

**9 October 2018**

**Right for Children transformation programme**

**Ward(s)** All

**Portfolios:** Councillor Chris Towe – Education and Skills

**Executive Summary:**

Walsall Council is committed to ensuring that children have the best start in life and are safe from harm, happy and learning well. In order to achieve this our 'Right for Children' vision sets out the need to ensure that we have:



Walsall has experienced significant increases since 2012 in the number of children who are looked after, and with 628 children currently looked after (as of the end August 2018), the number remains high and creates significant pressure on Children's Services. The main reasons why children become looked after in Walsall are neglect, emotional abuse, domestic violence, parental drug and alcohol misuse and parental mental ill health.

A detailed strategic review was undertaken by Walsall Council from December 2015 to March 2016 to identify what was required to improve Children's Services. As a result, "reduce the number of looked after children, safely" became a priority as part of Children's Services 'RISE' agenda. This had 4 strands 1) reduce the number of children becoming looked after, safely 2) improve the quality of practice 3) stable and skilled workforce and 4) Early help, early on.

A range of actions to achieve this priority were been instigated, including increased numbers of social workers to reduce caseloads / increase capacity for direct work with children and families and the proactive tracking of placements.

The council-wide transformation programme established in the second half of 2017, reaffirmed a whole system transformation of services associated with children who are looked after as a key corporate transformation.

A needs assessment undertaken in December 2017 provides us with a current and deep forensic look at child-level data over recent years, a stocktake of current provision and a critical baseline from which to measure progress.

Our 'whats working' literature review of innovation activity and learning across children's services nationally provides us with an evidence based 'menu of tried and tested' transformational opportunities which we can learn from and use to determine 'whats right for Walsall' children and families in terms of transformation.

The needs assessment and learning from what works nationally has led to the establishment of the following 3 distinct but interlinked workstreams to drive our Right for Children transformation programme.

1. Prevention
2. Restorative Practice
3. Commissioning

These workstreams are underpinned by 4 cross-cutting themes:

- A. Culture
- B. Governance & structures
- C. Partnerships
- D. Finance

Our 'Right for Children' plan on a page provides an overview of our transformation programme (appendix 1).

Education Services are a vital stakeholder in our Right for Children transformation programme. Too many children are missing significant amounts of their education – this increases their immediate vulnerabilities as well as having a negative impact on their longer-term outcomes. Our schools, colleges and alternative providers will be key to developing and implementing a collaborative plan that enables earlier identification of children who may become at risk of losing education and ultimately being excluded. We want to work better together with our vulnerable pupils to understand and address the 'root cause' of their behaviour and engage or re-engage them in full time education by offering the right package of support.

**Reason for scrutiny:**

To provide Members with an overview of Children's Services 'Right For Children' transformation programme and the implications related to education services and schools, as well as providing an update on progress made to date.

**Recommendations:**

The report to be noted.

**Background papers:**

Appendix 1 - Right for Children plan on a page providing an overview of the Transformation programme.

Appendix 2 - Right for Children needs analysis.

**Resource and legal considerations:**

Not applicable to this report.

## **Council Corporate Plan Priorities:**

The 'Right for Children' transformation programme will contribute to a number of our Council Corporate Plan Priorities:

1. **People:** The transformation programme will aim to work with children, young people and their families to ensure they have increase independence, improved health and can positively contribute to their communities.
2. **Internal Focus:** The programme is focussing on a whole system change to ensure that within Children's Services we are as efficient and effective as we can be.
3. **Children:** The main focus of the transformation programme is to ensure that support is in place so children can have the best start and are safe from harm, happy, health and learning well.
4. **Communities:** Our transformation programme will connect with Walsall communities and ensure that they are resilient with all housing needs for children and young people being met in safe and healthy places that build a strong sense of belonging and cohesion.

## **Citizen impact:**

We will listen to children, young peoples and their family's current experiences and understand and learn from when services made a difference and when not. As the users of our service, they are best placed to tell us what it feels like to live in Walsall and in being in need of help and support. We have an ambition to work in true collaboration with children, young people and families to develop and deliver our transformation programme.

## **Environmental impact:**

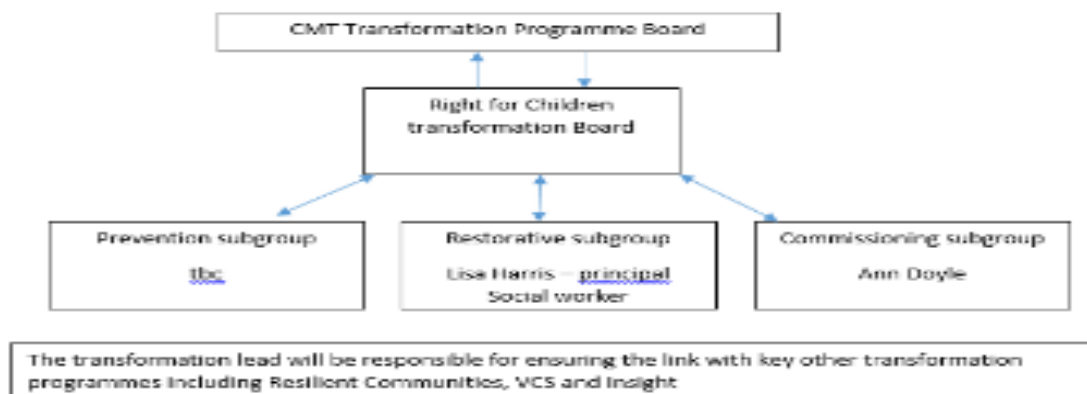
Not applicable for this report

## **Performance management:**

Project governance of the 'Right for Children' transformation programme sits within the wider Transformation Programme arrangements.

Within the "Right for Children" programme, are monthly Programme Board meetings, chaired by the Executive Director for Children's Services which oversees the monitor and progress against key milestones and against the work stream plans, identifies risk and takes appropriate action to mitigate and unblock obstacles. This Board is supported by the Corporate Transformation team.

The Project Board monitors progress, with the Project Lead, identifying resource requirements and ensuring they are in place at the appropriate time based on the project plan. Each work stream has a lead responsible for the delivery of the work stream plan of the transformation programme. They are supported in their work by the transformation lead and appropriate stakeholder.



### **Reducing inequalities:**

The aim of our 'Right for Children' transformation programme is to ensure that all children have the right support, in the right place, at the right time, for as long as it is needed to enable them to be safe from harm, happy and learning well with self-belief, aspiration and support to be their best.

### **Consultation:**

Between June and August 2018 key stakeholders have been consulted with on development of the 'Right for Children' transformation programme. This includes Voluntary and community Sector; Police; Money, Home, Job and housing providers; Public Health, Education and Adult Social Care. These key stakeholders and others will continue to engage and will be vital in successful implementation of the programme.

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## Report

### 1. Current situation –Why do we need this Programme?

#### 1.1 This situation will not 'right itself'.

Demand across Children's Social Care has continued to increase since 2012. Our recently commissioned needs analysis (appendix 2) providing a forensic analysis of demand shows that whilst Walsall has recently experienced some slight decreases (contrary to the national and regional picture where numbers continue to rise) overall the number of children looked after remains high at 628 and the actions we have put in place in 2016/17 are not yet having the desired effect although collectively the activity has avoided further costs associated with children who are looked after. Capacity to track, investigate, understand, and respond to the root causes associated with demand, identifying the preventative services required to help families to care for their children at home and to safely stop children from coming into care where it is the right thing to do, is critical.

1.2 Our analysis shows a changing profile of children who are looked after. Whilst the gender of children who are looked after has remained fairly static, the age profile has changed significantly and our response must flex to respond to these changes. Operating the same, with no change, is not an option. There have been increases in the youngest (babies under 1, with a specific issue of repeated removals of babies) and increases in older children (aged 10 – 17) such that over half of all our children who are looked after are now aged over 10 years. Whilst the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) who are looked after remains low, this is likely to change with Walsall's commitment to take more UASC over the next few years. Increases in the number of children on a child protection plan is also likely to result in increases in the number of children who are looked after. Increasing proportions of children are re-entering care due to unsuccessful reunification, a particular issue linked to adolescent children.

1.3 In common with most local authorities, abuse and neglect remain the main reasons why children come into care. But with the prevalence of families in acute stress, family dysfunction and domestic violence in Walsall is much higher than the national average and the latter now a factor in over 60% of all social care assessments, and doing nothing is not an option. Different ways of working preventatively across Children's Services, the Council and the wider public and private partnership system, including schools, are key to achieving better outcomes for children, managing demand, and keeping children within family settings, considered to be the 'right place', where it is safe to do so.

1.4 Children's needs are increasingly more complex. This increased complexity of need together with the multiplicity of issues experienced, are amplified when not effectively addressed as part of wider preventative or child protection systems, and the result is children stay in care longer and costs escalate. If we are to realise our vision of 'right time for the right amount of time'. Doing nothing is not an option.

1.5 Our current approach / way of working with children and families relies heavily on compliance and process, doing for / to and not with children and families, will not deliver the sustainable change we need to take place in order to realise the outcomes we want for our children and families. More of the same will not achieving the best outcomes for children.

## 1.6 In summary:

- Our spend is dominated by the demands of the children who are looked after, circa £23m.
- Our ability to predict and respond proactively / upstream to demand is hampered because activity has long been centred on the crisis end of the spectrum and is reactive.
- We must collectively prevent and tackle the root causes of neglect and abuse, the dominant reasons why children become looked after.
- Simply misdirecting existing (and new) resources into a system not focussed on the causes of problem will not transform the landscape or the lives of children and families in need, at risk or looked after.

## 2. Future situation and approach – How will the Right for Children programme address the issues identified?

### 2.1 Who are the children in scope?

Children and families whose emerging vulnerabilities place them on a trajectory to becoming looked after with a specific focus on:

- Children who are missing education.
- Children who are vulnerable because of additional needs e.g. SEND.
- Young carers.
- Children leaving our care with a focus on support to enable them to make a successful transition to adulthood and are supported to become good parents when they ready.
- Children living in poverty.
- Children who have emotional and mental health needs.
- Children getting involved in crime.
- Children who have parents who experienced adverse childhood experiences themselves and as a result were identified as children who needed statutory interventions.

Children who are currently looked after and their families with a focus on ensure that:

- Children are in the right placement where their needs are supported fully and they can grow up to be safe, happy and healthy and achieve their aspirations. Within this area there will need to be a consideration on how we can best support unaccompanied asylum seeking children.
- For children who can return home safely, they are reunited with their families in a timely and sustainable way.

Children who are on the edge of being looked after and their families, with a specific focus on:

- Unborn babies who may be impacted by neglect and domestic abuse - including parents who had previous children removed – we want to ensure that for these adults' pregnancy is used as an opportunity for change in ensuring that adults can become positive and resilient parents giving their children the best start in life.
- Effective support to adolescents who have been impacted by a number of adverse childhood experiences including living in an environment where they have experienced domestic Abuse, mental health, substance misuse and as a result their needs have become complex and family unit is at breaking point.

- We would like to develop proactive, multi systemic, trauma informed interventions with the family, to address the root causes and build back young people and families' resilience, to prevent children from coming into care.

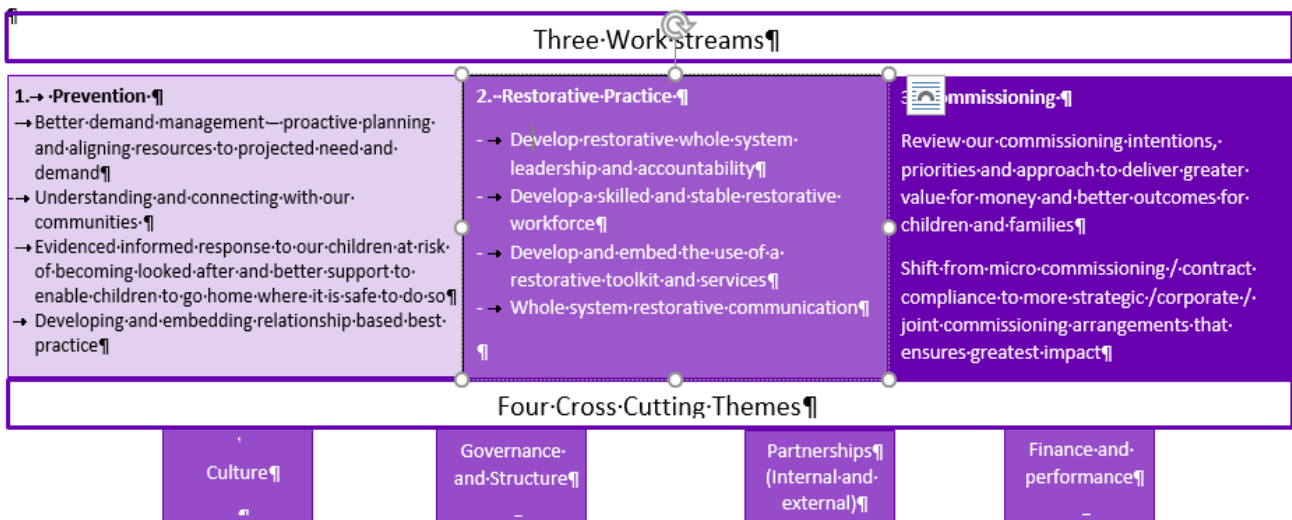
## 2.2 Our Right for children transformation principles

- Get the basics right for our children; a common sense approach that reduces bureaucracy, unnecessary and unhelpful processes.
- Strong leadership informed by 'what works' setting our direction.
- Mirror the lives and challenges of real families – whole system transformation because children and families don't fit neatly into directorates / teams and extend our work with children and families beyond a 9-5 and Monday to Friday mind set.
- Implement change that works for Walsall children and families and underpinned by evidence– not a 'lift and shift' from other local authorities.
- Prioritise the stability of children in all aspects of their life; design out 'hand off', 'handover' 'pass on' and what 'doesn't work' for children and families.
- A relentless focus on quality, impact and outcomes (not outputs).

## 2.3 Our Transformation Programme

Intended to reduce the circumstances which lead to children requiring a child protection response in the first place – demand management that will lead to sustainable change not one that rations services even more tightly as budgets shrink.

Re-orientation of Children's Services so we explicitly set out to reduce the need for statutory intervention by building on the capacity of those around the child to support them.



## 2.4 Key Achievements to date

### Communication and engagement plan

The communication plan is in place (supported by corporate Communications team) and focuses on raising awareness and securing stakeholder commitment to support the delivery of the programme. Stakeholders engaged to date include Children's Services workforce, Portfolio Holders, Public Health, Adult Social Care, Schools and the voluntary sector. Feedback from engagement sessions has been positive with stakeholders recognising language and priorities and showing keenness to engage in our journey.

Our 'Right for Children' Staff Conference took place on the 18 September 2018. 400 members of staff from across the directorate attended the launch of our Right for Children vision delivered through our transformation programme, and provided all staff with an opportunity to engage fully in the journey ahead.

The next step of the communication plan will focus on engaging stakeholders including schools and education providers in the delivery of the work streams and this will start in September 2018.

### Partnership with What Works Centre

The Council has been announced as one of the 21 chosen pioneer partners to work with the What Works Centre for Social care. The Centre, funded by the DfE, will be providing a whole organisational offer to us in Children's Services, bringing additional capacity and expertise to accelerate our transformation programme. Our partnership will focus on designing and testing a diagnostic tool to identify strengths and weakness in our current use of evidence, and areas for improvement.

### Work streams

Each work stream has a detailed plan of action and implementation of the actions is overseen by the Lead for Transformation in Children's Services. Impact will be monitored through the Transformation board.

The commissioning work stream and related action plan is jointly owned by Adult Services.