

Children and Young People's Scrutiny and Performance Panel

**Agenda
Item No.**

26 March 2013

Children's Services Improvement Activity

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Cllr R Andrew – Portfolio Holder for Children's Services

Executive Summary

This report is an update for Scrutiny on post Ofsted improvement priorities and activity, including information about agency staff. Additionally, potential options for scrutiny of post 16 Education are identified.

Recommendations

1. To note the progress and direction of travel against the strategic improvement priorities.
2. To consider the options identified for scrutiny of post 16 Education.

Background papers

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

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

Improvement Notice – published November 2012.

Resource and legal considerations

The strategic and operational improvement plans 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 national CIB (Children's Improvement Board) funding allocation is targeted at

- a) Sector led support, co-ordinated by C4EO (Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in children and young people services) to assist with:
 - performance management, and intelligent use of data and quality assurance arrangements
 - learning from complaints
 - early help scope
 - implementing an evidence informed approach to practice
- b) Work with The Children's Society to capture the voice of Walsall children to ensure their hopes, wishes and ambition for the improvement journey informs and shapes services to improve outcomes with children.
- c) Review of the social care front door.

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 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 in Walsall so that they safe, happy, healthy and with a bright 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. The delivery of the objectives in the improvement plan will be risk assessed and mitigated as appropriate.

The Improvement Board monitor progress and impact on a monthly 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. 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.

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) 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 be an important consideration for 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 the implementation of the delivery plans which underpin improvements.

Staff 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. Briefings are currently taking place within partner organisations.

Contact Officer:

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.

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Report

1. Context

Children's Services in Walsall were judged to be inadequate by Ofsted in a report published at the end of July 2012. Following the Ofsted judgement the Parliamentary Secretary of State for Children and Families issued an Improvement Notice to the Council in November 2012. This is usual practice following an inadequate inspection outcome.

This report provides a summary of improvement progress to the Scrutiny Panel against actions in the Improvement Plan since the last Panel meeting and improvement priorities for the next period.

2. Summary of progress since last report

Capacity, capability and culture

2.1 Vision and ambition for Children's Services: Better together for Children

The principles, values and ambition for Children's Services has been followed up in face to face conversations, briefings, meetings, presentations and staff engagement sessions. The Safeguarding and Inspection Team (SIT) have endorsed the vision and ambition and set five challenges to partners to make sure that it is embedded in practice and translates into actions and good outcomes for children and young people.

2.2 These challenges have been widely discussed, disseminated and endorsed. The biggest challenge is now to ensure we reflect them in our leadership behaviours and embed them in practice.

2.3 Sector led support

The Children with Disabilities peer challenge has taken place with the final report due shortly. The focus and timing of the Challenge aligns well with Walsall's approach to disseminating the learning about SEN and disabilities developments. A seminar on 8 February for parents/carers and professionals focused on learning from a national perspective about Green Paper Pathfinder developments and the implications of the key highlights from the Children and Families Bill and using the opportunity to bring the agendas together locally and agree the next steps.

Quality Assurance and Audit. A review of existing QA/audit processes and policies in Walsall, the West Midlands and others has taken place and agreement reached about the approach which will concentrate on safeguarding and the front door, but with links to early help and the child's journey.

Assignment: Early Help Offer. A review of Walsall's current early help strategy and offer has commenced and an initial report produced which highlighted good commitment and ambition for Early Help but a lack of

coherence at an operational level. Work is now going on, led by the two assistant directors to use both the interim and final report (due soon) to set out the Early Help framework for Walsall which will meet the needs of children and families and deliver best outcomes for them.

Data Assignment. Following the data diagnostic assessment, work has started to take improvements forward. A data specialist (expert in children's social care ICS systems, statutory returns and performance management, with a good understanding of children's social care practice) is working with us until the end of March to:

- set up reporting schedules and audit mechanisms;
- meet with the Service and others relating to performance management;
- introduction of a One Stop Shop (master dataset in one place) to the Performance & Outcomes Team;
- work with the Performance & Outcomes Team on performance management and
- work with the PARIS team (the ICS system in Walsall) to start improvements in PARIS and to help generate a learning and improvement culture.

2.4 The Children's Society have scoped and started work on capturing the voices and views of children and young people. This work will be championed by the SIT and Walsall's Council 4 Kids. Work has focused to date on reviewing statutory guidance and identifying best practice examples of participation in children's social care both nationally and regionally to enable us to make comparisons with policy and practice in Walsall. Initial meetings with key representatives have taken place and work is in hand to design a survey/focus group tool which can be used with individuals or groups of children so that their voices can be included in the continuous improvement journey. A particular focus is ensuring that the voice and views of children with disabilities, especially those in care and/or with safeguarding needs, are heard.

2.5 The team manager development programme is now underway. Initial feedback from participants and their managers is that they are finding the programme helpful in its focus on personal and professional responsibility and accountability for practice standards and expectations. The 'pre-approval' approach is seen as robust and challenging but constructive and empowering. Introductory and planned follow up sessions with Operations Managers and Heads of Service are designed to ensure that supervision and management oversight reflect and reinforce the key elements of the programme.

2.6 Specific work has been scoped and is now underway to support readiness for future inspection processes, across the fostering and adoption teams and in preparation for the forthcoming multi agency inspection framework. The focus of the work is evidencing the impact of inter-agency work with children

2.7 Following the diagnostic performance and data review in November and December and building on the practice improvement work currently taking place, supported by the C4EO associate, capacity is being increased by the

secondment of a full-time specialist in performance management and quality assurance, from the end of March.

- 2.8 Assurance arrangements in line with the DfE statutory guidance on the role and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services within the Council and across the partnership have now been agreed and a schedule of meetings put in place.
- 2.9 Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel agreed at their last meeting to establish a small safeguarding task group to enable them to scrutinise safeguarding issues and improvements in more depth as well as continuing to receive a regular safeguarding improvement update at each Scrutiny meeting. Members also decided to schedule a number of seminars to help increase their capacity to scrutinise and challenge the performance of Children's Services, drawing on the LGA Member Support for Scrutiny programme.
- 2.10 There is now four months of accurate reporting against our agency staff (31 December – 11 March). Before this there was no reporting mechanism in place to map agency staff down as far as service area level.

The March scorecard reports a total agency establishment of 40, against a permanent establishment of 110 (comprising 82 social workers, 82.93 FTE) 28 senior practitioners (26.54 FTE). We are still running with 14 vacancies. But turnover has reduced dramatically in Safeguarding and Family Support (from 55% to 15%); Initial Response Service (54% to 31%) and in Family Placements (from 25% to 0%). However in the Children with Disabilities Team it has doubled from 33% to 66%.

Overall:

- We now have an accurate dataset to monitor our establishment
- Our agency total had reduced from 52 to 40 in the last two months (a 23% reduction)
- Turnover in Safeguarding and Family Support Service, Initial Response Service and Family Placements has reduced dramatically over the last two months.
- Turnover has doubled in the Children with Disabilities Team (however this is a very small team of 4 staff with some specific issues so turnover here will always be magnified as a percentage).
- We are over establishment by 26 agency staff (only having 14 current vacancies – not including Team Managers) but we have been as high as 38 agency staff over establishment.
- The Assistant Director Specialist Services is engaging all our agency staff on 17 April at Essington.

3. Improving the quality of partnership and governance

- 3.1 The Walsall Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB) held a productive development day on 13 February to map out and agree the steps to ensure that the Board is able to effectively drive and assure sustainable improvements in

the multi-agency safeguarding of Walsall's children and young people. The Board is also hosting work by the Children's Society work on CSE (this is a later report on this scrutiny agenda).

3.2 The Walsall Children and Young People Partnership Board has held 2 facilitated sessions to:

- review the operation and structure of the Children and Young People partnership to promote and deliver improved outcomes for children and young people
- champion Walsall's vision and ambition for children
- scope the reshaping of the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) to reflect the scale and extent of the safeguarding improvement agenda.

The partnership has endorsed the need for a radical review of the partnership and to develop a new CYPP.

Work is now underway to provide capacity, support and challenge to the LA and local partners in agreeing shared priorities for improvement in outcomes for children and young people over the coming 3 years and to set out these priorities, actions required, lines of accountability and success measures that will ensure their delivery within a new CYPP.

This work will also take account of the need to ensure that priorities relating to pupil's learning are articulated in the CYPP, together with national expectations, such as the new Ofsted framework for Inspection of educational functions, are reflected in policy, strategy and practice post transfer of this function back into the Council.

3.3 Complaints/compliments

3.4 Work is ongoing to ensure systematic learning from complaints and compliments. A review by C4EO is underway and will be reported to the April Board. Support and help has been offered and accepted from Walsall Health Care Trust to share practice. As well as regular monitoring and follow up on complaints, a particular focus has been on learning from compliments.

3.5 The focus has been on reviewing the current complaints processes, including numbers and reasons for complaints at each stage, and make recommendations for improvement. An important aspect is to include learning from complaints to be fed into workforce development and service improvement. Training and support is being provided as appropriate, following review, to reduce the number of complaints and improve effectiveness of the complaints processes.

4. Quality and effectiveness of front line practice

4.1 Work to review the current operation of Thresholds is underway. Interim feedback is indicating that although improvements are needed in practice application and partner understanding, social care thresholds are generally being consistently applied. Additionally the independent review of the social

care front door has identified the need for some significant changes to the function and operation of the Initial Response Team function and operation. A detailed change programme is being drawn up and changes will be implemented from April.

4.2 Work is also underway to develop and implement a whole systems framework to manage families pathways from early help to statutory intervention.

5. Notable improvements this period

5.1 Key improvements this period are:

- 9 Newly Qualified Social Workers have successfully completed their portfolios with a further 3 due to complete by 28 February 2013.

All of our children's homes have been subject to interim inspections by Ofsted since January this year:

- Hilton Road achieved satisfactory progress. Whilst we have not received the report as yet verbal feedback from the inspector advised of one statutory requirement in relation to regulations 23(b); the Registered Manager to ensure comprehensive risk assessment processes are in place for the trampoline which includes regular visual inspection. The recommendation from the previous key inspection had been met.
- Lichfield Road achieved satisfactory progress. The inspector advised of one health and safety recommendation which related to clearing the drive of snow.
- Spindletree Rise – satisfactory progress
- Redruth Road and Eldon House received a rating of good progress which is the maximum award for an interim inspection.

We are now preparing for full inspection commencing in April this year.

- Increased capacity to support prioritised needs.

6.1 Capacity, capability and culture

6.1.1 The key priority areas in the next month are to:

- Champion and challenge the vision and ambition for children across the partnership
- Agree and implement the changes needed to the operation and structure of the Children's Partnership
- Ensure a relentless focus on expectations and accountabilities

6.2 Improving the quality of partnership and governance

6.2.1 The key priority areas in the next month are to:

- Work with the Chair of WSCB to support the implementation of agreed changes to the Board's function, operation and impact
- Focus the work of the Corporate Parenting Group so it can effectively fulfil its role and responsibility

6.3 Quality and effectiveness of frontline practice

6.3.1 The key priority areas in the next month are to:

- Increase the impact of the quality and effectiveness of social care practice on direct work with children and families, building on assessments/recommendations from internal and external review

7. Risks to delivery

7.1 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.

7.2 Current risks to bring to the notice of the Improvement Board are:

- Capacity and resourcing: Interim LADO arrangements remain in place. We are currently advertising for a LADO but have yet to finalise a permanent appointment. Recruitment is also proving very challenging to the domestic abuse referral team. Interviews are planned for 28 February.

8. Potential options for Scrutiny of Post 16

8.1 At the 12 February meeting the Scrutiny Panel discussed educational performance in Walsall. Part of the discussion focused on options of post 16 Education.

8.2 Context

The post 16 Education and Skills sector has a critical role to play in securing jobs for individuals and prosperity for the nation. In January 2007 the national youth unemployment rate was 14.3%, this increased to 20.8% by December 2012 and represents 974,000 young people aged 16-24. The number of young people 18-24 in Walsall claiming JSA increased from 8.1% to 11.8% over the same period. In an environment where employers have access to an international labour market young people need to develop really impressive skills and attitudes to stand out.

All young people will be required to participate in learning to the age of 18 from 2015. Despite learning and skills providers and schools succeeding in increasing the proportion of young people aged 16-18 engaging in learning, there is not enough good provision nationally for all those who are currently not in employment, education and training.

8.3 The C&YP Scrutiny panel could decide against this context to scrutinise:

- educational opportunities and achievement
- employment opportunities

8.4 Options for scrutiny could include:

1. Establishing a task group or a commission to review and consider key questions such as:

- is the post 16 provision and offer meeting the needs of our young people? And what are the future challenges?
- how will academies and free schools be held accountable?
- are our GCSE and A level results good enough? And what will be the impact of the new accountability measures currently under consultation?
- what does the apprenticeships placements and skills training provision currently look like and is it meeting the needs of our young people?
- are the current careers advice provision and mentoring programmes successful?
- What will be the impact of policies such as the raising of the participation age (the minimum age at which young people can leave learning); the proposed legislation to reform provision for children with special educational needs and disabilities?

2. The CYP Scrutiny Panel members may choose to focus on a single issue as a way of understanding the entire journey of a young person at 16 years of age and the various available pathways that the young person can take to eventual employment and use as a starting point a key line of inquiry question such as:

“Young people take different paths to employment. This scrutiny panel will examine their options. What are the opportunities, where are the barriers and how can the council help to build the resilience that is needed for a successful journey?”

and look in depth at

- what are the pathways young people take?
- what influences young people in their decisions about which pathways they take?
- what advice is available to young people to help inform their decisions?
- what is the experience of young people on the various pathways? (academic and vocational)

- how do young people make the transition into employment, what support mechanisms and options are available to them to make further decisions?
3. The CYP Scrutiny Panel may take a specific group of children, for example, children leaving care or another vulnerable group and investigate how outcomes in post 16 Education and opportunities can be improved for them.