

**26 November 2013**

**Children's Services Improvement Activity**

**Ward(s)** All

**Portfolios:** Cllr R Andrew – Children's Services

**Executive Summary:**

This report provides the latest performance information and commentary to Walsall's Children and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel, together with a summary of progress against actions in the last reporting period, and the focus of actions planned for the next period.

**Recommendations:**

1. To scrutinise the progress and impact of the strategic activity to date and the direction of travel outlined in the Improvement Plan and performance report.

**Background papers:**

Minutes from Children and Young People's Scrutiny and Performance Panel meetings in August, September, October, November 2012, January, February and March, July, September and October 2013

**Ofsted Reports:**

Inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services published July 2012

Inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children published August 2013

Improvement Notice – published November 2012.

Exchange of letters between the Leader of the Council and the Minister.

## Resource and legal considerations

This overview report relates to the strategic and operational improvement plans which are underpinned by resources, with the expectation that the Council and partner agencies will continue to contribute to ensure that resources across the partnership are prioritised to improvement needs.

The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families has exercised his power to issue an Improvement Notice that contains a concise range of outcome driven targets to address the issues raised in the previous Ofsted inspection. If the Council and partners fail to comply with the Improvement Notice by the assessment dates, then the Secretary of State for Education can use statutory powers of intervention (s497A Education Act 1996) to direct the Council to enter into appropriate arrangements to secure the necessary and rapid improvements required in children's services.

## Citizen impact

Improving Children's Services will ensure the partnership works "*better together for children and young people*" in Walsall to ensure they are safe, happy and healthy with a better today and a brighter future.

## Performance and risk management issues

Failure to adequately deliver sustained improvements to services and therefore meet the requirements of the Improvement Notice risks the safety and protection of children and young people. Delivery of the objectives in the Improvement Plan will be risk assessed and mitigated as appropriate.

The Improvement Board monitors progress and impact on a 6 weekly basis. This is in addition to developing service and 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. The (delayed) 6 month review took place in August 2013 and the next is due in November 2013. This will include written reports from the independent chair of the Improvement Board as well as other supporting evidence, including self evaluation, external review and inspection.

The framework and evaluation schedule for the inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers and reviews of Local Safeguarding Children Boards has now been published. This sets a higher bar for all regulated services:

- the single inspection framework: *framework and evaluation schedule for the inspection of local authority services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers:* [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/130216](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/130216)
- the inspection handbook: *inspections of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers:* [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120218](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120218)

## **Equality Implications:**

Has an Equality Impact Assessment been carried out? No

## **Consultation**

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

Staff and partner briefings are now in place on a 6 weekly basis to ensure key messages are communicated and to 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.

## **Contact Officer:**



Rose Collinson – interim Director, Children's Services

☎. 01922 652081

✉ [collinsonr@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:collinsonr@walsall.gov.uk)

## 1. Summary of progress since last report

### Improving the quality of partnerships and governance

#### 1.1 Walsall Safeguarding Children's Board (WSCB)

The Board met to undertake an independently facilitated self-evaluation exercise on 16 October with the primary aim of assessing effectiveness and impact to date and to review readiness for taking on full responsibilities for improvement support, scrutiny, challenge and impact for children and families across the partnership. Clear actions were agreed for sustaining the positive momentum of change and improvement to date. A report from the WSCB Chair on the outcomes of this self-evaluation exercise is included at **Appendix 1**.

#### 1.2 Walsall Children and Young People's Partnership (CYP) Board

At its meeting on 24 September the CYP Board signed off the Terms of Reference and Strategic Direction. Each of the CYPP 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 focus of Priority 6 has slightly shifted. Originally this priority emphasised the importance of a positive profile for children and young people but partnership discussion identified that our ambition should be re-framed to include a tighter focus on ensuring that the voice and views of children and young people inform and shape support and services, whilst also highlighting and celebrating the many achievements of children and young people. The revised Priority 6: 'Employing the voices, contributions and achievements of children and young people in Walsall to inform improvements in services', will now align better with the draft Engagement Strategy and will be championed by the two school based representatives from the nursery/primary and secondary sectors.

Work has been ongoing to align the CYPP with Area Partnership Plans, which link to the overall Walsall Plan. Following helpful discussions with the Police lead for the Partnership Tasking and Coordination Group (PTCG) it has been agreed how each Area Partnership will contribute to helping deliver the CYPP ambitions.

The CYP Plan is an item on this agenda.

#### 1.3 The Health and Well-Being Board

At its October 21 meeting the Board reviewed the Children's Commissioning Plans to provide assurance that commissioners are taking proper account of the priorities identified through the JSNA (Joint Strategic Needs Analysis) and agreed in the Joint Health and Well-Being Strategy. The Board endorsed the approach taken and have reflected in their work programme wider work across the children's partnership on 'unpacking' the spend by the CCG and Public Health against the children related priorities in the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

## 2. Capacity, capability and culture

### 2.1 Better together for Children – vision and ambition for Children's Services

The principles, values and ambitions for children and young people across Walsall continues to be communicated and endorsed in practice across the council and across the partnership through face-to-face conversations, briefings, meetings, presentations and engagement sessions. The October focus was on 'Early Help, Early on' to ensure that practitioners and partners know how needs can be matched to services, ways to access help and support are understood and evidence informed and we are working with the right children, in the right way at the right time. Working in partnership with Walsall College, the staff and partner engagement sessions will be recorded by students and available online to ensure a wide reach out across the partnership.

Work has also been undertaken to capture the learning from the last year and provide a case study for Ofsted and the DfE, as well as stimulate practitioners to 'tell their story'.

A number of staff and partner briefing sessions have been held on the new single inspection framework, supplemented by emerging learning from the single inspection framework initial pilots.

Additionally learning from the recent publication of a number of high profile Serious Case Reviews has also been disseminated across teams and partners and form the basis of the most recent 'Good to be working with you' October email, attached as **Appendix 2**.

## 2.2 Early Help Developments

While MAST (Multi Agency Screening Team) is working well and the Early Help offer is increasingly well developed, the interface between these two elements needs strengthening. A meeting between the DCS and lead officers took place on 4 October to identify the actions needed to achieve swift and effective improvements. These include:

- A briefing note prepared by the DCS shared with all lead managers to inform priority briefings with all operational staff including Area Family Support Teams which are a core element of the Early Help offer.
- Design and circulation of practice guidance for staff to inform decisions on the child's journey through this range of Early Help services.
- Senior leaders and managers engaging directly with teams across this spectrum of services, bringing staff together to communicate and agree how to most effectively implement required changes to practice without delay.
- Locality based meetings of staff and partners have been convened to communicate the agreed process and practice changes. Early help, early on is the focus of the October staff and partner engagement sessions.
- The early help work has been scoped into a clear programme plan with priority work streams, progress measures, risk register and timeline. An associated Early Help Core Group has been established to oversee progress.

- The Children's Centre Redesign is underway following the public consultation around children's centre services and the revised Statutory Guidance for Children's Centres. The proposed locality based hub and spoke model will align closely with the Early Help area based planning.
- The Early Help framework and strategy document have progressed with further work completed around children's pledges, assessment tools and workforce development.

A range of data has been collated and analysed from partner agencies to support the establishment of core early help priorities and the setting of short, medium and longer term goals for service delivery.

### 2.3 On-Site Visits by DfE

Our new DfE lead, Paul Harper, has undertaken two day long visits to Walsall during September and October. A full visit programme was agreed in consultation with Paul for both days. This covered a wide range of provision from Early Help to Safeguarding and Child Protection services. Paul met with leaders and managers, but with a principal focus on seeing and hearing from front line operational staff. On-site visits to MAST, IRS and Early Help provision provided an opportunity for a candid assessment of progress to date, current challenges and staff buy-in to the change and improvement programme. Overall feedback from Paul was positive and helpfully reflects our current improvement priorities and self-evaluation. The visits provide a constructive platform for the continuing dialogue with DfE to provide assurance as we work towards the lifting of the Improvement Notice.

The 12 month review, which is led by the DfE is scheduled to take place on 3 December. Work is in hand to present out self-evaluation of impact and progress to date and capacity to recognise and respond to future challenges. **Appendix 3** contains a recent exchange of letters regarding the focus of the review.

### 2.4 Strategic Improvement Plan (SIP)

Progress against the SIP is reported in the accompanying SIP Scorecard, with some complementary text updates in the main body of the SIP. The focus of work since the last Board meeting has been on ensuring secure implementation of the quality assurance arrangements; drilling down into worker level performance data to improve outcomes for children and sharpening the underpinning SIP delivery plans.

Whilst the overall SIP indicates that all 27 SIP objectives are either completed or on target for completion, the full scorecard drills-down to the measures behind the objectives and helpfully indicates a number of 'red' underlying areas of action and impact where we are facing challenges to delivery. This endorses the explicit scorecard-based approach which provides a clear basis for targeting resources and management action most effectively to ensure that overall objectives are achieved to deadline.

Additional work is being undertaken to highlight a specific focus on the 11 recommendations from Ofsted 2013, clarifying progress and ensuring that action to achieve further progress is clearly stated and understood by all partners.

## 2.5 Children and Young People's (CYP) Scrutiny Panel

The CYP Scrutiny Panel held a performance workshop on 7 October which covered:

- why we need data, where it fits into improvement
- what is good data, what kinds of information are available
- what scrutiny would like to receive
- exploring data
- how to use the scorecard

2.5.1 The focus of the 15 October CYP Scrutiny Panel meeting was on:

- scrutinising improvement progress and impact
- receiving a report on the outcomes of a recent consultation with parents and other key stakeholders about prioritising the work of children's centres towards children and families in most need and reshaping management resources to maximise frontline impact
- seeking assurance on work with children in care in financially challenging times
- understanding and seeking assurance regarding the issues in a recent finding of maladministration.

2.5.2 The Scrutiny Panel are looking in detail in three areas, Children in Care, Health Issues affecting Children and Children Home Educated, using a task group approach.

2.5.3 The Children in Care working group met for the second time on 12 November. And received a scene setting presentation to gather information about the virtual journey of children who are:

- Under 1
- Primary age
- Secondary age
- Care Leaver

The intention was to support and enhance member knowledge of the legal framework and develop an understanding of the journey of children and young people including 'risk points' before embarking on the journey of the virtual journey themselves. This will involve meeting staff, children, young people and their families and Partners. Once completed a discussion on the overall service will be undertaken to ensure that it is efficient and effective. Given members' visits, this should be much clearer and real enabling them to knit together various strands more easily. Conclusions will be drawn before producing a final report but one that is meaningful to children and young people, including the way it is written and presented. This will be delivered before the end of the municipal year.

2.5.4 The first meeting of the 'Health Matters' Working Group has taken place and the second is being arranged. Members of the working group have agreed to focus the work of the group on:

- Infant Mortality
- Consanguineous Marriage
- Teen Conception

The working group will fact-find and collect data before undertaking visits, speaking with service users, partners and officers. A final report and recommendations will be produced before the end of the municipal year. The Chair of the Health Scrutiny Panel has been made aware of the working group's investigation.

2.5.5 The Home Schooling Working Group met to look in more depth at home schooling following a recommendation of the CYP panel. The Working Group considered a number of areas including:

- Purpose
- What is Elective Home Education
- The Local Position (including comparisons to other LAs (Stoke on Trent, Birmingham and Sandwell))
- Policy and Procedures
- Engagement
- Challenges

Initial discussions focussed on areas including:

- The work of the Specialist Officers (x1 fte – 1 Primary, 1 secondary) including visit schedules and workloads/capacity;
- Reasons behind the decision to home educate;
- Advice provided by schools in relation to home education;
- Parents' understanding of home schooling and support available;
- The impact of the shortage of primary school places;
- Successes of home educated children;
- Safeguarding (Members wanted assurance that sufficient safeguards are in place especially when parents do not engage with the Local Authority and drew on evidence from Serious Case Review findings carried out elsewhere);
- The role of external organisations which support parents that choose elective home education (including challenge to Local Authorities);
- Legal provision such as school attendance orders if home schooling is deemed to not be working;
- Areas with higher levels of home schooling and possible explanations.



Members recommended;-

1. That specialist officers and social workers share practice and develop understanding of roles;
2. That officers meet to discuss system changes which would assist and speed up processes;

Members requested a further meeting (at the Goldmine Centre) to consider:-

- A detailed breakdown of those in home education;
- A further discussion with both the Primary and Secondary Specialist officers;
- An update on progress made with regard to sharing practice and learning.

## 2.6 Audit Committee

Members of the Audit Committee have maintained a keen interest in progress against post Ofsted actions and impact of the actions set out in the Improvement Notice. The Committee invited the Chair of the Improvement Board to its meeting on 11 November 2013 to assure themselves of progress and impact against the Improvement Notice.

## 2.7 Changes to Children and Young People Services

A comprehensive programme of change and improvement is being implemented across Children's Services, designed to move towards a more efficient and effective service model from 2014/15. This approach is driven by the parallel requirement to improve the quality and effectiveness of practice and service provision and to address resource pressures at both a national and local level. The reshaping of Children and Young People's Services is critically informed by some significant challenges. These include:

- An intensive focus on sustaining hard-won improvements to the quality of safeguarding and child protection services
- Tackling a notable increase in the numbers of children and young people looked after by the local authority, with associated cost pressures
- Integrating education and school improvement functions into the organisation following transition from a substantial outsourced contract in 2013.
- Ensuring smooth succession to a permanent and stable leadership team following a sustained period of interim leadership.
- Building the social work workforce, reducing agency staff and embedding good quality frontline practice.

Key elements of our reshaped service model include:

- Strengthened performance management and quality assurance, underpinned by robust and reliable data at both a strategic and operational level. This will inform analysis of impact and will drive decisions on how to make the most effective use of finite resources.
- Integrated commissioning with a primary focus on improved outcomes, early help and preventative intervention to progressively reduce the demand for more resource-intensive support.
- A productive partnership with schools that reflects the changing role of the local authority in driving school improvement, including sustainable and impactful school to school improvement and educational attainment.
- Implementation of a bold workforce development strategy to improve the stability of operational staffing and the quality of frontline practice. There will be a specific focus on building a strong permanent workforce and reducing the reliance on agency staff – impacting on cost and efficiency.
- A stable and permanent senior leadership team to drive forward sustained improvement and the implementation of increasingly challenging cost efficiencies.

Action being taken to progressively move the organisation towards a more efficient and effective service model from 2014/15 includes the following:

- Appointment of a new senior leadership team is underway with a national recruitment campaign from mid-September. This is in addition to wider workforce development including staff recruitment to key operational posts.
- Significant and continuing improvements in the quality and reliability of performance and qualitative data to inform strategic and operational decision-making and resource allocation.
- Strengthening of governance and partnership arrangements with a reshaped Local Safeguarding Board, a Children and Young People's Partnership Board with clear priorities and robust Scrutiny and Corporate Parenting arrangements in place.
- Rigorous implementation of the Strategic Improvement Plan for Safeguarding. Under the oversight of the Improvement Board a wide and highly effective programme of action is being undertaken to address the quality and effectiveness of frontline practice, the quality of leadership and governance, and the capacity, capability and culture of children and young people's services.
- A programme management approach to tackling key resource pressures.

The change programme is informed by the need to maximise the impact of finite resources across Children and Young People's Services and the wider partnership. Practical proposals which seek to address budget pressures are currently undergoing a process of consultation and include:

- Reviewing the balance of cost and effectiveness across directly delivered services and contracted arrangements with independent and third sector providers
- Developing more effective approaches to meeting the needs of children looked after, with a related positive impact on associated cost pressures
- Review and redesign of traded services to schools
- Reshaping the delivery model for children's residential provision
- Reshaping our Children's Centres to reflect the Early Help Offer
- Reducing transport costs for children and young people with special educational needs

## 2.8 People Capacity

A recruitment process is now in hand for three Assistant Director posts, one for Access and Achievement, one for Early Help and Commissioning and one for Children's Social Care. Interviews are planned for early December for the first two posts.

Shortlisting took place for the Principal Social Worker post on 30 September, but after considerable reflection, the assessment centre, scheduled for 11 October was cancelled due to the small field of applicants. We are in the process of going out to tender for agencies to help with the recruitment process. It is planned to reschedule the assessment Centre within six weeks of the original date. Interim arrangements remain in place.

The new WSCB Board Manager started in post on 23 October and was able to be present at the recent WSCB review session. This will now ensure that the WSCB has the developmental capacity it needs to drive forwards its business plan.

Following unsuccessful recruitment campaigns, already reported to this board, an interim LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer), took up post on 2 September. An appointment was made in October and the permanent LADO will start in January 2014.

The second attempt to recruit a permanent Team Manager for the Children with Disabilities Team has not been successful. Unfortunately it is not possible to offer a market supplement because it is not hard to fill other team manager posts across the directorate. We are continuing to review the way forward. A long-standing Interim Manager remains in post.

The Walsall feature in Compass 2014 (the annual guide to social work and social care) has interviews from serving social workers offering an honest perspective on

how their careers are progressing and how they feel the Council supports them in their social work role.

Twelve permanent social workers have taken up post between 1 August and a further 10 posts are under offer. They are all Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSW) but we have confidence in our Assessed Year in Practice (ASYE) programme and their abilities as evidenced in our rigorous recruitment programmes. This does mean that because NQSWs are entitled to a reduced caseload and cannot take complex cases it will not be possible to release one agency worker for every NQSW appointed in the first instance. This will be carefully monitored particularly as the NQSWs become more experienced.

Two permanent team managers are also new in post, one in LAC service as the Transition and Leaving Care Team Manager from 2 September. This means that all four team managers in the LAC service are now in permanent positions. Another joined Safeguarding and Family support and is now one of five permanent team managers out of six team manager posts.

## 2.9 Workforce Development

The Workforce Development strategy has been revised and a summary was included in Improvement Board papers for information. The new strategy offers a sharper focus on social worker recruitment and retention in Walsall, our plans for achieving stability in the Workforce and key to this, a career pathway for social workers.

Walsall is co-sponsor of the regional workforce development strategy, also provided for information, which consists of two strands of activity: Leadership and workforce development and Workforce supply issues.

The first strand has a focus on:

- succession planning for existing and emerging leaders
- developing the capacity of Social Care Team Managers
- developing the role of the Principal Social Worker as a regional resource
- developing social worker career pathways
- supporting the leaders of the early help workforce
- a specific offer for Black and Asian leader/workforce development and support
- embedding sector led improvement in terms of support for peer challenge and specific improvement projects arising from self assessment
- a development programme for LSCB chairs
- a regional leadership development offer for Members – particularly scrutiny chairs and Lead Members

And the second strand looks at workforce supply issues – recruitment and retention, and approaches to the procurement and deployment of agency staff and interim managers as key to develop and maintain a stable, high quality children's workforce in the region.

## 2.10 Self – Evaluation

Walsall Children’s Services are actively engaged in working with regional West Midlands authorities to further develop our approach to self-assessment through a process led by Improvement & Efficiency West Midlands (IEWM). The purpose of this exercise is to compare approaches to self-assessment and to develop peer support and challenge that drives-up the quality, effectiveness and impact of self-assessment for each authority. Walsall led a workshop session with regional partners as part of this process on 25 October. Learning from this will be incorporated into the continuing development of improvement activity in Walsall. The annual social care health check will take place in November this year, it encompasses all social care staff.

## 2.11 PARIS/ICS system

Action is being taken to procure a new ICS system across Children’s Services. In the medium term a series of improvements are being made to the functionality of the existing PARIS system to ensure that the system is best positioned to support the safeguarding improvement priorities, 2013 Ofsted recommendations and readiness for the requirements of the new Ofsted framework. A

## 2.12 Serious Case Review.

Walsall Safeguarding Children Board is conducting a serious case review on a large sibling group. It is a complex family situation. All of the children are safe and well in our care offence. The Review is due to conclude in December 2013.

## **3. Quality and Effectiveness of front line practice**

- 3.1 Following the Research in Practice (RiP) workshop in June, we are developing an Evidence Informed Practice Strategy which will be taken forward by Senior Practitioners as part of their pre-approval project. We are also promoting EiP through a presentation to front line teams, a series of coffee and conversation sessions to support and disseminate practice. The Principal Social Worker is leading on a programme of three separate workshops for front-line social care staff focusing on reflective practice, reflective supervision and play. The reflective supervision workshop includes a presentation called ‘Taking control of your supervision’ and one of the suggested ways of doing this is to make it energising and exciting for your supervisor. The play workshop will be held in an early years setting where workers can actually take time to play. We are monitoring the impact of this EiP approach
- 3.2 The October performance score card sets out progress, performance and priorities.
- 3.3 The Children with Disabilities Team was supported by a training programme to enhance their practice skills through September, consisting of sessions on:
  - Autism Awareness Training (Sensory Issues; Communication and Challenging behaviour)
  - Mental Health & Children with Disabilities
  - Makaton (2 day foundation course)

- Communicating with children with disabilities

The October and November Practice Education Sessions have just begun and will cover:

- 'Look who is talking'
- Working effectively with parents
- Safeguarding and child protection for disabled children
- Risk and protective factors for children with disabilities

Dates have been set for all team members to spend time in MAST in October and November.

A report is being taken to LSCB in November which will also include attendance numbers and feedback from evaluations.

- 3.4 The new Black Country Pre Proceedings Protocol was launched at an event led by Walsall and held on 30 September at the Molyneux Stadium in Wolverhampton. The keynote speech was given by Judge Bush, who spoke with absolute clarity about the court's 'non-tolerance' stance on delay for children and the need for social workers to be the professional experts in the court arena. Presentations on the Family Justice Review have been given to teams across the service as have presentations on the new Permanence Policy.
- 3.5 We were successful in our submission to be part of a DfE funded programme to support recruitment of foster carers from now until the end of March.
- 3.6 'We were also successful in our bid to become a pilot authority for 'New Belongings'. The pilot is aimed at raising awareness of the challenges faced by care leavers once they leave care and challenging local authorities and their communities to engage with care leavers differently. The pilot launched locally on 28 October, to coincide with National Care Leavers week. The pilot runs until September 2014
- 3.7 We supported a bid by Walsall Family Voice to the CDC (Council for Disabled Children) Innovation and Sustainability Programme, which was successful and will enable Family Voice to set up a young people's arm as part of their organisation. The participation team will help develop this engagement group.
- 3.8 A deep dive audit has been undertaken into Initial Assessments leading to NFAs, reporting to the Assistant Director, Specialist Services. The results show that thresholds are understood but positioned too low. A programme of development work is being undertaken with Early Help, MAST, IRS and Area Family Support Teams to strengthen and embed joint working arrangements which will address these issues, supported by revised threshold guidance which is currently out for consultation towards implementation from 1 December 2013.

#### **4. Notable improvements this period**

- 4.1 Key improvements in this period include:
- Improved robustness and reliability of strategic performance data

- Initiation of commissioning process for ICS system, with soft market testing now having taken place
- Improved working environment at the Quest
- Significant development through the QA framework of an ethos of challenge, learning and the application of learning into practice. More effective and systematic recording of this in case-records remains a priority
- Implementation and strengthening of MAST/Early Help Pathway across the partnership to ensure that more timely and effective Early Help interventions follow MAST screening
- Implementation of Early Help Scorecard to monitor the impact of Early Help and inform service improvement

## **5. Priorities in the next reporting period**

The key priorities in the next month are:

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

- Work with the chair of WSCB to embed improvements to the Board's function, operation and impact to ensure the Board is able to hold agencies robustly to account on their safeguarding responsibilities
- Focus the work of the Corporate Parenting Group so it can effectively fulfil its role and responsibilities for children in care

### **5.2 Capacity, capability and culture**

- Work to embed strengthened performance management and quality assurance arrangements, including self assessment and inspection readiness and the planned audit of initial assessments leading to no further social care action
- Agree mutual accountabilities with Police
- Workforce planning, including reshaping the directorate and reducing reliance on agency workers
- Focus on implications of single inspection framework for the partnership
- Preparation for the DfE 12 month review

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

- Consistency and impact of front line social care practice with specific focus on embedding key messages of:
  - ensuring children are seen alone whatever their age and their voices and views are heard, recorded on PARIS and taken into account
  - reflective supervision is a right and a responsibility
- Ensuring fair and equitable workloads
- Drive forward the implementation of early help provision to better match and meet needs

## 6. Risks to Delivery

6.1 The risk register is reviewed on a monthly basis by the Operations Group and new issues or risks requiring Improvement Board attention are highlighted here. The full risk register is available to all Improvement Board Members on request.

6.2 Current risks to bring to the attention of the Improvement Board are:

- Alignment of PARIS, the ICS system, with practice change priorities, including the child's voice and views and their journey, in the context of the developing regulatory framework.
- Ensuring a shared understanding and practice of accountabilities with the Police.
- Failure to appoint to key posts across the Directorate, potential to compromise the pace of practice improvements and a timely and effective transition to permanent Senior Leadership Team.
- Ensuring that a rigorous and forensic approach to self-evaluation is sustained with a renewed vigour that fully reflects the raised criteria in the new Ofsted framework and related regulatory developments.
- Ensuring that the right capacity is in place to deliver an effective Early Help offer.
- Securing the active and continuing engagement of health professionals on site in the MAST arrangements. Reduction in Health input will present a significant risk to maintaining quality and impact for children and young people.

### Author

Rose Collinson

Interim Executive Director, Children's Services

☎ 652081

✉ [collinsonr@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:collinsonr@walsall.gov.uk)

**Appendix 1** – Report of the Independent WSCB Chair to Improvement Board

**Appendix 2** – Good to be working with you – October 2013

**Appendix 3** – Ministerial Letter dated 30 October 2013





## **Report to Improvement Board November 2013.**

### **Walsall Safeguarding Children Board Review Meeting October 2013 Report from the Independent Chair of WSCB**

#### **1. Background**

- 1.1 The WSCB held a special meeting on the 16<sup>th</sup> October 2013 to undertake a self-evaluation exercise aimed at identifying specific action points for strengthening effectiveness and impact. As a framework for our discussions, we utilised the headline criteria emerging from the Ofsted proposals for LSCB review. These criteria are attached as an Appendix to this report.
- 1.2 We were also mindful of the fact that at the point where the Improvement Board ceases to operate, the WSCB will be charged with the continuation of the improvement journey for Walsall's children and young people.
- 1.3 This report provides a summary of the discussions and of agreed action points. A full record of the meeting is available if required.

#### **2. Actions Agreed by the WSCB**

- 2.1 The following actions were agreed by the Board. These are additional to action already committed to through the WSCB Business Plan:
- 2.2 To increase the frequency of WSCB meetings to monthly with a 6-month programme to drive forward improvement across the system. This has the added benefit of providing a strong platform for picking up Improvement Board priorities in the longer-term.
- 2.3 To implement a rolling programme of multi-agency case file auditing that spans the full range of WSCB partners.
- 2.4 To agree a tighter and more impact/action focused reporting style for papers received by the WSCB.
- 2.5 To broaden the scope of challenge beyond Children's Social Care and for each agency representative to actively bring forward issues for consideration (on which to be held to account) from their agency. Also, challenge should not be restricted to formal Board and Committee meetings.

- 2.6 To review how some core elements of WSCB partners' activity (ie: information analysis, training & development) can be more clearly badged as a direct contribution to the delivery of WSCB priorities.
- 2.7 To review the alignment of CYP participation in WSCB with wider CYP active involvement strategy – to maximise impact & reduce duplication.
- 2.8 To identify the most effective method of regular high-profile communication of key WSCB messages to cascade through partner-agencies
- 2.9 To reduce over-reliance on key individuals to progress priorities (ie WSCB Board Manager). Consider whether some key supporting / delivery activities can be more embedded with clear contingency arrangements
- 2.10 To widen the range of partners involved in direct delivery of training programmes, to make more explicit the multi-agency accountability of WSCB priorities. The Board is actively seeking to engage with Research in Practice to establish how best to evaluate multi-agency training.
- 2.11 In addition to these action points it was agreed that all Board members will submit three priority issues for discussion in detail at the November 2013 meeting with a view to creating a WSCB further improvement plan for immediate implementation. As an aid to further improvement it was agreed to increase the frequency of meetings to monthly, with immediate effect.

### **3. Summary and Next Steps**

- 3.1 Board members are confident that the action points agreed at the review meeting, taken together with the further improvement plan, will equip the WSCB, working together with the Children and Young People's Partnership Board and with relevant others, to effectively take forward the vital work of the Improvement Board.

### **4. Action for Improvement Board**

- 4.1 The Improvement Board is asked to note this report.

Robert Lake  
Independent Chair  
Walsall Safeguarding Children Board  
October 2013

**WSCB REVIEW CRITERIA**  
**October 2013**

The criteria used by the Board as a basis for the review included:

1. Do we have clear improvement priorities?
2. Do we oversee regular and effective monitoring & evaluation of frontline practice? Do we have truly effective methods for gathering evidence from frontline services? How do we really know what is going on?
3. Do we hold each other clearly to account, both in and between WSCB meetings? What do we actively do between meetings to drive forward WSCB priorities?
4. Do we have an effective local learning and improvement framework? Are we clear about our individual roles in ensuring that this framework is implemented?
5. Are the critical policies and procedures in place to safeguard children and young people across the partnership and are these regularly reviewed? How do we know?
6. Are we systematically using joint case file audits and other innovations to inform our priorities?
7. Are we convincingly building on the experiences of local children and young people as a measure for improvement?
8. Is the WSCB an active and influential agent of change across the partnership?
9. Do we have sufficient high quality staff training in place across the partnership?
10. Do we undertake a rigorous and transparent assessment of the performance and effectiveness of local services?

### Good to be Working with You: October

Dear Colleagues

I believe that *'If only'* is one of the saddest phrases for children and it's a constant and bleak refrain in each of the recently published serious case reviews and the high profile manslaughter trial. Over the last few weeks we've come to know children's names in ways we wish, in the circumstances of their tragic, slow and painful deaths that we didn't....Daniel Pelka, Keanu Williams, Hamzah Khan and Child T to name just 4.

For me some of the most poignant sentences in the reviews and account of the trial are:

'Daniel's voice wasn't heard'

' Keanu had become invisible'

' no one thought about what it was like to actually be child T'

Each of the children were 'invisible' to many professionals across all sectors that join up and work with children and families. Professionals didn't kill Daniel, Keanu, Hamzah or Child T - their parents did, **but** no individual practitioner works in a vacuum and there can be no effective assessment of risk without direct engagement with children's experiences, wishes and feelings.

Serious Case Reviews aren't about blame, but they are about learning and similar lessons emerge from all of them about the dangers of:

- being over optimistic about the adult's ability to change in the future, at the expense of focus and ambition for the child's current bleak and painful daily reality
- believing that calling a meeting is the same as protecting a child
- failing to understand the deep and sustained impact of domestic abuse on children
- focusing on helping grown-ups with practical difficulties, rather than investigating safeguarding concerns
- keeping information siloed and separate or passing (and often dropping) the baton for a child...it's absolutely clear that if everyone had known what everyone else knew there may have been very different outcomes
- not thinking the unthinkable on behalf of children and for example recognising that both men and women can and do abuse children

But most of all, despite everyone being concerned about Daniel, about Keanu, and about Child T, in reality they were rarely the focus of any interventions. Their voice, their views, their wishes and feelings weren't sought, weren't heard ....no one looked at life from their perspective, from their now.

The important legacy that we can offer these children, and all the other children whose names we know from other tragic cases is to reflect on the learning and look

at children we are worried about as we would our own children, and make sure between us ( and it is a **collective** responsibility) that children are at the heart of what we do and we are unrelenting in our focus on their needs, their voice, their now and their future.

We have a statutory duty to work together. But importantly across Walsall I believe we share, and work to put into practice, our moral responsibility to be better together for children so please do share **and act on** information, if you are worried about a child.

Children are best protected when there are local networks of trusted and confident professionals working together to share information about a child, build relationships between each other, share responsibility for the situation, critically challenge and assess the information they have, plan action collectively to support children, young people and their families and to act decisively to protect children when a risk of significant harm is clearly present. And always, always children are safest when the focus is on them: when a trusted adult sees them, and sees them on their own, listens to their wishes and feelings and makes plans informed by their voice, views and experiences. Otherwise *'we see things not as they are, but as we are'*.

So let's be better together for children, share and act on information, recognise that challenge on behalf of children is grounded in concern for them, and always, always make sure we are listening to ...and hearing, really hearing, their voice in all that we do.

*'If only'* is one of the saddest phrases for children. Please let's not be saying 'if only' for children in Walsall now or in the future.

Thank you for what you each contribute so that we collectively keep children safe in Walsall.



**Edward Timpson MP**

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families

Sanctuary Buildings 20 Great Smith Street Westminster London SW 1P 3BT  
tel: 0370 000 2298 [www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus](http://www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus)

Councillor Mike Bird  
Leader of the Council  
Leader's Office  
Council House  
Litchfield Street  
Walsall  
WS1 1TW

*Den Mike,*

**30** October 2013

Thank you for your letter of 30 September, summarising the further progress you believe you have made in safeguarding children and young people in Walsall.

This follows the July 2013 Ofsted inspection which rated Walsall as adequate in making effective arrangements to protect children and the six month review carried out by my officials. I am pleased to note that your Strategic Improvement Plan pays attention to the new single Ofsted framework; also that improving the quality and reliability of performance data now enables you to focus on key areas of performance at individual, team and service levels.

Diary pressures make it difficult to arrange a visit to Walsall before Christmas to see for myself the improvements you have made. However, I have asked my officials to arrange a twelve-month review and to provide me with a report on Walsall's readiness to exit intervention. I have also asked the Improvement Board Chair, Chris Spencer, to send me another report in November. Among other things, this should cover how fully the revised Strategic Improvement Plan has been implemented; the impact it is having on service delivery; the sustainability of your improvement measures overall; and the capability of the Safeguarding Board to take over from the Improvement Board once the Notice is lifted.

In their twelve-month review, my officials will report in particular on:

- The impact of the strategy to reduce and remove the backlog of referrals, including the appropriate use of thresholds
- Improvements to the quality and timeliness of initial assessments and the impact of improvements to "step up/step down" processes
- The outcomes of your review of staffing and workforce issues, in particular your recruitment and retention strategy, the use of agency staff and the impact of measures to reduce absence

I know you are planning some deep dives to assess performance in particular areas. My officials will be happy to reflect with you on the lessons learned from such exercises.

I look forward to receiving these reports in order to assess Walsall's readiness to exit intervention.

*Yours sincerely,  
Edward*

**Edward Timpson MP  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families**