partial needs analysis</li> <li>▪ ineffective follow up and follow through</li> <li>▪ ineffective evaluation</li> <li>▪ Immature commissioning culture</li> <li>▪ evidence of some risk aversion and a tendency to 'rescue'</li> <li>▪ resources not aligned to need</li> </ul> |

- impact of early support not clear combined with a patchy early help offer
- use of Paris, the ICS system, not maximised
- insufficiently ambitious corporate parenting

#### **Improving the quality of partnerships and governance**

- lack of clarity about who should be round which partnership table, purpose and inter-relationship of partnerships
- partnerships characterised by sub-groups and silos
- fractured accountabilities and ineffective mechanisms
- plethora of panels, boards and sub-groups masking clarity and transparency of decision-making and affecting management of risk
- lack of 'one direction' across the partnership

#### **Quality and effectiveness of frontline practice:**

- we have more than one front door
- our thresholds are confused and inconsistent
- lack of clarity regarding statutory guidance
- a knee-jerk legacy of conflicting management instructions
- superficial and unreflective supervision
- a range of started, starting and fading initiatives
- team turbulence characterised by turnover and too many handovers and transitions for children
- risk shunt evidence across the partnership
- low staff morale

4.4 Using the baseline position, emerging improvement themes have been shared with staff and partners and have gained consensus around the need for radical changes designed to secure sustainable change. The most important priorities are set out below:

- planned and purposeful direct work with families – focused on quality, impact and change.
- building quality into process and measurement
- management oversight, analysis and challenge: across plans, practice and competencies, expectations and supervision
- robust and productive partnerships for children
- identification and management of risk of harm to children – focused on how, who and when does its significance change
- safe early help practice, in front of the door as well as behind
- seeing children and hearing from them and the needs of their parent
- improved interfaces within and across children's services and with adult social care, drug, alcohol and domestic abuse services, the police and health sector

4.5 Key principles which have been shared widely to inform the way of working with staff and partners are to:

- prioritise rigorously and act strategically

- collaborate effectively and motivate more
- invest productively and maximise resources
- learn constantly

## 5 Summary of progress

### Capacity, capability and culture

#### 5.1. Vision and ambition for children's services:

*'Being better together for children'*. It takes a community to raise a child and a whole partnership to keep children safe and cared for. The Children's Services management team had a facilitated workshop in November to initiate work on Walsall's vision for children by articulating the principles, values and ambition for our services and the behaviours we need to demonstrate as leaders to make sure this translates into actions and good outcomes. The workshop was designed to:

- Promote an integrated leadership team working to a common cause and support each other to deliver improved outcomes for children and young people;
- Initiate a statement of our vision and ambition for Children's Services regarding the improvements planned that we can share across the council and partnership;
- Deliver an action plan with clear objectives and timescales to support the leadership team to achieve the improvements planned.

Feedback on the workshop has been positive. The action plan wasn't completed in the time available but the immediate next steps have been to begin to share both the vision of *'being better together for children'*, and the ambition to make sure *'children and young people in Walsall are safe, happy, healthy and with a bright future'*, with council staff and young people fora and to begin wider partnership engagement.

Work on culture change and building a confident and engaged workforce has focused on face to face visits, conversations, briefings and meetings with safeguarding and looked after children teams, school visits, head teacher and health colleague briefings, as well as regular email bulletins to children's services staff.

#### 5.2 The social work health check survey has taken place. 98 staff completed the survey which is 49.4% of all eligible staff.

Initial headline feedback is:

- 77.5% view caseloads as manageable.
- 91.8% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with support from their line managers.

- The most cited things social workers wished to change include more input into decision making and more time for direct work with children and families.
  - Points from positive feedback about the council include its commitment to make changes to retain and support staff, new senior management keen to listen and take account of voice and views of social care staff and openness to change within the higher management levels.
- 5.3 Councillors will know that the Safeguarding Peer Review last spring and the Ofsted inspection in the summer came to very different conclusions about the strengths and improvement priorities for Children's Services. Peer Reviews and inspections are designed for different purposes but the divergence between the two outcomes was not helpful for Walsall.
- 5.4 In order to move forward, a productive mutual review meeting was held with the Chief Executive of the national Children's Improvement Board and the Children's Improvement Adviser (Peer Review). Learning from this will inform the peer challenge this month, led by Gloucestershire on children with disabilities as well as future peer reviews and sector led support. The children with disabilities peer challenge scope focuses on both the strategic (*is the right service in the right place for the right children at the right time?*) and operational (*so what difference has this work made in improving outcomes for children?*) improvement priorities. Additionally the scope seeks a view from the challenge team on the fitness for purpose of the post inspection plans and recommendations for the step changes necessary over time to ensure a responsive needs based and outcomes focused service for disabled children and their families in Walsall.
- 5.5 C4EO (Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services) has been commissioned to provide support in areas relating to performance and quality assurance. At present, an Associate, Data Specialist and Sector Specialist have been assigned with expertise in these areas, and strong links to the regional Children's Improvement Advisor are being maintained. Where appropriate, existing frameworks which meet Walsall's needs are being considered for implementation to reduce cost and increase pace of change (i.e. not re-inventing the wheel). Sustainability and capacity/skills building are key facets of the work going forward.
- **Performance and data** – a diagnostic review commenced in November, to report in mid-January. Recommendations for improvement, examples of 'what works' and support is being provided during the diagnostic to ensure changes can be made immediately where appropriate.
  - **Quality Assurance and Audit** – Sector Specialist has been assigned and first onsite meeting took place in December. Walsall requires an audit framework that is simple, visual and has a common core section across all services, which includes talking to service users and learning from audits.
  - **Complaints** – a brief audit of the current complaints processes will be undertaken. The focus of improvement in complaints handling is to reduce the number of complaints received that reach stage 2 and 3, and ensure learning from complaints is embedded. Complaints reporting will be integrated in performance reporting.

- **Improvement Plan** - support to identify performance measures for the Improvement Plan which align with the Improvement Notice milestones and targets.
  - **Early Help** - A review of the strategy and services for Early Help has been scoped. Work will focus on ensuring there is a strong strategic approach across the borough with clear referral pathways and measures of impact from early help to statutory intervention.
- 5.6 Support has also been commissioned from The Children's Society to make recommendations about better listening to the voices and views of children and ensure their voices and views shape, inform and improve service delivery and improve outcomes. The ambition is to co-produce media products with local children and young people (the Council 4 Kids and the Safeguarding Inspection Team are keen to help drive this activity forwards) so it is a learning and development activity for them, and a sense of ownership of the product/messages can be developed. The process is designed to build capacity and develop an ongoing legacy and delivery mechanism. The Children's Society have committed to an 'in kind' contribution to this work to reflect our partnership approach with them.
- 5.7 Draft assurance arrangements have been developed in line with the DfE statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services and initial discussions for confirming these for Walsall are taking place.
- 5.8 Weaknesses have been identified in the children's social care commissioning and contract monitoring and work has been scoped to ensure reshaped and improved commissioning for better outcomes arrangements.
- 5.9 Work has also taken place to identify and gather improvement programme oversight capacity.
- 5.10 Based on the scale of the improvement challenge (evidenced by following up lines of enquiry from the Ofsted report and triangulating these with analysis of current data and practitioner service user views), a strategic improvement plan has been developed to focus on activities to achieve the outcomes required. Because of the post inspection management decisions and the changes in leadership, activities in progress do not necessarily reflect initial timescales from Ofsted. It has been essential to both unpack ill-judged management actions and to establish a baseline to ensure accurate and sustainable improvement priorities.
- 5.11 Recommendations for improved performance reporting are being undertaken so that there will be a monthly progress report on key performance indicators. These will align with the Improvement Notice issued in November
- 5.12 An interim Head of Corporate Parenting has been appointed and will start work in Walsall in January.

## **6 Improving the quality of partnership and governance**

- 6.1 The Borough Management Team have discussed and agreed accountabilities, functions and inter-relationships of the various Partnership Boards concerned with children and young people, and clarified leadership roles and responsibilities.
- 6.2 A multi-agency panel, with representatives from the Police, Health, Education and the safeguarding young inspection team, was successful in appointing a new chair of the Walsall Safeguarding Children Board. Robert Lake brings an impressive track record of social care, health and governance expertise, skill and experience to the post.
- 6.3 The Safeguarding Board met in November and following a presentation by the Director of Children's Services endorsed the summary baseline position of children services and, in particular, the improvements needed in partnership working as well as the strategic direction of travel for improvements to outcomes for children and young people across the Partnership.
- 6.4 In partnership with The Children's Society we have made a successful submission to the national Children's Improvement Board to work with the Walsall Children's Safeguarding Board sub-group responsible for child sexual exploitation at both strategic and operational levels. This work will take account of the findings of the interim report by the Deputy Children's Commissioner and the University of Bedford research, to assess what is working well, identify gaps and areas to develop further and develop a suite of toolkits to be piloted in Walsall and produced for use in other local authority areas. The proposed stages in working together are:-
- an audit of how well the CARE (children at risk of exploitation) panel is doing.
  - identify the core elements for success and the resulting impacts
  - identify areas of development and agreement of an action plan
  - develop the following toolkits:
    - audit tool for local authorities
    - assessment tool for service/departments
    - performance assessment tool for individual frontline staff
    - CSE tool for reducing level of risk and responding to risk indicators which can be used by children, young people, families and practitioners.
- 6.5 There has been a focus on monitoring the timeliness and quality of complaints handling and an emphasis on modelling and maximising opportunities for informing learning and shaping practice. A brief audit is planned to ensure processes are fit for purpose and that learning is disseminated to improve service delivery.
- 6.6 The Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel has reflected and reviewed their role in improvement. Members now receive a report on safeguarding and Looked After Children improvement at each meeting. Panel members have considered

key lines of enquiry and questions they could apply when safeguarding performance reports and information is presented to them. The focus of scrutiny has been to establish a clear picture in their heads of what 'good' would look like in terms of the quality and outcomes aspired for children, so they have a benchmark to test out improvements and direction and pace of travel and confidence to ask the kinds of questions that can get below the surface of the information in reports. The Director of Children's Services now attends each Scrutiny Panel meeting.

6.7 The Chair of the Improvement Board also attended the last Panel meeting to discuss his role and explain the function of the Improvement Board and the responsibilities and accountabilities of the Director of Children's Services, the Lead Member and the wider partnership in improvement.

## **7. Quality and effectiveness of frontline practice**

7.1 A review of the social care 'front door', using external expertise is taking place. The initial findings confirm the Assistant Director and Director of Children's Services analysis that fundamental changes are needed. These will be scoped and implemented in the New Year.

7.2 A review of the strategy and services for Early Help has been scoped. Work will focus on ensuring there is a strong strategic approach across the borough with clear referral pathways and measures of impact to ensure children and young people and their families receive support at the earliest opportunity and that staff in all partners agencies understand what to do when children's needs do not meet the threshold for statutory intervention but require targeted multi-agency early help.

7.3 Management arrangements of the children with disabilities team have been changed, through an internal secondment of an experienced manager.

7.4 The governors of Old Hall Community Special school are supporting the head teacher in a day a week secondment to work with the children with disability team and promote and increase children, young people parental, carer and school confidence in the service. Together the new manager and the head teacher provide significant leadership, expertise and skills and will be well placed to take forward the findings of the New Year peer challenge.

## **8. Key improvements and priorities**

8.1 Key improvements are:

- Work to engage and mobilise staff and partners in the Improvement activity required to swiftly and sustainably improve outcomes for children
- Clarity around the frameworks and content of the Improvement Plan and performance reporting
- Engagement with sector led and national partners to support the improvement journey

### **8.2 Capacity, capability and culture**

8.2.1 The current key priority areas are to:-



- Agree and implement re-shaped performance framework.
- Scope the reshaping of the Children and Young People Plan to reflect the scale and extent of the safeguarding improvement agenda.
- Initiate and review the operation and structure of the Children and Young People Partnership.
- Further develop and communicate the vision and ambition for children.
- Propose a quality management framework for social worker responsibilities and workloads, setting out clear expectations, standards and entitlements.

### 8.3 Improving the quality of partnership and governance

- 8.3.1 Continue to grow and evidence emerging impact of learning from complaints on service improvement
- 8.3.2 Self assessment of Walsall Safeguarding Children's Board strengths and gaps in relation to support, challenge and scrutiny of safeguarding activity.

### 8.4 Quality of effectiveness of frontline practice

- 8.4.1 Propose a framework for thresholds and referral mechanisms to step up to and down from specialist safeguarding services.
- 8.4.2 Scope the scale of improvement needed to the protocol and practice relating to children missing from home, care or education.

## 9. **Resource considerations**

- 9.1 At this time work is still ongoing to determine the exact level of resource required to support the improvements required in order to manage the service effectively post inspection. Early estimates are that a further £200,000 would be required. This value is included in the budget plans that are currently being developed for 2013/14 and beyond.

## 10. **Citizen impact**

- 10.1 The details of progress made so far and further improvement required , as outlined in the report, will have a positive impact on improving the quality of provision and services for children and young people and their families in Walsall. Delivering the required improvements will ensure that the contribution made by local services involved in safeguarding young people and the quality of service provided for looked after children is effective and of a quality that ensures children and young people in Walsall are safe, happy, healthy and have a bright future.

## 11. **Community safety**

- 11.1 There are no community safety implications arising from this report.

## **12. Environmental impact**

12.1 There are no environmental impact implications arising from this report.

## **13. Performance and risk management issues**

13.1 Failure to adequately deliver sustained improvements to services and meet the requirements of the Improvement Notice risks the safety and protection of children and young people. The delivery of the objectives in the improvement plan will be risk assessed and mitigated as appropriate.

13.2 The Improvement Board monitor progress and impact on a monthly basis. This is in addition to developing service, partnership wide performance management and quality assurance arrangements. The Department for Education (DfE) will also assess and evaluate progress and impact on a 6 monthly basis. This will include written reports from the independent chair of the improvement board and from the Leader of the Council as well as other supporting evidence, including external review and inspection.

## **14. Equality implications**

14.1 Working in partnership to ensure that children and young people are safe, cared for and protected is key to ensuring they are safe, happy, healthy and have a bright future as responsible productive citizens now and in the future. The improvements identified will address inequalities in current service delivery and protect the most vulnerable and at risk children. Service delivery will take into account the diverse communities we serve and support cultural diversity and children's sense of identity.

14.2 There are no equality implications as a result of this report.

## **15. Consultation**

15.1 There is on-going engagement with partners at a strategic level at eh Improvement Board. One aspect of improvement is to ensure that other key partnership boards e.g. the Walsall Children's Safeguarding Board (WSCB) and the Children and Young People's Partnership Board (C&YPPB) are productive, mutually challenging and impact positively on better outcomes for children. This will also apply to the (currently shadow) Health and Wellbeing Board. At an operational level, a multi-agency group, chaired by the Assistant Director Specialist Services, representing all key partners, is championing implementation of the delivery plans to support improvements.

15.2 Staff briefings are now in place on a 6 weekly basis to ensure key messages are communicated and provide regular opportunities to capture feedback and learning from those delivering the services. Regular visits to teams and services provide additional opportunities for feedback and feed-forward as do email updates. Briefings are currently taking place within partner organisations.

## Background papers

Ofsted Report – Inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services published July 2012.

Improvement Notice – published November 2012.

Improvement Plan available

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rose Collinson". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

**Signed:**

**Interim Director:** Children's Services

**Date:** 27 December 2012