

## **CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL**

TUESDAY 26 NOVEMBER, 2013 AT 6.00 P.M. AT THE COUNCIL HOUSE

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| <b>Panel Members Present</b>                  | Councillor B. Cassidy (Chair)<br>Councillor R. Martin<br>Councillor G. Perry<br>Councillor D. Shires<br>Councillor P. Lane<br>Councillor T. Jukes<br>Councillor E. Hughes  |
| <b>Non elected voting members present</b>     | S. Raynor (Lichfield Diocesan Education)   |
| <b>Non elected non voting Members present</b> | David Blackwell (Secondary Teacher Representative)   |
| <b>Portfolio holder present</b>               | Councillor R. Andrew   |
| <b>Officers Present</b>                       | Rose Collinson - Interim Executive Director, Children's Services;<br>Sue Butcher - Interim Assistant Director, Specialist Services<br>Louise Hughes – Assistant Director – Preventative and Targeted Services<br>Dan Mortiboys – Senior Finance Manager<br>Andrea Potts – Head of Housing<br>Neil Picken – Senior Committee Business and Governance Manager<br>Paula Jones – Workforce Development Manager |
| <b>Also in attendance</b>                     | Robert Lake – Chair, Walsall Safeguarding Children's Board<br>Carolyn Stokes - Operational Director, Walsall Training Providers  |

### **356/13 APOLOGIES**

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Russ Bragger.

### **357/13 SUBSTITUTIONS**

None.

### **358/13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

There were no declarations of interest or party whip identified at this meeting.

## 359/13 MINUTES

Members considered the minutes of the meeting held on 20 August, 2013

### **Resolved**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 August, 2013, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

## 360/13 CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT ACTIVITY

The latest service performance information was presented to Walsall's Children's and Young People's Scrutiny and Performance Panel, together with a summary of progress against each action in the latest reporting period. The focus of actions planned for the next period was also discussed.

Members noted that the twelve month review by the Department for Education (DfE) was scheduled to take place on 3 December, 2013. The interim Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that the Authority would need to demonstrate progress in a number of areas which included evidencing that a strategy was in place to reduce the reliance on agency staff and that the service was fit for purpose. It was emphasized that regulators would need to be confident with the service in order to lift the Improvement Notice.

The Panel requested that an update be provided to the meeting scheduled to take place on 14 January, 2013 making them aware of the outcome of the DfE review.

Members sought an update in respect of the PARIS system. The Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that whilst a new system was being procured, it was important to develop and continue to use the PARIS system to make it as functional as possible.

The Panel requested an update on the senior management appointments. Officers explained that interviews for the Assistant Director Access and Achievement and Assistant Director Early Help, Commissioning and Workforce Development would take place w/c 2<sup>nd</sup> December, 2013. The third position for the Assistant Director, Children's Social Care would take place in spring, 2014.

### **Resolved**

1. That an update on the outcome of the DfE 12 month Review be reported to the Panel at the meeting scheduled to take place on 14 January, 2013;
2. That the update be noted.

## 361/13 PERFORMANCE SCORECARD

Members received a report setting out key exception areas identified from the high level scorecard. This included:-

- Initial assessments in timescales;
- Percentage of schools judged as good or better by Ofsted;

In relation to schools, the Chair sought the Panels agreement to convene a special meeting, to take place in January, 2014 to which the Panel agreed.

A discussion took place regarding the reasons behind the drop in performance in relation to the number of initial assessments completed within the required 10 day period. Members were advised that there had been an exceptionally high number of referrals between April - October, 2013 which peaked at 400. This had been exacerbated by lowered perceived thresholds and the correct thresholds for care provision not being applied at the most appropriate point. The Interim Assistant Director (Specialist Services) advised that a number of measures had been put in place to address the issue including, amongst others:-

- A revision of Thresholds to enable all staff to fully understand them
- Re-organising staff to create a fourth team allowing more time before the next duty period;
- The issuing of laptops to all staff within the Initial Response Service to enable more flexible working
- Ensuring that all managers' work could be viewed on PARIS to minimise delay in allocation and sign off.

It was noted that implementing such measures was already having a positive impact on performance. For instance, there had been a reduction in the backlog of incomplete initial assessments and timeliness had improved with 96% of initial assessments opened to the Initial Response Service (IRS) being completed during w/c 14 October, 2013 were completed within 10 days.

Discussion ensued in relation to the rollout of allocation of laptops within Children's Services. Members were informed that all social work staff within IRS now had laptops but that some service areas still needed them.

The Chair questioned if there were any reasons as to why there was a peak in Initial Assessments during the summer. In response, the Interim Assistant Director (Specialist Services) advised that there was a general lack of confidence about the early help offer and thresholds were being applied at too low a level although this would not be directly attributed to the peak during the summer. The Interim Assistant Director (Specialist Services) re-iterated that the service had been reconfigured to create a fourth team within the IRS which enabled better work flow. Staff morale had improved helped by the new working environment which was now open plan and facilitated better communication. The family room was due to be redecorated week commencing 2<sup>nd</sup> December, 2014.

In relation to education, the Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that there were strengths in relation to outcomes for children across Nurseries, Pupil Referral Units and FE/Training 16-19 Learning and Skills, however, work was needed with Primary Schools and some Secondary and Special Schools to ensure improved progress and achievement for pupils. Members were advised that Ofsted had revised the inspection framework in the summer and raised the bar for inspection judgements from September, 2013 which had impacted on inspection outcomes.

The Chair stated that as 30 Primary Schools were not performing to the required standard action was required to provide extra support to these schools. The Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that Members were now advised when a school was being inspected within their ward. Members were also advised that there would be:-

- A review of the Walsall School Improvement Strategy;
- Work undertaken to revise the core offer of support and challenge to schools;
- A programme of workshops for Key Stage 2 targeted teachers in Spring 2014 to accelerate progress in writing and maths;
- Delivery of a school improvement recovery plan.

A Member asked whether the transition of services from Serco had impacted upon the support available to schools and whether school to school support was affected when schools became Academies. In response, it was explained that schools were still engaging whether Academies or otherwise. It was important to match support to need and ensure that impact of support provided was measurable.

Discussion followed on how schools addressed underperforming teachers. Officers advised that schools and leaders take responsibility however focus needed to be less about what makes a good teacher and more about what makes good learning. Ofsted focussed upon the impact of those that lead learning such as curriculum leaders.

## **Resolved**

That the report be noted.

### **362/13            QUARTER 2 FINANCIAL MONITORING POSITION FOR 2013/14**

Members considered a report setting out the predicted revenue and capital outturn position for 2013/14 based on the performance for quarter 2 (to end of September 2013), for services within the remit of the Panel.

The Senior Finance Manager advised that the net capital underspend of £8.794m was as expected at the time of the year. This would reduce to on budget after carry forward requests were taken into account.

The Chair referred to appendix 1 of the report which set out reasons for revenue forecast underspend. It was asked how much it cost to take a child through the court system which was anticipated to contribute £129k to an overall projected overspend of £311k including additional staffing costs due to the use of agency staff. Officers advised that it would cost £10k however this would rise significantly if there was a delay or a family member required support during a hearing. The number of care proceedings had increased and more looked after children (LAC) were subject to interim/care orders.

In relation to the predicted overspend within Corporate Parenting it was explained that this was due to an increase of LAC. The budget was based on 541 however there were 605 LAC at the date the report was completed. This created additional placement costs of c£1.0m. Increased agency costs were also contributing to the predicted overspend. Officers advised that there were now 609 LAC, however, the number fluctuated.

Significant work was being undertaken to reduce the costs of care and, where appropriate, safely reduce the number of LAC.

A member questioned what was being done to address the number of agency staff? The interim Assistant Director, Specialist Services advised that work was being carried out to reduce the reliance on agency workers and there had been a reduction. However, when appointing newly qualified social workers (NQSWs) it was not possible to release an agency worker straight away as a NQSW do not have a full caseload nor carry out other elements of the role, such as child protection cases, straight away. As an example if 3 NQSWs are appointed it should be possible to release one agency staff worker (with full responsibilities) straight away with a tapering effect as the NQSWs became more experienced and assumed full responsibilities. It was emphasized that Walsall had been commended for the level of support it gives to NQSWs which was attractive, however, the benefits of appointing NQSWs would take time as the Authority 'grew its own'.

A member referred to appendix 3 which set out a summary of the 2013/14 Capital Programme. In doing so it was asked why only half of the allocated budget was expected to be spent at year end? In response, it was explained that funding was allocated for multi – year programmes. It was suggested that more detail could be provided in respect of this at a future meeting, should Members require. The Chair clarified that this money was rolled over and so it would not be lost should it not be spent in year. Officers confirmed that this was the case. A member expressed the view that it appeared on the finance papers that the money wasn't required and so it was important to make clear the fact that the budget had been allocated and rolled over as part of multi-year projects.

## **Resolved**

That the 2013/14 forecasted year end financial position for services under the remit of the Panel be noted.

## **363/13 WORKING IN A CHALLENGING FINANCIAL CLIMATE AND BUDGET**

Two reports were submitted [annexed]. The reports detailed the portfolio plans for future service delivery, along with the approach being taken to delivering service improvements and cost efficiency for the Children's Services Portfolio whilst another focussed upon the Specialist Services Workforce Development Strategy and Action Plan.

The Panel acknowledged, with concern, that cuts would need to be made given the overall savings required for the Authority. In particular, discussion was held with regard to the proposed reduction in transport costs (including Special Educational Needs) by strictly adhering to the policy. Doing so would impact on some parents that had previously received assistance but would not in the future. Members were concerned that this would impact upon parents' ability to ensure that children were able to travel to school safely. They were also particularly disquieted in relation to the review of transport funding in relation to provision of services to children with disabilities.

In relation to proposed savings which could be realised by a review of targeted youth support and targeted careers information, advice and guidance services, Members sought assurance that despite savings, there would be adequate support available.

Further discussion was held regarding the £930,000 reduction in relation to Children's Centres. The Panel requested further clarity and a report to the next meeting providing detail around the proposed clustering arrangement, impact on staff and timescales for implementation.

## **Resolved**

- 1. That a report on Children's Centres be submitted to the Children's and Young People's Scrutiny and Performance Panel to be held on 14 January, 2014;**
- 2. That the draft revenue budget and capital programme for 2014/15 for the Children's Services Portfolio be noted.**

364/13

## **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PLAN**

A report was submitted [annexed] detailing the role of Walsall Children and Young People's Partnership Board to produce and deliver a Children and Young People's Plan (WCYPP).

It was explained that representatives of the Board would sponsor each of the 8 priorities and the Chair welcomed sponsors that were in attendance at the meeting and invited them to address the Panel.

Carolyn Stokes - Operational Director, Walsall Training Providers and one of two sponsors for priority 4 - Greater diversity of choice for learning, training and employment for young people addressed the Panel. Carolyn advised that they were liaising with schools to look at the vocational courses offered as employers required individuals with skills for the workplace.

Robert Lake, Chair, Walsall Safeguarding Children's Board and sponsor of priority 3 - Reduce the harm caused by child sexual exploitation including children missing from home also addressed the Panel. He explained that a great deal of work was being carried out in respect of child sexual exploitation at the Walsall Safeguarding Children Board. A special committee had been established to drive forward issues within Walsall. Whilst Walsall had carried out some remarkable work already, such as Street Teams, it was important to strive to be even better and link with regional work. Due to the nature of child sexual exploitation it was difficult for people to come forward and share their experiences and tell people what is actually happening. This made it more challenging to address the issues. Mr Lake urged everyone to help, wherever possible, to uncover child sexual exploitation within Walsall.

The Interim Executive Director, Children's Services advised that a report had been published by the Office of the Children's Commissioner which claimed that claiming that 100% of boys now watched pornography and offered to produce a summary for the Panel which was welcomed. Also, Members were advised of Operation Sentinel led by

the Police which aimed at protecting the most vulnerable members of society in the West Midlands. Mr Lake advised that a conference would be held in Spring, 2014.

## **Resolved**

### **That the report be noted**

#### **365/13 HOME SCHOOLING**

The Panel received a verbal update on the work of the Home schooling Working Group and information on surplus primary places.

The Assistant Director – Preventative and Targeted Services advised that the information provided was based on confirmed figures for the 2012/13 school year. Confirmed figures for the 2013/14 school year, which will be obtained from the October, 2013 pupil census, were not yet available. The Panel were informed that:-

- In 2012/13 there was surplus capacity in Reception in 38 of the 79 Walsall Primary Schools and Infant Schools which admit children to Reception;
- This represented a total of 142 surplus Reception places available across the borough;
- Surplus Reception places were available in 19 of Walsall's 11 Primary Planning Areas;
- All children in the 2013 Primary Admissions Round were either offered one of their parents preferred schools, or were offered a place at a school which is within the 2 mile statutory walking distance of their home address.

The Chair referred Members to page 26 of the agenda papers which detailed the work that had been carried out by the home schooling working group. With regard to Primary School Places the Chair advised that further work was required into this matter. Officers agreed to bring a further report back to the meeting scheduled to take place in January, 2014.

## **Resolved**

### **That a further report on primary school places be considered by the Panel at the meeting scheduled to be held on 14 January, 2014.**

#### **366/13 LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN WORKING GROUP**

The Panel considered the initiation document for the Looked After Children Working Group [annexed].

The Interim Executive Director, Children's advised that Members of the Panel would follow a virtual journey of four children and young people. It was suggested that the working group could link with the work being undertaken by the Corporate Parenting Board to avoid duplication.

**Resolved**

1. That the initiation document for the Looked After Children Working Group be approved;
2. That Councillor E. Hughes be appointed Lead Member.

367/13      **WORK PROGRAMME**

Members considered the work programme.

**Resolved**

That the work programme be noted.

368/13      **FORWARD PLAN**

Members considered the forward plan [annexed].

**Resolved**

That the forward plan be noted.

369/13      **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next meeting was noted as 14 January, 2014 at 6.00 p.m.

The meeting terminated at 8.00 p.m.

Chair: .....

Date:.....