

CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

MONDAY 26 NOVEMBER, 2012 AT 6.00 P.M. AT THE COUNCIL HOUSE

Panel Members Present	Councillor R. Martin (Vice Chair in the Chair) Councillor D. Shires Councillor T. Jukes Councillor R. Thomas Councillor E. Hughes Councillor G. Perry
Non elected voting members present	S. Rayner (Lichfield Diocesan Education)
Non elected non-voting members present	R. Bragger (Primary Teacher representative) P. Dunn (Secondary Teacher representative)
Portfolio holder present	Councillor R. Andrew - Children's Services
Officers Present	Rose Collinson - Interim Executive Director, Children's Services; Louise Hughes - Assistant Director, Preventative and Targeted Services; Sue Butcher - Interim Assistant Director, Children's Services Denise Falconbridge - Managing Director, Serco Shannon Moore - Head of Improvement Services, Serco Dan Mortiboys – Senior Finance Manager (Head of Schools Finance) Neil Picken – Senior Committee Business and Governance Manager
Also Present	Chris Spencer – Independent Children's Improvement Board Chair

245/12 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor B. Cassidy.

246/12 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

247/12 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

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

248/12 MINUTES

The Chair referred Members to a document which had been tabled detailing a number of proposed amendments to the minutes of the meeting held on 30 October, 2012.

Members were afforded a few minutes to consider the proposed amendments.

Following consideration of the amendments it was:-

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 30 August, 2012, be approved as a true and accurate record subject to the inclusion of the following amendments:-

Minute	Proposed Amendment
235/12	<p>Insert after the first sentence:-</p> <p>‘The Chair welcomed Mike Lee who was previously Chair of Walsall Association of Governors’</p>
236/12	<p>Insert after the final bullet point:-</p> <p>The chair expressed concern in relation to borough-wide attainment levels. She stated that, although some schools were improving rapidly, there were those which had experienced significant falls this year. Resulting discussion further highlighted these concerns as well as the need for transparency and the usage of plain English when reporting statistical information. Phrases such as "In relation to Key Stage 5758 PcC" are meaningless to members and the public.</p> <p>A number of members asked what sanctions The Dfe are able to impose on those schools who fail to meet the Secretary of State's "floor" of 40% at KS4, including English and Maths. Officers confirmed that they were already in the process of finding out.</p>
237/12	<p>Add to the final bullet point:-</p> <p>Members asked how many parents were enrolled on the mellow parenting scheme. Officers agreed to provide this information.</p>
237/12	<p>Insert after the final bullet point:-</p> <p>Following the presentation, Members challenged why, despite all the work that had been undertaken, Walsall remained in the bottom quartile.</p>
240/12	<p>Insert after the final bullet point:-</p>

	The Chair asked the Interim Executive Director (Children’s Services) so that members were in no doubt, if she felt that she had unearthed and understood all the problems facing Walsall in relation to safeguarding practice. In response, the Interim Executive Director stated that she felt that she was making good progress in terms of getting to the bottom of the pile of issues. The Chair asked her to outline an instance where a relatively simple solution was available to a problem which had been present for some time. The Interim Executive Director responded by highlighting the problems around small social work teams. Such teams were suddenly at a disadvantage if a member of staff became sick and had to take time off or was on leave. This resulted in the use of agency staff. A solution would be to increase the size of the teams making them more resilient to absence.
242/12	Insert after the first sentence:- The chair resolved to ask members to consider items and questions for future meetings.

249/12 **SAFEGUARDING AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN SERVICES**

The Chair welcomed Chris Spencer, Independent Chair of the Walsall Children’s Improvement Board (WCIB) to the meeting. All present then introduced themselves.

The Chair of the WCIB provided details as to why the WCIB had been introduced within Walsall; a brief account of his experience and expertise and an outline of how the WCIB would work with the Council to improve safeguarding within Walsall. Specifically, it was stated that the Government’s Improvement Notice was expected to be in place for 18 months, subject to the required progress being made by the Council and its partners. During this period, the WCIB would continually support and challenge the Council and its partners to ensure that requirements were met and outcomes improved. This included Scrutiny and how well it operates within the Council.

During the ensuing discussion, the Chair of the WCIB suggested that the Panel may wish to consider both the Improvement Notice issued by The Dfe and the Improvement Plan, once finalised by the Interim Executive Director (Children’s Services). Members duly noted this and requested that the Improvement Plan be added to the Work Programme. The Interim Director (Children’s Services) advised that the Improvement Notice had recently been published and was appended to item 7 within the Agenda and confirmed that she was happy to bring the Improvement Plan to the meeting in future.

Members noted that the Chair of the WCIB was geographically disparate with a range of work pressures across the Country, including Chairing the CIB at Sandwell. Assurances were sought that he would be able to focus on the challenges facing Walsall. In response, The Chair of the WCIB stated that he would not have taken on the role if he was not certain that he could achieve the necessary results. He confirmed that he had a base in Gloucestershire and London and commuting was not an issue. He also offered to attend a future meeting to provide a presentation on the role of

Scrutiny, from his perspective on how the Panel could challenge progress with the improvement plan, at the next meeting. Members agreed that this would be useful and should include an update on the work of the WCIB. It was requested that this item be added to the Work Programme.

Discussion followed in relation to the role of Partners within the WCIB. The Chair of the WCIB advised that a number of influential people from partner agencies sat on the Board within Walsall which would assist with decisions and delivery of the improvement plan. It was stated that it was early in the process although Members were assured that, as Chair, he would do his utmost to ensure all Partners delivered results which are in line with The Department's expectations.

In relation to a question regarding scrutiny of Partners it was explained that whilst the Council were predominantly responsible for the failings, effective partnership working and a multi-agency response were crucial for success. It was emphasized that Partners play a vital role in assisting the Council in delivering the improvement plan. A new inspection framework was expected in June 2013 which would look at Partners and the Council equally. Before the Improvement Notice could be lifted a further inspection would be carried out which would be under the new Framework.

The Chair sought clarity as to lines of responsibility. The Chair of the WCIB stated that he was required to submit a 6 monthly report to the Parliamentary under Secretary of State for Children and Families to include specific commentary against the targets as set out in the Improvement Notice. The Interim Director (Children's Services) was responsible for delivery.

Resolved

- 1) That the Children's Improvement Plan be added to the Work Programme;
- 2) That the Chair of the Children's Improvement Board be invited to the meeting of the Panel to be held on 8 January, 2013 to provide a presentation on:-
 - The role of Scrutiny in delivering improvements and monitoring progress of the Improvement Plan;
 - The latest position with the work of the Children's Improvement Board.

250/12 SAFEGUARDING AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN SERVICES – IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) presented a report [annexed] which updated the Panel on post Ofsted improvement priorities and activity.

Members were advised that the Improvement Notice had been published and was annexed to the report for Members to consider.

The Improvement Notice focussed around three themes:-

- Quality and effectiveness of frontline practice;
- Capacity, capability and culture; and;
- Improving the quality of partnership and governance

Discussion ensued on the role of Scrutiny in relation to governance. The Independent Chair of the WCIB asked Members how they could be sure that the Improvement Notice was being delivered. Members stated that in the past Scrutiny may not have been as searching as it could have been however the Panel were, at that time, reliant on information submitted. The Panel had evolved and was now more proactive and challenging in its approach. The Chair of the WCIB stated that it was important to scratch the surface and suggested that the data sets, as submitted to the WCIB, could also be considered by the Scrutiny Panel. The Interim Director (Children's Services) agreed to submit the data sets for consideration and also encouraged Members to 'walk the floor' and meet staff.

A Member suggested that future update reports on The Improvement Plan reflect the three themes of the Improvement Notice, supplemented by data such as the data set submitted to the CIB. The interim Executive Director (Children's Services) agreed to reflect the Panels wishes. This would enable the Panel to identify any specific areas which may warrant further consideration and investigation.

A member of the Panel stated that whilst statistics were important it was critical that discussions take place to understand them fully at each meeting. Clarity was then sought on the relationship between the Improvement Board and Safeguarding Board. The Interim Director (Children's Services) explained that the Safeguarding Board had not been as effective as it could have been. The aim is that, over time, the Children's safeguarding board will be a robust partnership able to hold partners to account and capable of taking over the current role of the Walsall Improvement Board. A new chair was due to be appointed within a few days of the Panel's meeting. Existing Members of the Board were also undertaking away afternoons to develop an annual business plan. It was suggested that the Chair, once appointed, should be requested to attend the Scrutiny Panel at least twice a year.

Responsibilities of the Safeguarding Board include:-

- Holding Partners to account, including the Council;
- Set priorities for Children's Safeguarding;
- Identify what is working well and what isn't;
- Monitor changes to ratings;
- Challenging each other at meetings.

In relation to the WCIB it was explained that as the Safeguarding Board becomes more effective, involvement for the WCIB would decrease, until such time that it was no longer required as adequate systems were in place.

The Chair asked what the root cause of the failure had been to which the Chair of the WCIB responded. It was explained that Walsall had achieved well over a number of years when inspected and so it was of some surprise that the results were poor on this occasion. The bar had been raised significantly and it may have been that there was an element of complacency as this had not been recognised and acted upon. Subsequently the bar has been raised even higher and to his knowledge, 6 out of 12 inspections at the new level had resulted in an inadequate judgement whilst the majority of the remaining 6 were listed as adequate.

The Chair then asked whether the Council had the capability and capacity to improve. It was stated that the Panel should ask for trend analysis, along with a narrative so that Members could monitor the rate of improvement.

The Interim Director (Children's Services) stated a social work health check was being undertaken to take a 'temperature check' to assess the current workforce. The Interim Assistant Director (Children's Services) advised that the size of social worker teams were being considered to ensure better cover was provided in times of absence. Staff had been consulted as they were on the frontline and they were very candid about their views and what they felt could be improved. Initial feedback suggested that staff were beginning to feel as though they were being listened to. The opportunity for Members to visit staff was re-iterated and Members were asked to contact the Interim Assistant Director (Children's Services). Members suggested that once the social worker health check had been completed that it should be considered by the Panel.

In closing, the Chair of the WCIB stated that he was confident with new leadership in place however practice was patchy and a proper supervision policy needed to be implemented as this was a key area where experiences of staff varied.

Members were asked to consider future reports for submission to the Panel and advise the Chair directly to ensure that the work programme could be updated.

Resolved

- 1) That future update reports on the Improvement Plan focus around the three themes:-
 - Quality and effectiveness of frontline practice;
 - Capacity, capability and culture; and;
 - Improving the quality of partnership and governance
- 2) That the Chair of the Safeguarding Board, once appointed, be requested to attend the Scrutiny Panel at least twice during the municipal year;
- 3) That once the Social Work health check had been completed that it should be considered by the Panel;

251/12 FINANCIAL MONITORING: 2013/14 BUDGET CONSULTATION

Members considered a report [annexed] outlining the portfolio plans for future service delivery, along with the approach being taken to delivering service improvements and cost efficiency for the Children's Services portfolio.

Concern was expressed that there was a -90k operational saving in relation to Corporate Parenting within the proposed budget. It was noted that this related to under spend, however, it was asked why the money had not been spent in such a critical area. In response, it was stated that until the Improvement Plan was completed the level of resource required was unclear. Once the Improvement Plan had been agreed a report would be submitted to Council setting out the level of resource required.

It was requested that feedback from public consultation be considered at the Panels meeting in January, 2013.

Further concern was expressed in relation to the policy saving of -£254k in relation to Integrated Young Peoples Support Services. It was suggested that any reduction in spend could impact heavily upon schools' existing resources and social exclusion. The Portfolio Holder for Children's Services explained that a more strategic approach would be adopted with provision across the board being reviewed. Walsall Council would work with providers to offer the best service whilst targeting support where it was most needed.

The Assistant Director (Preventative & Targeted Services) advised that there had been a shift away from youth to integrated young people's services. Attention had moved away from universal services to targeting resource to reach the vulnerable and most at risk. Positive relationships existed with schools and a joined up, co-ordinated approach was required. Officers were also meeting with Prospects, the provider commissioned to operate the service, whom appeared willing to identify efficiencies and adopt new ways of working.

Whilst accepting the explanation a Member of the Panel stated that he remained concerned that reconfiguring the service may result in further intervention. It was stressed that prevention was better than intervention therefore was of the utmost importance that this service operated effectively.

Resolved

- 1) That feedback from public consultation on the budget in relation to services within the remit of the Panel be considered at the meeting scheduled to be held on 8 January, 2013;
- 2) That the report be noted.

252/12 FINANCIAL MONITORING: QUARTER 2 UPDATE

The Panel received a report [annexed] which summarised the predicted revenue and capital outturn position for 2012/13 based on the performance of quarter 2 (to end of September, 2012) for services within the remit of the Panel.

Members noted that the use of agency staff had had a detrimental effect upon the budget and sought clarity as to why they were required. In response, the Interim Director advised that they were looking for an overall reduction in the use of agency staff however there would always be a need for some provision, as was the case within schools. That said, the council was committed to growing its own talent and would seek to reduce the number of agency staff, safely in future.

Resolved

That the 2012/13 forecasted year end financial position for services under the remit of the Children's and Young Peoples Scrutiny and Performance Panel be noted.

253/12 SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT SUPPORTING STRATEGY FOR INTERVENTION IN UNDERPERFORMING SCHOOLS

The Panel received a presentation [annexed] on the School Improvement Supporting Strategy.

Of key importance to the work of Improvement Services was the collection of school improvement data. This information enabled improvement services to predict which schools may be at risk of inspection and prepare. Members were advised that this had been accurate to date.

The improvement service also offered support to schools to help them make changes as required. Heads of successful schools were also at hand to provide advice and guidance. Though a lot of support was available it was important that the support package to schools was tailored as sometimes too much support could be overwhelming.

Members questioned what would happen in the event that a sponsored academy went into a category as a result of poor performance. It was explained that in such an instance it may be that a new sponsor would be required. Once a school had become an academy there was no option to change. In addition, a member commented that in their experience, sponsors did not bring additional capacity to a school. It was their view that support was less than when the school was run by the Local Authority.

Discussion followed on the age profile and quality of Headteachers. It was stated that schools success was dependant on the quality of management and leadership. Members were advised that ways to encourage progression were being explored, especially the transition from middle management to senior management.

Resolved

The presentation be noted.

254/12 WORK PROGRAMME 2012/13 AND FORWARD PLAN

The Panel considered the work programme and Cabinet's Forward Plan

Resolved

- 1) That the following items be added to the work programme:-
 - Feedback from public consultation on the budget in relation to services within the remit of the Panel (8 January, 2013);
 - Social Worker Health Check (8 January, 2013);
 - Chair of the Children's Improvement Board – Presentation to the panel (8 January, 2013);
 - Children's Improvement Plan (when published);
- 2) That the Forward Plan be noted.

256/12 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 provision of SEN transport and transfer of the Children's Centres to the Council. Further details were provided on Walsall's '*Sharing Practice*' developments which had been devised with head teachers.

Resolved

That the update be noted

257/12 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chair informed Members that the date of the next meeting would be 8 January 2013 at 6.00 pm.

The meeting terminated at 8.00 pm.

Chair:

Date: