



Walsall Council

Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee

29 January 2024 at 18.00

**Meeting Venue: Conference Room 2 at the Council House, Lichfield Street,
Walsall**

[Livestream Link](#)

Membership:

Councillor A. Hicken (Chair)
Councillor T. Jukes (Vice-Chair)
Councillor A. Garcha
Councillor L. Harrison
Councillor C. Horton
Councillor N. Latham
Councillor S. Nasreen
Councillor L. Rattigan
Councillor C. Statham
Councillor J. Whitehouse
Vacancy

Portfolio Holder:

Councillor S. Elson – Children's Services

Quorum:

Four Members

Democratic Services, The Council House, Walsall, WS1 1TW
Contact name: Nikki Gough Telephone: 01922 654767 Email: nikki.gough@walsall.gov.uk

[Walsall Council Website](#)

**If you are disabled and require help to and from the meeting room,
please contact the person above**

The Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012
Specified pecuniary interests

The pecuniary interests which are specified for the purposes of Chapter 7 of Part 1 of the Localism Act 2011 are the interests specified in the second column of the following:

Subject	Prescribed description
Employment, office, trade, profession or vocation	Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain.
Sponsorship	<p>Any payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than from the relevant authority) made or provided within the relevant period in respect of any expenses incurred by a member in carrying out duties as a member, or towards the election expenses of a member.</p> <p>This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Regulations (Consolidation) Act 1992.</p>
Contracts	<p>Any contract which is made between the relevant person (or a body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest) and the relevant authority:</p> <p>(a) under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed; and</p> <p>(b) which has not been fully discharged.</p>
Land	Any beneficial interest in land which is within the area of the relevant authority.
Licences	Any licence (alone or jointly with others) to occupy land in the area of the relevant authority for a month or longer.
Corporate tenancies	<p>Any tenancy where (to a member's knowledge):</p> <p>(a) the landlord is the relevant authority;</p> <p>(b) the tenant is a body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest.</p>
Securities	<p>Any beneficial interest in securities of a body where:</p> <p>(a) that body (to a member's knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of the relevant authority; and</p> <p>(b) either:</p> <p>(i) the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or</p> <p>(ii) if the share capital of that body is more than one class, the total nominal value of the shares of any one class in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest exceeds one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class.</p>

Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended)

Access to information: Exempt information

Part 1

Descriptions of exempt information: England

1. Information relating to any individual.
2. Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).
4. Information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the authority.
5. Information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings.
6. Information which reveals that the authority proposes:
 - (a) to give any enactment a notice under or by virtue of which requirements are imposed on a person; or
 - (b) to make an order or direction under any enactment.
7. Information relating to any action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime.
8. Information being disclosed during a meeting of a Scrutiny and Performance Panel when considering flood risk management functions which:
 - (a) Constitutes a trades secret;
 - (b) Its disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice the commercial interests of any person (including the risk management authority);
 - (c) It was obtained by a risk management authority from any other person and its disclosure to the public by the risk management authority would constitute a breach of confidence actionable by that other person.

Part 1 – Public Session

1. **Apologies**
2. **Substitutions**
To receive notice of any substitutions for a Member of the Committee for the duration of the meeting.
3. **Minutes**
To approve and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 2 November 2023.
(Enclosed – Pages 1 to 6)
4. **Declarations of Interest**
5. **Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended):**
To agree that the public be excluded from the private session during consideration of the agenda items indicated for the reasons shown on the agenda.
6. **Update on Draft Revenue Budget 2024/25 – 2027/28**
To inform the Committee of the changes to the draft revenue budget 2024/25 – 2027/28 from what was previously reported to the Committee on 2 November 2023.
(Enclosed - Page 7 to 11)
7. **Private Fostering**
To provide an update to Scrutiny Board in respect of Private Fostering.
(Enclosed - Page 12 to 24)
8. **Early Help Young Carers Service**
To provide an updated overview of Walsall Young Carers.
(Enclosed - Page 25 to 33)
9. **Recommendation Tracker**
To review progress with recommendations from previous meetings.
(Enclosed – Page 34)
10. **Areas of Focus 2023/24**
To review the Committee Work Programme and the Forward Plans for Walsall Council and the Black Country Executive Committee
(Enclosed – Pages 35 to 46)
11. **Date of next meeting**
The date of the next meeting will be 29 January 2024.

Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 7 December 2023, 6:00pm

In Conference Room 2 at the Council House, Walsall

Committee Members present:

Councillor Hicken (Chair)
Councillor Jukes (Vice Chair)
Councillor Garcha
Councillor Latham
Councillor Nasreen
Councillor Rattigan
Councillor C. Statham

Portfolio Holder

Councillor S. Elson

Officers present:

R. Homer	Director (Children's Social Care).
I. Vanderheeren	Director (Early Help)
J. Jones	Group Manager
N. Gough	Democratic Services Officer

28 **Apologies**

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillor Latham and Councillor Whitehouse.

29 **Substitutions**

There were no substitutions.

30 **Declarations of interest and party whip**

No declarations of interest or party whip were received.

31 **Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)**

There were no agenda items requiring the exclusion of the public.

32 **Minutes**

A copy of the minutes of the meeting held on 2 November 2023 was submitted.

[Annexed]

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 2 November 2023, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved and signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record.

Walsall Annual Safeguarding report 2022 – 2023

The Independent Chair presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The Walsall Safeguarding Partnership annual report provided an overview of multiagency safeguarding activity during the year 2022-2023 and reflected the efforts of partner agencies who had worked in collaboration to promote the welfare and safeguarding of the children and young people of Walsall.

The Committee was informed of the work undertaken during this period to strengthen the statements that underpin the Walsall Safeguarding Partnership purpose, vision, and ambition. An overview of Walsall's demographics was given, and it was noted that there were rising concerns about youth and violent crime and issues of disproportionality amongst the cohort of young people involved. The Walsall Safeguarding Partnership, Safer Walsall Partnership and Youth Justice Board to work in collaboration to consider a strategic response to address the issues identified.

The Independent Safeguarding Chair described the Partnership's progress against priorities, and it was noted that neglect was a serious issue in Walsall, however nationally there had also been a significant increase due to financial hardship families were facing. It was also stressed that all age exploitation remained a priority for the partnership.

The Committee were provided with performance data, and informed that this had been analysed to provide information to meet need and to deliver services to children and young people.

It was concluded that partnership work was progressing well, and that practice was effective. A series of questions ensued.

In response to a question relating to actions that had taken place following the thematic overview of the findings of Jane Wonnacut, the Independent Chair explained that a multi-agency plan had been produced, and there had been extensive training provided. Families in poverty were supported and the 'think family' approach had been embedded. 'Seven minute' briefings were described, which clearly outlined the issue, the action and what needed to be done to better equip staff with information.

The Independent Chair provided informed on the multiagency audit, and the programme for the year. A sample of cases were audited, and recommendations were made accordingly. This followed through to the Quality and Performance Group. Senior Members of staff, from within the partnership, considered the outcomes of the audit and the actions that needed to be taken as a result.

Members questioned how the impact of schemes introduced were measured. It was stressed, by the Independent Chair, that a variety of actions needed to be taken to have an impact. The impact was measured through an audit, the type of referrals were monitored, along with the way that families were being supported. Further questions were asked around the impact of training, and the Chair clarified that the impact of this could be seen – although feedback was considered with training tweaked.

Further detail was provided on the Quality and Assurance Group, Members were informed that each partner took an assurance report to the meeting and partners were fully invested in the group.

The Independent Chair explained that the Partnership was endeavouring to find and support children who were being exploited, these were difficult areas to deal with as it was often hidden. The Committee were assured that every effort was made to ensure that these children were identified. It was confirmed that foster carers and residential home staff were trained on this issue.

Members were advised that referrals remained low, however had not declined.

Resolved

- 1. That the Final draft of the Walsall Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report 2022-23 be noted**
- 2. That Child Sexual Abuse is an issue that needs further consideration and should remain a priority for the Partnership.**

34 Locality Working and Family Hubs

The Director presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed) and provided an overview of the progress to date and on-going planning for the delivery of locality working including co-location of Children's Social Care, Early Help and key locality partners within the North, West, Central South and East locality.

Members were informed that in addition to the four locality hubs, community-based support and services were provided through ten 'community spokes' which were delivered through voluntary and community sector partners. They provide a range of local community activities and sessions. In addition to this a range of other services and support had been developed such as online help, leaflets, booklets and parent Panels.

The successes of the model were described and included the development of a skilled workforce, stronger relationships with partners, time to talk had become embedded in three localities, the development of a unified language, and the removal of barriers - allowing greater engagement with families.

In response to a series of questions, the Director stated that it had been noted that Fathers were not being reached out to, work was taking place to rectify this. Members asked what was being done to ensure that localities were sustainable beyond government funding. The Director stated that the sustainability was a priority for Walsall Together as joint commissioners, and the impact it was making had been demonstrated.

Further to discussion the Director explained that localities met the needs of the locality and worked in a coordinated way to meet the demands of the community. To understand these needs, data was analysed and used to provide a better understanding of the locality needs to provide a more flexible response.

A Member noted that the East timetable was well developed, and questioned what was being done to ensure the same offer was available in the other locality areas. The Director stated that the service was 1 year in to a 2/3 year programme, a round table event would be held, which would consider the achievements of each locality. Funding would be used to close the inequality gap and put in targeted resources. The year 3 focus was considering those post codes which were not taking up offers to understand what was preventing families from using the services offered.

Officers stated that data was monitored, it was hoped that outcomes for children born this year could be followed to measure the impact of the programme in Walsall.

Resolved

- 1. That the Locality working, and family hub report be noted.**
- 2. That the direction of travel to date be supported.**
- 3. That the service continues to work with the voluntary and community sector to future proof the provision.**

35 Early Help Strategy

The Director presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed), an update was provided on the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Supporting Families programme 2022 and beyond, the Walsall's Early Help Partnership and the Walsall Early Help Strategy 2021-2024. The Committee were advised that 'The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' national framework set out how all local strategic partnerships had to work as part of the Early Help System.

Members were informed that Sandwell Council carried out a peer review of how the Early Help Partnership had performed against a set of criteria of measures. As a result of this an overall score of 4 out of 5 was given, recognising that there was still work to do.

The Early Help strategy was due for review; however, the Early Help Partnership had suggested a 12-month interim strategy to allow time to understand the potential changing national and local landscape. Members were informed that the demand for early help services had continued to increase, along with the complexity of families requiring help and support.

The Committee was provided with details of a £1million funding stream to deliver a programme for children with SEND and showing vulnerabilities to exploitation (but were below children's social care of EHCP threshold). In addition, a transition pilot had taken place in 2022/23 due to concern at a number of young people in year 7 who were at risk of being excluded from school.

The Early Help Partnership was currently working with Lincolnshire to complete a peer review, where an independent review of the Early Help offer, the strength in partnership, the gaps and barriers can be identified to help the partnership in specific areas.

Further to discussion Officers explained the possibilities for the CARE project to be sustained, given the outcomes that were being achieved. Officers explained the opportunity for work with the voluntary sector to maintain the project – and health had helped to fund this work.

A Member questioned how the data was used to monitor outcomes/impacts, Officers explained that the scorecard indicated the number of children and the re-referral rate – adding that the data was used on a locality basis.

In response to a question from the Committee, the Director explained that the priorities for the interim strategy would be informed by the data available to the partnership. It was acknowledged that if a child was not in school they were at risk, and the Committee were assured that attendance was monitored.

The Portfolio Holder paid credit to and thanked the team in children's services.

Resolved

- 1. That the direction of travel for the Early Help Partnership be supported.**
- 2. The progress and achievements of the Early Help Partnership were noted.**

36 Recommendation Tracker

The Committee received the tracker of recommendations from previous meetings, including progress made and outstanding items.

The Committee were encouraged to attend the Total Respect training programme.

[Annexed]

Resolved:

That the recommendation tracker be noted.

37 Areas of Focus

Resolved that:

The Areas of Focus be noted.

38 Date of next meeting

The next meeting would be 29 January 2024.

There being no further business this meeting was terminated at 8.10 pm.

Signed:

Date:

**Children's Services
Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

29 January 2024

Update on Draft Revenue Budget 2024/25 – 2027/28

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Cllr S Elson – Children's

1. Aim

- 1.1 To inform the Committee of the changes to the draft revenue budget 2024/25 – 2027/28 from what was previously reported to the Committee on 2nd November 2023.

2. Recommendations

The committee are requested to:

- 2.1 Note the changes to the draft revenue budget 2024/25 – 2027/28 from what was previously reported to the Committee on 2nd November 2023 and the reasons for the changes.

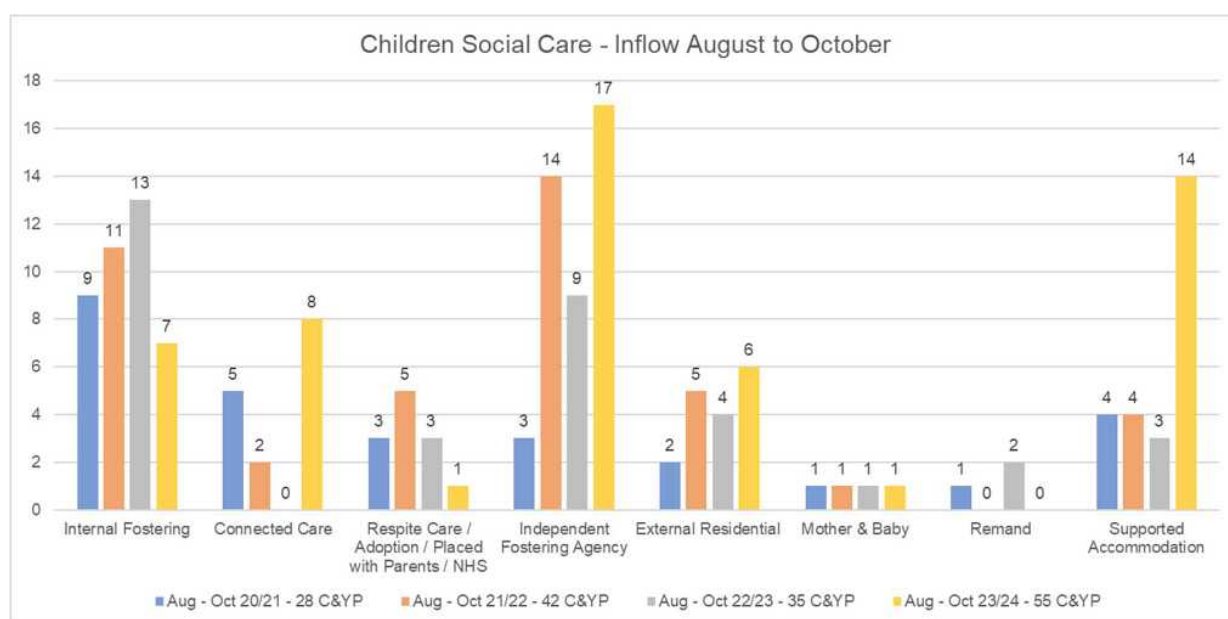
3. Report detail – Know

- 3.1 On 2nd November 2023, a report was presented to Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee detailing the proposed draft budget for 2024/25 – 2027/28. This was inline with the budget report presented to Cabinet on 18th October 2023.
- 3.2 Following this, the Medium Term Financial Outlook for Children's services was updated to reflect the most current information available linked to the number of children in care and updated costs. This resulted in changes to the required future investments and savings for Children's services as reported to Cabinet on 13th December 2023.

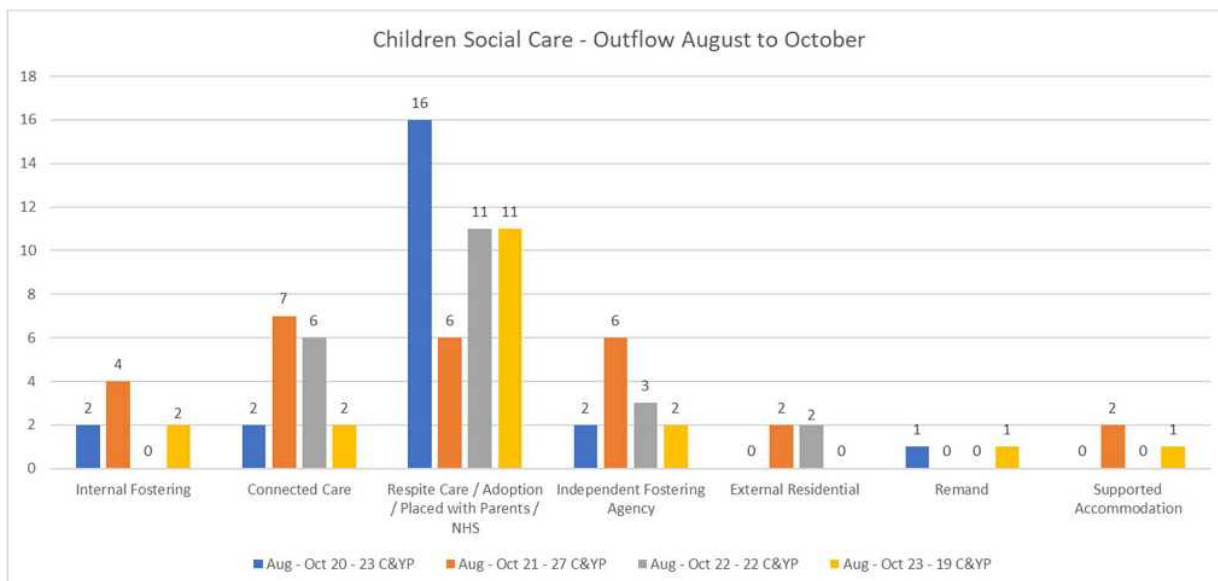
The changes to the MTFO are detailed in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Movement in Children's Services MTFO					
	2024/25 £m	2025/26 £m	2026/27 £m	2027/28 £m	Total £m
Changes to Investments					
Inv 65 – additional children in care demand / cost pressures	2.60	1.02	0.46	0.34	4.43
Inv 68 – Early Help removed as offset by saving	(0.89)	0.00	0.00	0.00	(0.89)
Inv 76 – Placement costs – Inflationary increases for external framework placements	(1.18)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(1.37)
Inv 79 – Children's residential homes revenue costs reviewed	0.00	(0.04)	0.05	0.00	0.01
	0.53	0.92	0.45	0.28	2.18
Changes to Savings					
OP59 – Early Help removed as offset by investment	0.89	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.89
OP63 – Placement Sufficiency – opening of further homes – revised following business case	0.00	0.04	(0.11)	0.00	(0.07)
OP65 – Adolescent service linked to investment rephased as to now commence January 2024	0.01	(0.01)	0.00	0.00	0.00
	0.90	0.03	(0.11)	0.00	0.81
Net Movement In MTFO	1.43	0.95	0.34	0.28	2.99

- 3.3 To note, changes to Inv 68 and OP 59 net to nil by removing both the saving and investment.
- 3.4 The small changes to Inv 79, OP 63 and OP 65 are due to rephasing of the projects and changes in implementation dates.
- 3.5 Children's demand services investment request (Inv 65 & 76) has increased by £1.4m since the previously reported MTFO. The movement in investment takes in to account the changes in mix and the impact of children entering and exiting care between August and October.
- 3.6 The primary reason for the increased investment request is linked to an extraordinary increase in the net number of children entering and exiting care during this period.
- 3.7 The chart below compares the number of children entering care between this period in 2023/24 to the same period over the prior three years. During this period in 2023/24, 55 children entered care of which 10 children were following a new referral into Children's services, 7 were part of 2 larger sibling groups and 13 were separate migrant children.



- 3.8 This pressure has been further impacted by the increased reliance on Independent Fostering Agency and External Residential placements during this period in 2023/24. To note, the growth in Supported Accommodation placements primarily relates to the increased intake of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children, however this pressure has been offset by additional UASC income.
- 3.9 The number of children exiting care during this period has also reduced compared to prior years. This can be seen in the chart below. To note, this excludes those that have turned 18 as the financial impact of these have been considered within the forecast and budget.



3.10 Children's services have undertaken remedial action to understand and analyse the increases seen and to embed new ways of working across early help and children's social care seeking to strengthen support provided at an earlier opportunity. There will be continued focus on understanding and pre-empting the needs of children requiring our support, so we can attempt to target these children and meet need at the earliest opportunity. In addition to these immediate actions, there is continued focus and reflection on how a revised commissioning strategy could support these challenges in the medium term.

3.11 To note the increase in the investment request relates to the ongoing cost of the increased number of children in care currently. It does not assume that the extraordinary increase in the number of children entering care seen in 2023/24 will continue going forward based on the assumption that the mitigating actions will prevent this from continuing.

Resource and Legal Considerations

Cabinet on 13 December 2023 were presented with a list of movements in the MTFO since reported to Cabinet on 18 October 2023.

The full Cabinet report can be accessed at the following link:

[Draft Revenue Budget and Draft Capital Programme 2024/25 to 2027/28 - Cabinet 13 December 2023](#)

Reducing Inequalities

Services consider equality issues in setting budgets and delivering services. Irrespective of budgetary pressures the council must fulfil its equal opportunities obligations.

4. Decide

4.1 This Committee is asked to note the changes to the draft revenue budget 2024/25 – 2027/28 from what was previously reported to the Committee on 2nd November 2023.

5. Respond

5.1 This report is for noting and comment by the Committee as above.

6. Review

6.1 This report is for noting and comment by the Committee as above.

Background Papers

- Various financial working papers.
- Corporate Financial Performance 2022/23, as reported to Cabinet on 14 December 2022.
- Draft Revenue Budget and Draft Capital Programme 2024/25 – 2027/28 as reported to Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 2nd November 2023

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29 January 2024

Title of the Report Private Fostering

Ward(s): All

Portfolios: Cllr Stacie Elson

1. Aim

- To provide an update to Scrutiny Board in respect of Private Fostering. To provide assurances around how Walsall Safeguarding partnership has delivered its duties and functions in relation to private fostering and how the welfare of privately fostered children has been safeguarded and promoted during the last 12 months period. This report also outlines the activities which have been undertaken to promote awareness of the notification requirements regarding children who are privately fostered.
- To support proposals for the ongoing implementation and development of Private Fostering both internally and across the wider partnership.

2. Recommendations

The Scrutiny Committee are invited to:

- Note the progress made to date since the Ofsted recommendation was made in October 2021 :

Management oversight and support for children living in private fostering arrangements was to improve.

Significant changes have been made to process and practice across children's social care systems in order to support the correct identification of children in Private Fostering arrangements. These will be outlined further in this report.

- ***To support the safeguarding partnership in driving accountability across the wider partnership and community in raising awareness of children who reside in Private Fostering arrangements.***

Thousands of children across Britain live with adults who aren't their parents in private fostering arrangements. They may be teenagers who have a poor relationship with their parents, children from overseas sent to live with family friends for a better life, or their parents may be in prison, ill or serving in the armed forces.

Private fostering may often be safe and appropriate however there are equally vulnerabilities and potential risks for this hidden group of children. It is imperative that the wider partnership and community are alert to the potential for a privately fostered child and know what to do when such a situation is recognised. Each partnership agency is responsible for the distribution and awareness raising of private fostering.

3. Report detail

Performance-

Between October 2022 and October 2023 there have been eighteen children identified as living in a private fostering arrangement. This is an increase of 200% compared to previous reporting year. In total we received 14 MASH contacts whereby children were identified as potentially living within a private fostering arrangement, an increase of 75%.

Some of these arrangements have now ended for differing reasons that I will outline later in the report. We currently have five children that are known to be living within a private fostering arrangement.

This data shows an increase in the number of referrals and children in private fostering arrangements when comparing to last year's annual report whereby we received only 8 referrals and had six children who were privately fostered. We know that referrals rates are nationally low, but this improvement indicates that private fostering awareness is becoming better recognised amongst the local authority, partners and the wider public.

Reasons for a child living in private fostering arrangements:

- Living with great Aunt as father has criminal convictions that preclude him from caring for children.
- Two children have experienced a family breakdown and living with friends of the family.
- Young person is aged 15 is an expectant father with his 15-year-old girlfriend and wants to live with the same household.
- One child's mother is experiencing mental health difficulties, and the child is now living with previous ex-partner to mother.

Notifications / Referral source

Of the eighteen children that were identified as being privately fostered across the year the following table outlines how we became aware of the arrangement:

Allocated Social Worker	7
Police	2
Early Help Practitioner	1
Health	2
Home Office	2
Another Local Authority	2
Parent	2

Of the 14 MASH referrals received-

Education	8
Home Office	4
Health	1
Housing	1

Across the 12 months we can see that the identification of the number of children in private fostering arrangements has increased. What can also be seen is that there is a varied referral source from across the partnership which would support the view that the awareness raising and training offer is having a positive impact. Despite this, it is recognised that the number of children identified as 'Privately Fostered' overall remains low and there is further work to be undertaken in order to further develop partnership and community understanding of when to refer a child to the local authority.

Reasons identified for 13 children no longer being identified as private fostered:

Young Person turned 16 years old	4
Returned to parent's care	3
Permanency achieved with PF carer via a Child Arrangement Order	2
PF not deemed to be appropriate plan and care proceedings initiated	4

Throughout the year of 2023, the following activities were undertaken:

- PF (Private Fostering) leaflets for children, parents and carers have been redesigned and are available on Walsall Partnerships website
- A PF awareness raising video is available on the partnership website
- A PF 7 minute briefing has been developed and is available on the partnership website
- Three safeguarding partnership implementation meetings have occurred with a focus on private fostering awareness.
- Private fostering has been included in all DSL/refresher training and the PF leaflet has been emailed out to all educational establishments and across Early Years.
- Housing have confirmed the PF leaflets will be shared across all teams and added as an agenda item for team meetings.
- Private fostering is included within any induction programme for any new starter in Children Services
- A private fostering scenario is included within the Right Help Right Time multiagency training.
- PF has been added as an agenda item to Early Help, Health, Education Children Services briefings throughout the year.
- PF has also been added to Walsall Safeguarding Partnership Spotlight newsletter on 3 occasions throughout the year.
- We have celebrated PF awareness day on 8th November by ensuring that we have visibility on the internal Walsall intranet

- PF discussed in locality training events

In addition to these points, changes to the mosaic workflows, establishment of the PF toolkit and development of the PF tracker has greatly supported in improving practice.

An audit tool has been developed and audits have taken place twice this year. This was undertaken by Group Manager, MASH team manager, duty and assessment team manager, fostering team manager and private foster senior social worker. This is to ensure that there is learning from both elements of the children and fostering service. The audits have evidenced that progress has been maintained in respect of the identification of a PF arrangement, appropriate checks undertaken and assessments concluding timely.

4. *Financial information*

Privately fostered children do not receive a fostering allowance from the Local Authority. The guidance stipulates that financial sustenance for the carers is the responsibility of the parents. There may be a requirement to provide services under section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

5. *Reducing Inequalities*

The number of identified private fostering arrangements in Walsall remains low and it is believed that this is due to non-identification rather than non-existence of such arrangements. Private Fostering remains an area of practice that brings challenges in both workforce understanding, awareness across partnerships and the wider Walsall community. There is emerging understanding of process around private fostering assessments and the roles and responsibilities of the children's social worker and the fostering social worker. There is evidence of robust safeguarding activity taking place and no child has been left at risk in a private fostered arrangement.

Children in private fostering situations can be invisible as has previously been stated. Whilst it is important that we act promptly and follow due process when a child has been identified, it is equally important to raise awareness and urge both the public and professionals to report signs of informal care arrangements for children who are being cared for by a person who is not their parents.

6. *Review*

Private fostering continues to be a priority for 2024 and is an identified area for improvement following the last OFSTED inspection in October 2021. Arrangements are in place to evidence how we will continue to raise awareness.

A main priority is to ensure on-going promotion to maintain awareness around the notification process of private fostering for professionals, carers, and young people.

Advice and support must be provided to private foster carers, parents of privately fostered children and to the children themselves. This may include advice on child development, religious or cultural issues, relevant training opportunities and accessing universal benefits/ finances. All children who are subject to private fostering arrangements remain an open case and are subject to regular monitoring and support services.

Private Fostering remains an area of practice that brings challenges in both workforce understanding, awareness across partnerships and the wider Walsall community.

There is an understanding of process around private fostering assessments and the roles and responsibilities of the children's social worker and the fostering social worker is now better understood. Given the small numbers of children privately fostered this is still not routine for many social workers. Although we have experience of undertaking Private Fostering Assessments across all four localities in Walsall.

It is important that Children's Social Workers understand and are able to recognise a private fostering arrangement. The PF toolkit, awareness raising, training and changes to the mosaic workflow all support the development of this.

Whilst the number of identified private fostering arrangements in Walsall remains low, we have seen a 200% increase in the number of children whom have been identified as living in a private fostering assessment. There are successes emanating from the work completed to date.

We have started the journey of raising awareness across the partnership with the hope that we continue to identify those children that have been privately fostered. To continue to increase awareness the next stage will be to work closely with Walsall Communication Team to develop a strategy in raising further awareness via the media.

We have the correct procedures in place and an emerging confidence that social workers, team managers and Group Managers recognise when a child is living within a private fostering arrangement and appropriate assessments and checks are undertaken. We have evidenced that when these arrangements are not deemed to be safe appropriate safeguarding action is undertaken, furthermore when permanency can be achieved via a private law order this is also progressed.

Background papers

Private Fostering Annual Report

Author

Jade Read

Group Manager, Safeguarding and Family Support

jade.read@walsall.gov.uk

*Private Fostering
Children's Overview and Scrutiny
Committee
January 2024*



Walsall Council

PROUD OF OUR **PAST** OUR **PRESENT** AND FOR OUR **FUTURE**

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Purpose

- To support proposals for the ongoing implementation and development of Private Fostering both internally and across the wider partnership.
- To consider how Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee can support in making Private Fostering

Private Fostering

‘A private fostering arrangement is essentially one that is made privately (that is to say without the involvement of the Authority) for the care of a child or young person under the age of 16 (under 18 if disabled) by someone other than a parent or close relative with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more The period for which the child is cared for or accommodated by the private foster carer should be continuous, but that continuity is not broken by the occasional short breaks’

(National Minimum Standard for Private Fostering DFES 2005)

Many children who are privately fostered are not known to services, agencies or people working with them.

- Privately fostered children are much more vulnerable because of their ‘invisibility’ and because services do not always record and report information about them.
- Under new regulations, identifying, recording and reporting children who may be privately fostered is everyone’s responsibility – the responsibility falls on all those people or agencies who come into contact with children and young people in their work.

Privately fostered children are often made more vulnerable by their living circumstances and by their status not being identified and reported to the Local Authority.

It is estimated that about 10,000 children in England are privately fostered.

It is likely that more than 50% of private foster arrangements are not notified to Local Authorities.

We currently have **5** children that are privately fostered in Walsall.

Current examples of PF arrangements in Walsall :

- Living with great Aunt as father has criminal convictions that preclude him from caring for children
- Two children have experienced a family breakdown and living with friends of the family
- Young person is aged 15 is an expectant father with his 15 year old girlfriend and wants to live with the same household
- One child's mother is experiencing mental health difficulties and the child is now living with previous ex-partner to mother.

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Throughout the year of 2022 the following activities were undertaken...

Throughout the year of 2023, the following activities were undertaken:

- PF leaflets for children, parents and carers have been redesigned and are available on Walsall Partnerships website
- A PF awareness raising video is available on the partnership website
- A PF 7 minute briefing has been developed and is available on the partnership website
- Three safeguarding partnership implementation meetings have occurred with a focus on private fostering awareness.
- Private fostering has been included in all DSL/refresher training, PF leaflet has been emailed out to all educational establishments and across Early Years.
- Housing have confirmed the PF leaflets will be shared across all teams and added as an agenda item for team meetings.
- Private fostering is included within any induction programme for any new starter in Children Services
- A private fostering scenario is included within the Right Help Right Time multiagency training.
- PF has been added as an agenda item to Early Help, Health, Education Children Services briefings throughout the year.
- PF has also been added to Walsall Safeguarding Partnership Spotlight newsletter on 3 occasions throughout the year.
- We have celebrated PF awareness day on 8th November by ensuring that we have visibility on the internal Walsall intranet
- PF discussed in locality training events.

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Main Impacts

- Between October 2022 and October 2023 there has been eighteen children that have been identified as living in a private fostering arrangement. This is an increase of 200% compared to previous reporting year.
- In total we received 14 MASH contacts whereby children were identified as potentially living within a private fostering arrangement, an increase of 75%.
- This data shows an increase in the number of referrals and children in private fostering arrangements when comparing to last year's annual report whereby we received only 8 referrals and had six children who were privately fostered. We know that referrals rates are nationally low, but this improvement indicates that private fostering awareness is improving recognition of private fostering across the local authority, partners and the wider public.
- Positively, audit activity has evidenced there is a recognition of what constitutes a private fostering arrangement when referred into MASH.
- There is evidence of robust safeguarding activity taking place. This has been evidenced across the year with 4 children becoming children in care and two children's permanency supported with their private foster carer obtaining a Child Arrangement Order.
- There is evidence that assessments are being completed jointly with the Fostering Service. DBS, medicals and references are being obtained timelier, although this could be further improved.
- Evidence that the private fostering toolkit is having a positive impact.
- There is evidence of assessments paying attention to the cultural needs of families and identification of community resources that can support these needs

Ongoing areas of improvement

Targeted communications through professionals:

- Quarterly safeguarding partnership implementation group meetings
- Twice annually re-distribute electronic version of PF toolkit for professionals who are in regular contact with children and families including details of who to contact to report a case of private fostering.
- Twice yearly, include information on Walsall Safeguarding Partnership website/newsletter reminding practitioners of their responsibility to report cases of private fostering arrangements to the MASH.
- Private fostering has been incorporated into the mandatory RHRT safeguarding training for all social workers, early help practitioners and staff through the Walsall Safeguarding Partnership
- Printed and electronic information to continue to be distributed through existing channels for professionals including GP safeguarding bulletins, CCG intranet/website and communications group, school safeguarding contacts, Head teacher forums, NHS Trust e-bulletin, School Health Nurse staff briefings, Schools e-bulletin, Voluntary Sector Council, Religious groups, Refugee and Migrant Centre, Police intranet/bulletins, West Midlands Fire Service.

- Each Locality has a Time to Talk Partnership event which occurs bimonthly, PF awareness to be included within this and revisited twice per year.
- Each Locality also has a Lead Early Help Participation Officer who can consistently raise the awareness of PF when meeting with the locality professionals.

Schools & childcare settings:

- PF to be discussed in DSL workshops and Head Teacher forums.
- Work with the School Admissions Team to identify where the adult making the application was not the parent or close family member.
- Revisit information about private fostering on schools e-bulletin with a reminder to school staff that they need to let us know of any private fostering arrangements they become aware of.

Online and social media:

- Undertake a Facebook and Twitter advertising campaign to raise awareness of private fostering and the need to make referrals to MASH.
- Private fostering continues to be a priority for 2023 and is an identified area for improvement following the last OFSTED inspection in October 2021. Arrangements are in place to evidence how we will continue to raise awareness. It is recognised that understanding private fostering is complex and therefore a collaborative approach is essential in developing relationships across each sector.

Early Help Young Carers Service

Ward(s): All

Portfolios: Cllr S. Elson - Children's Services

1. Aim

To provide an updated overview of

- Walsall Young Carers
- Activities undertaken in support of Walsall Young Carers within the Early Help service over the past 12 months.
- The ongoing co-production and collaboration commitment to improving the identification and support for young carers.

2. Recommendations

1. For the direction of travel for the Early Help Young Carers Service to be supported.
2. For progress and planned improvements to be supported.
3. For members to support the on-going awareness raising of young carers and the important role they play as part of the wider health and social care sector.

3. Report detail – know

3.1 Young Carers National Context

Who are young carers? definition: "Young Carers are children and young people under the age 18 who provide **regular** and **ongoing** care and emotional support to a family member who is physically or mentally disabled or misuses substances".

The Children's and Families Act 2014 and the Care Act 2014 both significantly strengthened the rights for young carers and outlines the requirements of local authorities, along with the Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995, there has been a clear and gradual shift in the focus for local authorities to deliver support to young carers and their families including carrying out a young carers needs assessment, taking a whole family approach and the need to improve the support for young carers transition to adulthood.

What do young carers do: Young carers carry out a range of practical home tasks such as shopping, cooking, cleaning, washing, overseeing medication, personal care such as helping with bathing, dressing and often look after younger siblings.

How many young carers are there: There are a number of varied estimates of how many young carers there are, the 2021 ONS census reported that there are around 120,000 young carers aged between 5 – 18 in England, however, The Children’s Society, Carers Trust alongside other charities campaigned to get young carers added to the school census, they were successful and for the first time in January 2023 schools were asked to record if a pupil was a young carer, and if so, who they were identified by i.e. school or parent. The results were released in June 2023 on the [Department for Education website](#), the data however shows that there was a significant under-reporting of the number of young carers in schools. Nationally 38,983 pupils were recorded, representing 0.5% of the pupil population¹ which equates to an average of 260 young carers per local authority. However according to the Carers Trust research by the University of Nottingham and the BBC suggest that around 10% of all pupils are providing high or very high levels of care.

What is the impact of being a young carer? : Being a young carer can have a big impact on the things that are important to growing up. It can, according to research

- Have an impact on their ability to attain and achieve with education or training, many young carers struggle to juggle their education and caring which can cause pressure and stress
- 27% of young carers aged 11-15 miss or have difficulties at school due to their caring responsibilities. (*Childrens society 2021*)
- The COVID-19 pandemic risks exacerbating the situation, stopping young carers from reaching their full potential.
- With the added complications of COVID-19, young carers are missing even more school than before and urgent support is needed if they are not to be left behind their peers.

Young carers overall development can be significantly and negatively impaired, irrespective of the type of care or frequency of care provided. Many young carers report feelings of isolation and are rarely ‘stress free’ from the pressures of home tasks, taking on adult ‘responsibilities’ both practically and emotionally and miss out on opportunities that other children have and take for granted such as seeing friends, playing, having hobbies, having opportunities to learn, caring can have a dramatic detrimental effect on the education and aspirations of young and young adult carers, which makes support services essential.

However, that said there is also some good things about being a young carer, again according to the Carers Trust survey findings said that young carers:

- Had a sense of accomplishment.
- Are more independent - a quote from a young carer “As I was a Young Carer, I had to grow up fast. I was left to do everything by myself, but as a result, I am more mature for it. I knew how to pay bills and run the house by the time I was 8 years old. I was doing the weekly shopping and cooking everyone’s meals (every night) by the age of 10, (I had been doing much of it since I was about 5 but full blown, just me on my own from about 10 years old).
- Can handle different situations, having the confidence to cope and take ‘charge’.

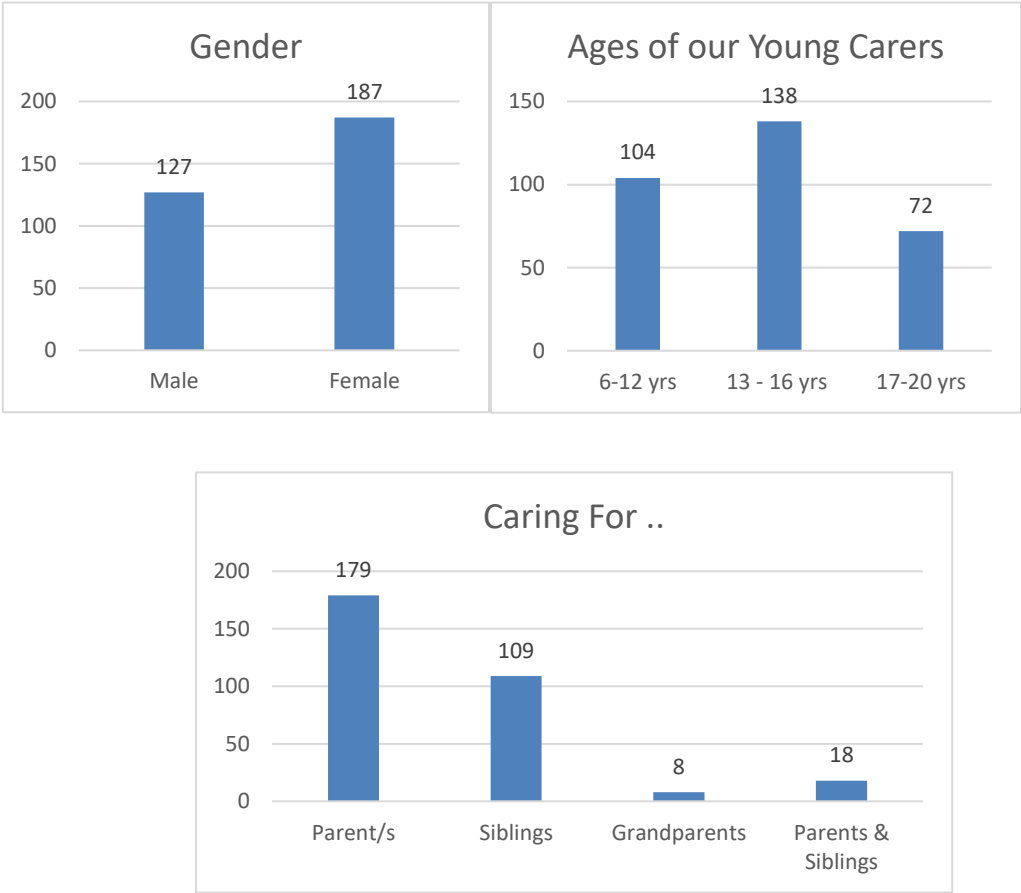
¹ [Young carers and the school census - Carers Trust](#) Page 30 of 50

3.2 Local Context

Walsall Young Carers: what do we know? It was disappointing that in the school census 2023 for Walsall, schools only reported 52 young carers which is 0.1 % of the pupil population (53,051 pupil population), significant work over the past 2 years has been completed to raise the knowledge, profile, and identification of young carers and as of 31st December 2023 there are 314 young carers on record. The identification of young carers continues to increase each year, it has significantly increased from 2019 when we were supporting only 62 young carers, this increase is due to the awareness campaigns and specific focus on young carers.

All 314 young carers have been assessed as being a young carer and work continues to complete regular reviews of the roles and responsibilities each young carer has. Reviews will be held at a minimum once a year, the reviews have commenced with our older carers.

The demographics of our 314 your carers are:



Following on from the review of Walsall young carers which commenced in 2021/22 and the refocus on young carers support service, in collaboration with young carers, their family and other key stakeholders the service has continued to develop and strengthen.

In December 2022 as part of the scrutiny overview a commitment was given to:

1. Look at delivering the Young Carers Group across various localities within the borough, acknowledging transport and accessibility of My Place can be a barrier for young people to attend the group.

We have met with the young carers, visited the Family Hubs within the localities to scope out the possibility of their use, agreed a trial in the North locality which is due

to start March 2024. However young carers have fed back that they like My Place and enjoy meeting together as a whole group. In response to this we have increased the number of children and young people we pick up to attend the young carers groups, held once a month for those aged 8-13 yrs and once a month for those aged 13 to 18 yrs. On average we have between 20 and 30 young carers attend each group with approximately 12 being collected by the Early Help team who are qualified to drive the youth minibus, whilst approximately 8 others are collected by staff on their way to group.

2. Connect to the wider Adult Carer strategy and include a section around young carers with agreed longer term action plans and themes to support young carers.

The membership of the Young Carers Multi-agency Action Group has expanded and more recently linked with Walsall Together to support further the development of services available; this has allowed an 'All Age Carers Steering Group' to be formed, including membership from Early Help, Adult Social Care, The Manor Hospital, WHG, Walsall Together, Alzheimer's Society, School Nurses. The group have developed, in collaboration an 'All Age Carers Strategy', this is in draft form with a meeting to finalise the strategy and agree governance sign off routes being held on the 19th January 2024. Once the strategy has been launched, planned April 2024, the associated action plan will be aligned.

3. Continue being part of and delivering the annual National Young Carers Action Day.

We have continued our involvement in the national campaign, in March 2023 the theme was 'Making Time for Young Carers', we had a week of activities including webinar events further raising the profile of young carers, held a celebration event recognising the valued role of our young carers, launched the Young Carers Training package for professionals and incorporated it into the core induction programme available on One Source as an eLearning course for internal staff and made it available on-line for external partners.



4. Strengthen the support available, linking further to the Carers Centre to enable wider range of support to be available, including support with homework, emotional health and wellbeing, exam revision and transition support.

We met with the Carers Centre, however due to funding pressures their service ceased last year. We therefore transitioned the young carers into the Early Help Young Carers Group and employed for a period their lead to support the transition, the lead did secure permanent employment within the Early Help Young Carers service however has since left due to family commitments.

5. Actively recruit young carers' volunteers as part of the wider Early Help volunteering service.

We have continued as an Early Help service to recruit volunteers who do support the delivery of the group and 121 interventions when required, a new recruitment

campaign is planned between now and the end of March 2024 where specific volunteers will be advertised.

In addition to the activity above the service has also over the past 12 months completed several improvements, including:

Raising the profile - continued to raise the profile and awareness of young carers, co-delivering further training with the Carers Society where a further 32 partners including police and health have been trained in identifying and understanding the referral process for potential young people who maybe caring for a family member. A separate bespoke schools training offer was also developed in partnership with The Children's Society and Joseph Leckie Academy, 37 schools attended the training. Both training programmes has resulted in continued increase in referrals being received, between April 2023 and December 2023, a total of 55 young carers assessment requests were received from external partners and 25 from internal staff.

Raised vulnerability concerns – in partnership with Access & Inclusion the vulnerability of young carers who are at risk of being placed on a reduced timetable or at risk of being suspended from education has been recognised which has led to the development of an associated risk assessment form that now includes a question around young carers, the Inclusion Manager advises the Young Carers team of any potential change to education which allows the team to support, at the earliest opportunity, and acts as a safety net should the school have failed to inform the team in the first instance.

Young Carers Champion – the team have continued to develop the champion role in schools, over the past 12 months 29 additional schools have joined the scheme, there are school champions now within each of the localities:

- 34 schools having a champion role in the East.
(8 secondary & 25 primary schools)
- 24 schools having a champion role in the North.
(2 secondary, 1 out of borough secondary & 21 primary)
- 2 schools having a champion role in the West.
(1 secondary & 1 primary)
- 16 schools having a champion role in Central/South.
(5 secondary & 11 Primary)

The school champion role has also been reviewed and together with The Children's Society and Joseph Leckie Academy the training has been refreshed.

Joseph Leckie Academy has embraced the school champion role and is now a peer mentor for other schools to share good practice, to ensure schools are inclusive and have a support mechanism in place. The work of Joseph Leckie has been recognised as good practice and The Childrens Society are looking at taking elements of the practice to share nationally. The practice includes:

- Access to a telephone during school break times; allowing young carers to call home to reduce unnecessary concern or anxiety and increase their concentration in class.
- Awareness of attendance and punctuality being affected by caring responsibilities e.g., taking younger siblings to and from school or when caring tasks during the night cause lateness.
- Someone to talk to who understands, who will listen and not judge (nominated staff member)

- Negotiated deadlines for homework (when needed)
- Access to homework club
- Arrangements for schoolwork to be sent home (when there is a genuine crisis).
- Ensure parents can access school for open evenings, etc. and if this is not possible, consider how links can be made with home.
- The school will encourage effective use of the PSHE curriculum, to explore the rights of children, the roles and responsibilities of young carers, and the challenges they face. This includes using PSHE lessons to promote positive images of disability, challenging stereotypes, and discrimination. We will promote discussion regarding caring and issues surrounding illness and disability, to promote a fuller understanding, acceptance, and respect.

Health partnership – this continues to strengthen with Walsall Manor specifically where the Patient Experience Manager has incorporated young carers awareness training as mandatory training for the wider workforce, the hospital now displays the young carers pull up banners and holds a monthly pop-up stand for young carers awareness.

Young Carers Team - Early Help have secured a small team who have:

- In collaboration with young carers, rewritten the young carers assessment, this is currently waiting to be uploaded onto the mosaic system.
- Started to review each young person's caring roles and responsibilities, refreshing the individual families support plans or working with adults social care supporting transition into adult carers as appropriate.
- Trained 3 young carers in the ASDAN Peer Mentoring course which is an accredited course providing recognition for those who have successfully evidenced their skills in the ability to mentor younger children (young carers).
- Trained 3 Young Carers with children's society to be 'mental health champions' within group sessions whereby they organise activities and create safe spaces for young people in the group. This focusing on the promotion of healthy wellbeing.
- Introduced informal 'coffee morning' for parents of our young carers to share concerns, seek advice, guidance, and additional support.

Young Carers Support Group – the team continues to develop the support offer at the Young Carers Group where again in collaboration with the young carers themed support, advice, guidance, and training is delivered. The National Youth Agency Youth work themes have been used within the group to deliver informal education and recreational activities, the delivery of the group is now underpinned by the 4 corner stones of youth work young person's empowerment, participation, equality & education.



Over the past 12 months the following activities have been delivered as part of the group work:

Youth work theme: Health and wellbeing

- Mindfulness colouring activity.
- Community sexual health nurse talked about safe sexual health and how to access services.
- Healthy eating and food preparation in all youth club sessions.
- Outdoor activities including mountain bikes, team games etc.
- Mental health activities and discussions.
- Oral hygiene awareness.
- Gardening club.

Youth work theme: Economic and financial activities

- Future careers Food hygiene training
- How to open a bank account
- CV writing
- Homework and revision support

Youth work theme: Arts culture and heritage

- Weekly arts and crafts.
- Black History Month awareness and celebration.
- International Women's Day celebration.
- Diwali celebration.

Young Carers Festival 2023 - for the first time the team were able to take 10 of our older cares to the Young Carers Festival in August, an opportunity for them to have fun away from their caring roles and responsibilities, enjoy new activities and experience a 'festival environment'.

Our young carers

- Went camping for the first time.
- Stayed away from their family for the first time.
- Took part in new activities including rock climbing.
- Made new friends from across the country.

A great time was had by all, each found the experience a positive and energising the feedback from them included:

"Thank you so much. We all appreciate you giving us this opportunity. It's been the best time I've had in ages & I am happy I got to make new friends. You & the young carers staff really inspire me for what I want to do in my future so Thank You so much".
Ellie

"Thank you to each & every one of you behind the scenes a YCT. I had a lot of fun & really needed the break. I didn't actually realise how much I needed it until I was at the festival. Not only did I get to enjoy lots of new things & meet new people which was great, but I also felt understood. I am in such a better headspace so thank you".
Dan

"I really enjoyed the festival. It made me think a lot about my caring role, even though I was chilled out. Speaking to others made me realise what I do is important but that I matter too. I got to speak about how I feel, especially at school & got to talk about ways

to get teachers to understand our lives at home which I don't always think they do. It has made me hopeful that one day schools will get it" Lily.

Family Winter Fate 2023 – In partnership with Turning Point, the Young Carers team held a family winter fete and outdoor Christmas market. Our young carers asked for an activity where they could spend time with their family, to have somewhere inclusive for all their family members to take part in activities and be together. A total of 138 individuals attended the fete, having the opportunity to visit Santa, meet internal and external partners including school nursing & DWP, try delicious food including a Christmas dinner, take part in arts and crafts, meet the animal man and his friends.

Plans for 2024/25 – In consultation with young carers and partners we have so far agreed to:

- Continue the Young Carers Champion Roles and start to widen the partnership to include CAMHS, Youth Justice, GP's.
- Further strengthen links with Adult Social Care to consider the transition support for our older cohort of carers, specifically connected to the reviews that have commenced.
- Deliver courses that support the older carers with employment skills.
- Scoping out the potential of 'play therapy' – in partnership with the Disabled Young Persons Team we are looking to introduce play therapy to our younger carers, this will help to provide positive mental health, express their feelings and concerns and to develop strategies to cope with everyday life.
- Be part of the on-going National Carers Day, the focus this is 'fair futures for young carers'.
- Link further into the national support group who meet a several times a year to share good practice, provide peer support and support practice development.
- Complete all carers reviews and support plans.
- Include in the Supporting Families model and payment by result claims, further evidencing intervention and impact.
- Understand and work with schools to ensure the school census figures reflect young carers identified in Walsall Council.
- Look to have at least 30% of schools achieving the 'School Young Carers Aware Award'.
- Identify KPI's for this financial year.
- Refresh the young carers website.

4. Financial information

There is a budget of £50k within the Early Help Young Carers service, this includes a 1 FTE permanent Early Help Practitioner and a budget of £10,000 per year to deliver a programme of support and consultation for your carers. An investment has been agreed to secure an additional 1FTE Support Worker from April 2024 and the Early Help service are looking to reprofile the staffing structure to include a Senior Practitioner to oversee Young Carers, along with providing specialist support around SEND to the Holiday Activity Food project (HAF) and the School Transition pilot.

Transport costs remain a concern, the service is looking at possible minibus driver training for staff to ensure attendance continues to increase at the group work provision.

5. Reducing Inequalities

Effective and timely support to young carers is essential to not just avoid poor outcomes but to have ambition and thrive, work continues to support schools and health services in identifying, as early as possible a child or young person who maybe carrying our caring roles and responsibilities, to reduce a range of issues including poor educational attainment, isolation and bullying, further work is planned with adult social care to consider the wider impact on child and young people when an adult carers assessment is made along with a focus on transition support from being a young care into becoming an adult carer.

6. Decide

The All-Age Carers Steering Group has set out key priorities for 2024/25, as detailed in the report based on the needs of and feedback from our young carers. Whilst there is no decision for scrutiny to be made around the priorities, scrutiny is asked to support the direction of travel and endorse the achievements made so far.

7. Respond

The Early Help Young Carers Service and key partners are responding to the needs of young carers, the Early Help Steering group oversees the delivery of the action plan and will oversee the young carers specific actions within the carers strategy due to be launched April 2024. The Early Help Steering Group will have a standard agenda item for update reports to be taken twice a year with an annual review planned September of each year. Achieving and evidencing the outcomes secured for young carers continues to be a priority along with further identifying children and young people who carry out caring roles and responsibilities and who should be supported as a young carer.

8. Review

A review report to scrutiny could be scheduled if further assurances are required.

Author

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Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Recommendation Tracker 2023/24

Committee Meeting Date	Agenda Item	Action/Recommendation	Officer responsible	Status	Target Completion Date	Notes
27 June 2023	Areas of Focus	A work programme for the municipal year be produced and be circulated to members of the Committee.	Clerk	Complete	28th September 2023	A work programme for the municipal year be produced and be agreed by the Committee at the next meeting.
26 September 2023	Youth Justice	An agenda item on violence (youth justice) be scheduled for a future committee, with an invitation extended to partners	Phil Rutherford	In progress	April 2024	Scheduled for 11 March 2023.
26 th September 2023	Areas of Focus	The following items be added to the Committee work programme: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children with disabilities. • An update on children's services 	Clerk	In progress	April 2024	Added to the areas of focus.
2 November 2023	Draft Revenue Budget and Draft Capital Programme 2024/25 – 2027/28	Feedback from the CS OSC on the draft revenue budget and draft capital programme be provided to Cabinet on 13 th December.	Clerk/Chair	Complete	December 2023	Report send to Cabinet on 13 th December 2024. Further report to be considered by CS OSC on 29.1.24.

Children's Services OSC Areas of Focus 2023/24

Committee date	26 September	2 November	7 December	29 January	11 March	16 April
Report Deadline	15 September	24 October	28 November	18 January	29 February	5 April
Budget setting process		X				
Q2 financial monitoring		X				
Family/Locality Hubs			X			
Early Help Strategy			X			
Social Worker recruitment and retention				X		
Private Fostering				X		
Youth Justice priorities and disproportionately	X					
Youth Justice Partnership – reduction of Youth violence (partnership invite)					X	
Children at Risk Exploitation						X
Safeguarding Annual Report 2022/23			X			
Intra familial abuse strategy						X
Young Carers				X		
Children with disabilities					x	



FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS

**Council House,
Lichfield Street,
Walsall, WS1 1TW**
www.walsall.gov.uk

4 DECEMBER 2023

FORWARD PLAN

The forward plan sets out decisions that are termed as “key decisions” at least 28 calendar days before they are due to be taken by the Executive (Cabinet). Also included on the plan are other decisions to be taken by the Cabinet (“non-key decisions”). Preparation of the forward plan helps the Council to programme its work. The purpose of the forward plan is to give plenty of notice and an opportunity for consultation on the issues to be discussed. The plan is updated each month with the period of the plan being rolled forward by one month and republished. Copies of the plan can be obtained from Democratic Services, Walsall MBC, Council House, Walsall, WS1 1TW craig.goodall@walsall.gov.uk and can also be accessed from the Council’s website at www.walsall.gov.uk. The Cabinet is allowed to make urgent decisions which do not appear in the forward plan, however, a notice will be included on the agenda for the relevant Cabinet meeting which explains the reasons why.

Please note that the decision dates are indicative and are subject to change. Please contact the above addressee if you wish to check the date for a particular item.

The Cabinet agenda and reports are available for inspection by the public 7 days prior to the meeting of the Cabinet on the Council’s website. Background papers are listed on each report submitted to the Cabinet and members of the public are entitled to see these documents unless they are confidential. The report also contains the name and telephone number of a contact officer. These details can also be found in the forward plan.

Meetings of the Cabinet are open to the public. Occasionally there are items included on the agenda which are confidential and for those items the public will be asked to leave the meeting. The forward plan will show where this is intended and the reason why the reports are confidential. Enquiries regarding these reasons should be directed to Democratic Services (craig.goodall@walsall.gov.uk).

“Key decisions” are those decisions which have a significant effect within the community or which involve considerable expenditure or savings. With regard to key decisions the Council’s Constitution states:

- (1) A key decision is:
 - (i) any decision in relation to an executive function which results in the Council incurring expenditure which is, or the making of savings which are, significant, having regard to the Council’s budget for the service or function to which the decision relates or
 - (ii) any decision that is likely to have significant impact on two or more wards within the borough.
- (2) The threshold for “significant” expenditure/savings is £500,000.
- (3) A decision taker may only make a key decision in accordance with the requirements of the Executive Procedure Rules set out in Part 4 of this Constitution.

**FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS
JANUARY 2024 TO APRIL 2024 (04.12.2023)**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Reference No./ Date first entered in Plan	Decision to be considered (to provide adequate details for those both in and outside the Council)	Decision maker	Background papers (if any) and Contact Officer	Main consultees	Contact Member (All Members can be written to at Civic Centre, Walsall)	Date item to be considered
37/23 (7.8.23)	<p>Draft Revenue Budget and Draft Capital Programme 2024/25 to 2027/28 – Update:</p> <p>To provide an updated medium term financial outlook, draft revenue budget and capital programme for 2024/25 to 2027/28, including update to savings proposals, impact of Autumn Statement, and progress on budget consultation to date including feedback from Overview and Scrutiny Committees on the draft revenue and capital budget.</p>	Cabinet Non-key Decision	Vicky Buckley Vicky.Buckley@walsall.gov.uk	Council tax payers, business rate payers, voluntary and community organisations. Internal services	Cllr Bird	13 December 2023
64/23 (4.12.23)	<p>Internal Audit Contract Award:</p> <p>To award a contract for the provision of an Internal Audit Service</p> <p><i>This will be a private session report containing exempt information.</i></p>	Cabinet Key Decision	Vicky Buckley Vicky.Buckley@walsall.gov.uk	Internal services	Cllr Bird	13 December 2023
63/23 (04.12.23)	<p>LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Progress Review:</p>	Cabinet	Elizabeth Connolly Page 42 of 50	Internal Services	Cllr Bird	13 December 2023

	To note the Local Government Association's final Progress Review Report and their observations following the Corporate Peer Challenge revisit in October 2023	Non-key decision	Elizabeth.Connolly@walsall.gov.uk			
55/23 (6.11.23)	Walsall Borough Local Plan - Call for Sites: To agree authorisation for the Council to publicise and implement a Call for Sites exercise for the Walsall Borough Local Plan.	Cabinet Key Decision	David Holloway David.Holloway@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr Andrew	13 December 2023
56/23 (6.11.23)	Walsall Youth Justice Service Strategic Plan 2022-2025: To note and forward to Council for approval the Walsall Youth Justice Service Strategic Plan 2022-2025.	Cabinet Key Decision	Phil Rutherford Philip.Rutherford@walsall.gov.uk	Internal services YJS Partnership Board	Cllr Elson	13 December 2023
38/23 (7.8.23)	Treasury Management Mid Year Position Statement 2023/24: To note and forward to Council, for consideration and noting (and in line with the requirements of the Treasury Management Code of Practice (2017), the mid year report for treasury management activities 2023/24 including prudential and local indicators.	Council Non-key Decision	Treasury Management Code of Practice. Richard Walley Richard.Walley@walsall.gov.uk	Internal services	Cllr Ferguson	13 December 2023
36/23 (7.8.23)	Healthy Eating for Children and Young People Programme: To seek approval to procure a new healthy eating and weight	Cabinet Key Decision	Esther Higdon Esther.Higdon@walsall.gov.uk Page 43 of 50	Internal Services Walsall Healthcare Trust	Cllr Flint	13 December 2023

	management programme for children and young people in Walsall. <i>This will include a private session report containing exempt information.</i>					
61/23 (6.11.23)	Walsall Tobacco Control Plan 2023-2027: To approve the Tobacco Control Plan.	Cabinet Key Decision	Joe Holding Joe.Holding@walsall.gov.uk	Internal services SWPB	Cllr Flint	13 December 2023
62/23 (06.11.23)	Adult Social Care Contributions Policy: To approve the continuation of an Adult Social Care Contributions Policy rather than a Charging Policy which encompasses a number of charging areas under the Care Act. The Contributions Policy will detail the framework as to how customers will be assessed for their adult social care contributions. The policy will however cover both residential and community assessments. The current policy is community assessments only.	Cabinet Key Decision	Kerrie Allward Kerrie.Allward@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr Pedley	13 December 2023
50/23 (2.10.23)	Corporate Financial Performance 2023/24: To report the financial position based on 9 months to December 2023.	Cabinet Non-key Decision	Vicky Buckley Vicky.Buckley@walsall.gov.uk	Corporate Management Team and Internal Services	Cllr Bird	7 February 2024
51/23 (2.10.23)	Corporate Budget Plan 2024/25 – 2027/28, incorporating the Capital Strategy and the Treasury Management and investment Strategy 2024/25:	Cabinet Council Key Decision	Vicky Buckley Vicky.Buckley@walsall.gov.uk Page 44 of 50	Council tax payers, business rate payers, voluntary and community organisations,	Cllr Bird	7 February 2024 (Council: 22 February 2024)

	To recommend the final budget and council tax for approval by Council.			Corporate Management Team and Internal Services		
52/23 (2.10.23)	Council Plan 2022/25 – Q2 23/24: To note the Quarter 2 2023/24 (outturn) performance against the Markers of Success in the Council Plan 2022/25.	Cabinet Non-key Decision	Elizabeth Connolly Elizabeth.Connolly@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr Bird	7 February 2024
57/23 (6.11.23)	Walsall Net-Zero 2041 Climate Strategy: To approve the Walsall Net-Zero 2041 Strategy.	Cabinet Key Decision	Katie Moreton Kathryn.Moreton@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr Flint	7 February 2024
39/23 (7.8.23)	Strategic Leisure Review: To update on the performance and impact of the four leisure facilities. To approve recommendations around the current and future facility stock.	Cabinet Key Decision	Stuart Webb Stuart.Webb@walsall.gov.uk	Internal services	Cllr Flint	7 February 2024
65/23 (4.12.23)	Materials Contract Awards: To award off-take and processing contracts for multiple recyclable materials.	Cabinet Key Decision	Katie Moreton Kathryn.Moreton@walsall.gov.uk Alan Bowley Alan.Bowley@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr Murphy	7 February 2024
54/23 (2.10.23)	Adult Social Care Commissioning Strategy 2023 – 2026:	Cabinet Key Decision	Nigel Imber – Nigel.Imber@Walsall.Gov.uk Page 45 of 50	Internal consultees Local and regional partners	Cllr Pedley	7 February 2024

	To approve an interim commissioning strategy.					
60/23 (6.11.23)	<p>Community Grant – Bloxwich Community Partnership:</p> <p>To agree funding and leasing arrangements in relation to Palace Play, Shop and Eat Blakenall Row, Walsall WS3 1LW</p>	Cabinet Key Decision	<p>Sarah Oakley</p> <p>Sarah.Oakley@walsall.gov.uk</p>	Bloxwich Community Partnership	Cllr Perry	7 February 2024
53/23 (2.10.23)	<p>Determination of the Scheme for coordinated admissions, and the Admission Arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled Primary Schools for the 2025/26 academic year:</p> <p>To determine the scheme of admissions and admission arrangements for community and voluntary-controlled primary schools for 2025-26.</p>	Cabinet Key Decision	<p>Alex Groom</p> <p>Alex.Groom@walsall.gov.uk</p>	<p>Internal consultees</p> <p>Public</p> <p>Local Authorities</p> <p>Schools</p> <p>Faith Groups</p>	Cllr M. Statham	7 February 2024
14/23 (6.2.23)	<p>Growth Funding for Schools:</p> <p>To enable the Local Authority to fulfil its duty to secure sufficient primary and secondary school places, through the adoption of a policy for the application of revenue funding for school growth.</p>	Cabinet Key Decision	<p>Alex Groom</p> <p>Alex.Groom@walsall.gov.uk</p>	Internal services, Schools Forum	Cllr M. Statham	7 February 2024

46/23 (4.9.23)	SEN Place Requirement: To approve finance for additional special educational needs school places.	Cabinet Key Decision	Alex Groom Alex.Groom@walsall.gov.uk	Internal services	Cllr M. Statham	7 February 2024
58/23 (6.11.23)	High Needs Funding Formula 2024/25: To approve changes to the High Needs Funding Formula, as agreed by Schools Forum, to be used for the allocation of Dedicated Schools Grant – High Needs Block to schools in Walsall for the 2024/25 financial year.	Cabinet Key Decision	Richard Walley Richard.Walley@walsall.gov.uk	Schools Forum Internal Services	Cllr M. Statham	20 March 2024
59/23 (6.11.23)	Early Years Funding Formula 2024/25: To Cabinet approve the Early Years Funding Formula, as agreed by Schools Forum, to be used as the allocation of funding to early years providers in Walsall.	Cabinet Key Decision	Richard Walley Richard.Walley@walsall.gov.uk	Schools Forum Internal Services	Cllr M. Statham	20 March 2024
66/23 (4.12.23)	Waste Management Strategy Update - Fryers Road Household Waste Recycling Centre redevelopment (HWRC): That Cabinet approve the pre-tender budget for the redevelopment of a larger Fryers Road HWRC and agree to use the Pagabo framework (design and build stages) for the procurement of Fryers Road HWRC.	Cabinet Key Decision	Katie Moreton Kathryn.Moreton@walsall.gov.uk Stephen Johnson Stephen.Johnson@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr Andrew Cllr Murphy	17 April 2024

67/23 (4.12.23)	Council Plan 2022/25 – Q3 23/24: To note the Quarter 3 2023/24 (outturn) performance against the Markers of Success in the Council Plan 2022/25	Cabinet Non-key Decision	Elizabeth Connolly elizabeth.connolly@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr Bird	17 April 2024
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Black Country Executive Joint Committee Forward Plan of Key Decisions

Published up to May 2024

Date Created	Key Decision	Contact Officer	Main consultee	Date of meeting
	Black Country Executive Joint Committee Governance			
04/09/2023	<p>Change Control and Delegated Authority</p> <p>Approval of BCJC Delegated Authority to the Single Accountable Body Section 151 Officer (SAB s151 officer) and approval of the revised Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership (BCLEP) Assurance Framework Change Control and Delegated Authority delegations, as detailed in the attachment of the report (BCLEP Assurance Framework Appendix 23).</p>	<p>David Moore David.Moore@walsall.gov.uk</p> <p>Mark Lavender Mark.Lavender@walsall.gov.uk</p>	Walsall Council	24/01/2024
	Land and Property Investment Fund			
04/12/2023	<p>Dudley Brownfield Land Programme</p> <p>Approval of the withdrawal of the Dudley Brownfield Land Programme project (Dudley Council) from within the Land and Property Investment Fund Programme.</p>	<p>Helen Martin Helen.Martin@dudley.gov.uk</p>	Dudley Council	24/01/2024

Date Created	Key Decision	Contact Officer	Main consultee	Date of meeting
04/12/2023	<p>Loxdale Residential Scheme</p> <p>Approval for the Accountable Body for the Land and Property Investment fund (Walsall Council) to proceed to enter into a Grant Agreement with Wolverhampton City Council to deliver the Land and Property Investment fund funded elements of the Loxdale Residential Scheme project with delivery to commence in the 2023/24 financial year.</p>	<p>Richard Lawrence Richard.Lawrence@wolverhampton.gov.uk</p>	<p>Wolverhampton City Council</p>	<p>24/01/2024</p>
04/12/2023	<p>Programme Management Costs</p> <p>Approval of the balance of Land and Property Investment Fund funds to be allocated to Accountable Body (Walsall Council) programme management costs, to cover additional due diligence and contracting costs associated with the replacement of a project.</p>	<p>David Moore David.Moore@walsall.gov.uk</p> <p>Mark Lavender Mark.Lavender@walsall.gov.uk</p>	<p>Walsall Council</p>	<p>24/01/2024</p>