

CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

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

Panel Members Present	Councillor B. Cassidy (Chair) Councillor G. Perry Councillor D. Shires Councillor R. Thomas Councillor T. Jukes Councillor E. Hughes
Non elected non-voting members present	S. Rayner (Lichfield Diocesan Education) R. Bragger (Primary Teacher representative)
Portfolio holder present	Councillor R. Andrew - Children's Services
Officers Present	Rose Collinson - Interim Executive Director, Children's Services; Sue Butcher - Interim Assistant Director, Children's Services Louise Hughes – Assistant Director Children's Services – Preventative and Targeted Services Dr Uma Viswanathon – Consultant Public Health Medicine Neil Picken – Senior Committee Business and Governance Manager
Also Present	Robert Lake – Chair of Walsall Safeguarding Children Board

280/13 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor R. Martin.

281/13 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

282/13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

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

283/13 MINUTES

Members considered the Minutes of the meeting held on 12 February, 2013.

Mr S. Rayner requested that his name be included within the list of those in attendance.

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 12 February , 2013, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record subject to the inclusion of Mr S. Rayner within the list of those in attendance.

284/13 CHILDRENS SERVICES IMPROVEMENT ACTIVITY

The Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) presented a report [annexed] detailing progress made on post Ofsted improvement priorities and activity; information regarding agency staff and potential options for scrutiny of post 16 education.

Reference was made to the Safeguarding and Inspection Team (SIT) whose membership was made up of young people. The SIT had endorsed the vision and ambition and set five challenges to partners to ensure it was embedded in practice and is translated into actions and good outcomes for children and young people, as follows:

- Improved co-operation between agencies;
- Increased productivity in meetings;
- Equity;
- Multi – agency exchange of best practice;
- To aim high.

The Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that she was due to meet with the Children and Young People Partnership on 27 April, 2013 to agree priorities in the Children's Plan should be.

A Member sought clarity on why the use of agency staff had doubled within the Children with Disabilities Team from 33% to 66%. Clarity was also sought in relation to the 'sign off' of complaints. In response, the Interim Assistant Director (Children's Services) advised that there were specific issues which had led to the increase of agency staff within the Disabilities Team. It was a small team of four which skewed percentages when using agency staff. Agency staff had been used as disciplinary action had been brought against senior staff which meant that the positions could not be filled permanently. There were also issues around the use of non qualified staff. All matters were being addressed to ensure that a fully qualified, fully staffed time team was in place. With regard to complaints it was explained that:-

1. The Interim Assistant Director (Children's Services) has oversight of the majority of complaints;
2. A diagnostic had been carried – one aim was to ensure that complaints would be more consistent and less adversarial.

The Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) referred to the need to make significant changes to the social care front door together with the Initial Response Team function and operation. Members were advised that as of the 8th April, 2013 the first point of contact for all customers would be a multi agency screening team.

The Chair advised that she would visit the Initial Response Service as part of the work of the Safeguarding Working Group.

The Panel were advised that the Department for Education (DfE) had published an updated 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' which was a guide to inter agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. The report sets out that whilst the local authority should lead agreements on Thresholds, the Walsall Children Safeguarding Board should sign them off. This would be explored over the summer and a report brought to a future meeting of the Panel on progress.

Notable improvements were mentioned including the appointment of nine newly qualified social workers. A number of children's homes had been subjected to interim Ofsted inspections including Redruth and Eldon House which both received a rating of 'good progress' – the maximum award for an interim inspection.

Members of the Panel congratulated the work carried out by staff at Eldon and Redruth and requested the Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) to feedback the praise to the staff. Members enquired as to when the new Eldon building would be ready? Officers advised that the new development would be called 'Bluebell House'. It had been handed over, however, they were awaiting Ofsted registration before it became operational.

A Member of the Panel asked for clarity as to when the six monthly review of progress to meet the requirements of the Improvement Notice would be undertaken by the Department for Education. In response, officers advised that the review would be undertaken in June, 2013.

Discussion followed on the scrutiny of post 16 education. A number of options were debated. Members suggested that the question of whether the post 16 provision and offer was meeting the needs of young people was pertinent and worth exploring further in the next municipal year.

The Chair questioned how Walsall College had been rated as outstanding and yet scores at post 16 were not. In response, the Interim Assistant Director (Children's Services) advised that the college had been judged outstanding by Ofsted and deserved this accolade. The performance statistics were lagged which affected the scores.

A Member asked whether it would be possible to undertake an investigation to establish what had happened to those students leaving Sneyd School during the time it was closing to map their journeys to the present day. The Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that officers would look at what data is available and bring options to the next Panel meeting. This was welcomed by the Panel whom expressed the view that the young people that attended Scrutiny previously, during the closure process, be contacted if possible.

Resolved

1. That the Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) submit a report to the next meeting of the Panel identifying opportunities to track the progress of pupils from Sneyd School during the time of its closure;
2. That the Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) provides an update on progress made on Thresholds with Walsall Children Safeguarding Board, once available;
3. That the update be noted.

285/13 DRAFT HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGY

Dr Uma Viswanathan introduced the draft Health and Wellbeing Strategy [annexed] and provided an opportunity for Members of the Panel to consider and comment on its content.

Members of the Panel commented that whilst the document was comprehensive they were concerned that it was highly aspirational and did not provide answers as to how the many recommendations would be delivered. Specific reference was made to working with education and training providers to reduce the attainment gap between the least and most deprived children in Walsall. The Chair asked what would be done differently to the strategies and methods already in place to reduce the gap?

In response, Dr Viswanathan stated that the strategy would be developed further once approved to identify how to achieve the recommendations by working differently.

A Member asked whether such a large number of recommendations were achievable and sought clarity that the strategy was merely 'setting out the stall' and would be followed by action. Dr Viswanathan reiterated that action planning would be completed once the strategy had been approved.

A Member questioned whether the Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) considered the document to be useful. In response, the Executive Director stated that Members were right to ask how things would be carried out differently as this was a key challenge from young people.

Discussion followed in relation to recommendations in respect of 'Section 6 – Give every child the best start in life'. This correlated with the Children & Young People Plan by ensuring readiness for learning. Children's centres were best placed to deliver this service, however, a review was required as to what centres should focus on to ensure that the right people were being helped.

The Chair stated that the authority needed to focus upon readiness to learn by seeking out and learning from best practice. She added that there were times when simple things were required, such as providing parenting classes within children's centres, as that helps to prepare children for school readiness.

At the invitation of the Chair, the Portfolio holder for Children's Services explained that many of the comments raised were discussed at the Shadow Health and Wellbeing Board. There needed to be clarity around what would be achieved in 2013. It was also stated that there was a lack of clarity around aims and objectives. The timescale for implementation was 2016 in line with the sustainable community strategy. The Portfolio holder agreed that the document was very high level and more specific and clear actions, identifying those responsible for delivery, were required as was identifying good practice.

The Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) stated that the updated Walsall Child Health Profile was available and would be circulated to Members of the Panel.

Resolved

- 1. That the comments made by the Panel in relation to the draft Health and Wellbeing Strategy be forwarded by the clerk to public health;**
- 2. That the updated Walsall Child Health Profile be circulated to Members of the Panel.**

286/13 SAFEGUARDING WORKING GROUP

The Chair advised the Panel that the safeguarding working group had convened and produced an initiation document. This document had been tabled for consideration and approval by the Panel [annexed].

The Chair stated that a short review would be undertaken. Members would visit key frontline services to better understand a child's journey from needing to receiving help.

The Panel considered the initiation document.

Resolved

- 1. That the initiation document be approved;**
- 2. That Councillor Rose Martin be appointed as Lead Member.**

287/13 SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

The Chair welcomed the Chair of the Walsall Safeguarding Children's Board (WSCB) to the meeting.

The Panel considered a report [annexed] providing an overview of specific aspects of children's safeguarding improvement activity.

The Chair of the WSCB advised that there did not appear to be a major issue with child sexual exploitation within Walsall however more research would be undertaken with partner agencies to better understand the situation.

The Children's Society had been appointed to undertake an investigation into how the WSCB safeguards children and young people against child sexual exploitation. Once the investigation had been completed the findings would be brought to the Panel for consideration.

The Chair advised that Walsall had a good reputation in terms of street team provision and asked how they were commissioned. The Assistant Director (Targeted and Preventative Services) advised that a voluntary organisation was contracted to Council to undertake this work. A briefing note would be circulated to the panel and a report considered at a future Panel meeting

A discussion followed on the scale of child sexual exploitation within Walsall. The Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that sexual exploitation was a challenge everywhere, however, the extent of the issue within Walsall was not clear. Advice from the Police suggests that the issue is not overwhelming within Walsall, however, the Council need to ensure that staff know how to help if and when a problem is identified.

Resolved

- 1. That the findings of the Children's Society investigation into how the Walsall Children's Safeguarding Board safeguards children and young people against child sexual exploitation be considered at a future Panel meeting;**
- 2. That the Assistant Director (Preventative and Targeted Services) provide a briefing note to members on street team provision;**
- 3. That a report be considered at a future Panel meeting on street teams.**

288/13 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that a special meeting would be held week commencing 13th May, 2013 to consider the findings of the Safeguarding Working Group.

289/13 EDUCATION CONTRACT

(Exempt information under Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972) as amended.

An update was provided on the transition of the education contract. Members were advised that the final transition of services was on track to take place on 2nd April, 2013. A new schools directory had been produced and would be circulated to the Panel.

Resolved

That the update be noted

The meeting terminated at 7.40 pm.

Chair:

Date: