

Audit Committee – 25 February 2013

Children's Services Safeguarding Children Improvement Progress

1. Summary of report:

- 1.1 This report provides the Committee with an update on progress since the publication of the Ofsted Safeguarding and Looked After Children inspection report in July 2012 and the Improvement Notice publication to the Council in November 2012.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 To note the progress and direction of travel against the strategic improvement priorities.



**Rose Collinson – interim Director (Children's Services)
1 February 2013**

3 Background

- 3.1 The Ofsted inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children took place at the end of June 2012. The subsequent report, published in July, judged services in Walsall to be inadequate. An Improvement Notice was issued to the Council in November 2012. An independently chaired Improvement Board was established in September and is meeting monthly to assess progress against the strategic Improvement Plan priorities. Councillor Chambers, a member of the Audit Committee, is a member of the Improvement Board.
- 3.2 Since September the interim Director of Children's Services, together with the Assistant Director (from October) of Specialist Services have focused on establishing the scale of the Children's Services improvement challenge. This has been achieved by following up the lines of enquiry from the July Ofsted report on Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services in Walsall, triangulating these with analysis of current data, and practitioner and service users' views.
- 3.3 Key principles which have been shared widely to inform the way of working with staff and partners are to:
- prioritise rigorously and act strategically
 - collaborate effectively and motivate more
 - invest productively and maximise resources
 - learn constantly

- 3.4 Overall, the ambition for children and young people across Walsall was not clearly understood or embedded, and was not driving activity or impacting on improved outcomes for children. The summary headline baseline position was reported to all members at Council on 7 January 2013.
- 3.5 From the baseline position, emerging improvement themes have been shared with staff and partners and have gained consensus around the need for radical changes designed to secure sustainable change. The most important priorities are set out below:
- planned and purposeful direct work with families – focused on quality, impact and change.
 - building quality into process and measurement
 - management oversight, analysis and challenge: across plans, practice and competencies, expectations and supervision
 - robust and productive partnerships for children
 - identification and management of risk of harm to children – focused on how, who and when does its significance change
 - safe early help practice, in front of the door as well as behind
 - seeing children and hearing from them and the needs of their parent
 - improved interfaces within and across children's services and with adult social care, drug, alcohol and domestic abuse services, the police and health sector.

4. Current Position

- 4.1 Council members received a report providing an update on progress since the publication of the Ofsted report and the subsequent Improvement Notice. The Director of Children's Services provides a monthly report to the Improvement Board setting out summary of progress and impact against the three themes:
- Capacity, capability and culture
 - Improving the quality and partnerships and governance
 - Quality and effectiveness of frontline practice
- 4.2 The report evidences notable improvements, key priority areas for the next period and risks to delivery. The Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel receive a progress and impact report on safeguarding at each of their meetings. The sections below update members on progress and impact since the January full Council report.

5. Capacity, capability and culture

- 5.1 Vision and ambition for children's services:
The email briefings from both the interim Director and Assistant Director reinforced the principles, values and ambition for Children's Services and articulated the leadership behaviours needed to demonstrate in practice to make sure these translate into actions and good outcomes for children and young people.

These have been followed up in face to face conversations with partners, Headteachers and Chair of Governors briefings, meetings and staff engagement sessions which took place on 16 and 18 January.

5.2 Sector Led support

The Children with Disabilities peer challenge is scoped and will take place in February. The team from Gloucestershire includes Alison Cathles, Commissioning and Strategy Manager, SEND; Sarah Hylton, Service Manager with countywide lead for disabled children and young people and Deborah Livingstone, a Parent Participation Officer.

The team will review and report on the quality and effectiveness of current operational practice in relation to:

- early help for children with disabilities
- systems and processes
- quality assurance mechanisms
- supervision and CPD
- management oversight

as well as provide a critique of the strategic focus and direction towards a responsive needs based and outcomes focused service for disabled children and families in Walsall.

5.3 C4EO (the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services) has been commissioned to provide support in areas relating to performance, quality assurance, complaints and Early Help.

Progress is reported to the Improvement Board within the Improvement Plan but an overview on progress so far on each assignment is set out below:

❖ **Performance Data**

- performance and data – the diagnostic review which took place in November and December is now complete. The executive summary and full report have been discussed by the Improvement Board. These set out findings and recommended areas for development, grouped under four outcome headings and set in the context of the key elements of a successful data and performance framework:
 - data recording/input
 - data aggregating
 - data reporting and
 - data use by senior managers/Boards and partnerships.

The outcomes:

- systems and processes that work – a children's social care client record management system that supports practice and assists in workflow and practitioner recording time
- intelligence is available and assessed appropriately – relevant, timely information produced systematically in an intelligible manner

- all staff and managers know what is required of them in performance management and use of data to support decision making and they have the skills and capacity to undertake requirements
- the authority is able to undertake robust self-assessment and evidence appropriate use of data and other evidence to measure impact, commission, evaluate and improve services.

A Performance Clinic took place with Children's Services senior managers on 15 January in order to:

- feed back the findings and recommendations from the diagnostic assessment
- promote the culture change and leadership behaviours required to champion change and embed improvements to deliver better outcomes for children
- agree ownership and responsibility and sequencing of actions in the delivery plan.

Additional capacity to help support and challenge practice improvement in this area has also been sourced and commissioned. Sam Freeman started work in Walsall on 15 January.

- ❖ **Quality assurance and audit** - the detailed scope for this work has been developed by Anne Cole, the sector specialist to ensure that practice within and across specialist services is robust, consistent and promotes sustained and sustainable learning and follow up to embed remedial actions from audits. This work is designed both to improve frontline practice and pave the way for the wider quality assurance and audit improvements required across the children's partnership.
- ❖ **Early help** – the review of the strategy and services for Early Help has been scoped. Sue Sandford and Maria Greenwood are leading this work which is currently taking place. Sue has already provided some sector led support to children's centres across Walsall. The focus is on ensuring there is a strong strategic approach across the Borough, with clear referral pathways and measures which is championed and owned by the refreshed Children and Young People's Partnership.

- 5.4 The Children's Society has scoped and started work on capturing the voices and views of children and young people, particularly the most vulnerable.
- 5.5 Improvement programme management capacity has been increased with full time additional support being provided for programme management by Maxine Taylor and project oversight by Mandeep Bassi.
- 5.6 The findings of the social work health check survey (the full report has been discussed by the Board) have been analysed to inform the workforce development strategy, which will be brought to the Improvement Board in February. Insights from the social work health check, together with feedback from team meetings, visits and assessments, has informed the commissioning of

a change programme for team managers which started in January. The programme is for all team managers and is aimed at developing and promoting personal responsibility, accountability and empowerment to bring about change in order to improve the service. Managers who lead the service will also be included because of the importance of awareness, tools and techniques to enable effective support of the team leader group during and after the programme. The programme will focus on achieving a strong competent team manager group who are able to ensure:

- sound risk assessments
- consistent evidence of management oversight and good decision making on case work
- robust contribution to creating the culture of accountability.

The programme takes into account the 'Standards for Employers of Social Workers in England and Supervision Framework', the Munro Review of Child Protection and 'Working Together to Safeguard Children'; (the programme will incorporate any revisions to Working Together as appropriate).

Work is underway to define the requirements for a permanent appointment of a Principal Social Worker. In the interim this function is being supported in Walsall by consultancy arrangements. The Children's Improvement Board adviser has also been asked to source a sector led candidate and is actively following this up.

- 5.7 A Corporate Parenting and Safeguarding Training programme has been developed to enhance the quality and effectiveness of Corporate Parenting Arrangements and ensure members can fulfil their safeguarding responsibilities. The proposals are an agenda item at the next Corporate Parenting Board this month.
- 5.8 Work has been undertaken to ensure robust measures are in place to evidence improvements in the outcomes required in the Improvement Notice.

6. Improving the quality of partnership and governance

- 6.1 The handover from the previous Chair to the new independent Chair of the Walsall Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB) has taken place. The Chair gave a brief presentation to the January Board with a more detailed report to follow to the February Board meeting. The WSCB has a planning day on 13 February to agree delivery plans to discharge their responsibilities within the Improvement Plan.
- 6.2 The Children's Society are working with the WSCB and have scoped the stages of working together to improve our multi-agency response to issues relating to child sexual exploitation which will be available this month.
- 6.3 A facilitated workshop for members of the Walsall Children and Young People's Partnership took place on 15 January and agreed to initiate work to:

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

- 6.4 The Corporate Parenting Board met on 19 December. The Director of Children's Services now attends each meeting and provides an update on progress against the Improvement Plan priorities. The Board agreed the need for a comprehensive review of membership, structure and operation in order to best fulfil their responsibilities as corporate parents. The focus of the December meeting was the educational outcomes for looked after children in Walsall. As well as discussing a report from the Virtual School on activity, impact and progress on outcomes for children in care, the Board also reviewed recent correspondence ('Education – a toolkit for life: helping looked after children achieve their potential') from the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families.
- 6.5 Walsall was awarded the Care2Work Quality Mark in December for its commitment to improving the employability of care leavers. From Care2Work is a national project managed by Catch 22's national Care Advisory Service (NCAS) which aims to improve employability outcomes for young people leaving care by creating employability opportunities with national employers and sharing good practice between local authorities. The Quality Mark recognises those local authorities who demonstrate a commitment to improving employability and helping care leavers into the world of work.
- 6.6 Work has begun, championed by the Director of Neighbourhoods and the Director of Children's Services, to ensure better signposting and support for opportunities across the Council for work experience and work shadowing for children in care.
- 6.7 Members of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel have begun a programme of visits to Children's Services to meet with children and young people and the staff who work with them, and check out for themselves improvements and direction of travel.
- 6.8 Following the Borough Management Team discussion about partnership accountabilities, functions and inter-relationships, partnership working is ongoing. Recent examples include initial discussions with WHG about involvement with work on the Early Help framework, the voice and views of children and support for children with disabilities and their families, a planned follow up visit to the Manor Hospital by the Chief Executive and Director of Children's Services to discuss practice improvements, learn about good complaints handling practice

and address any strategic barriers, work on joint commissioning between Children's Services and Adult Social Care and a report on the agenda for the February Health and Wellbeing Board to ensure that the profile of children and young people's health and wellbeing within the health reform remains a high priority.

- 6.9 Protocols and practice regarding children missing from home, care or education was highlighted as a risk to the December Board. Work is now underway with the Police to clarify the scale and extent of the challenge. It will also take into account the recently published DfE statutory guidance on identifying children not receiving suitable education.

7. Quality and effectiveness of frontline practice

- 7.1 Work has been commissioned on evaluating the current operation of thresholds at different levels:

- for entry into the children's social care service via referrals, IAs and CP enquiries from outside sources
- internal thresholds - e.g. for 'step down' to preventative services, CP enquiries and so on
- for entry to the service for children with disabilities

The work will provide a snapshot evaluation of the current quality of front line practice, e.g. the involvement of children, quality of assessment analysis, effectiveness of care planning and use of current models of assessment of risk. This qualitative work will also reference current patterns of on-the ground partnership working. A summary report to the March Board will draw together the themes and make clear recommendations for the future.

- 7.2 The review of the social care 'front door' has identified issues with the team duty rota schedules which impedes effective working. Changes will now be implemented to the system.

- 7.3 Early Help – an overview of Early Help services and support has been drawn together to inform the needs analysis and the detailed scope to 'develop and implement a whole systems framework to manage families pathways from early help to statutory intervention'.

8. Notable improvements this period

- 8.1 Key improvements this period are:

- Successful sector led commissioning for improvement plan priorities
- Increased programme management capacity focus
- Action plan to improve data and performance management
- Safe service over the Christmas period

- The LAC youth group 'Respect' organised a successful Christmas party for children in care.

9. Key priority areas for next period

9.1 Capacity, capability and culture

9.1.1 The key priority areas in the next month are to:-

- implement the re-shaped performance framework.
- scope the review of the operation and structure of the Children and Young People Partnership and revisions to the Children and Young People's Plan.
- champion the vision and ambition for children across the partnership.
- propose a quality management framework for social worker responsibilities and workloads, setting out clear expectations, standards and entitlements.

9.2 Improving the quality of partnership and governance

9.2.1 Continue to grow and evidence emerging impact of learning from complaints on service improvement

9.2.2 Self assessment of WSCB strengths and gaps in relation to support, challenge and scrutiny of safeguarding activity.

9.3 Quality of effectiveness of frontline practice

9.3.1 Increased focus on the quality and effectiveness of social work practice, building on assessments/recommendations from internal and external review.

9.3.2 Scope the scale of improvement needed to the protocol and practice relating to children missing from home, care or education.

10. Risks to delivery

10.1 The risk register is reviewed on a monthly basis by the Improvement Board multi-agency operational group and new issues or risks requiring Improvement Board attention are highlighted here. The full risk register is available to all Improvement Board members on request.

10.2 Current risks brought to the notice of the Improvement Board are:

- Capacity and resourcing: difficulty in recruiting to key posts. An interim head of Service for Corporate Parenting and Leaving Care was interviewed and appointed in December but decided not to join Walsall in early January.

Mitigating action taken has been to review the scope of the role and secure strong internal capacity to fill the post. A permanent appointment will be made in the summer. The second set of interviews for the LADO was unsuccessful. Interim arrangements remain in place.

- Unison work to rule: Unison have notified Council that their members have voted to take action short of strike action, which is to work to rule from 7 January, across all council services. Mitigating action taken has been to ensure impact of this action is kept under continuous review so appropriate management action can be taken to keep services running safely.

11. Resource considerations

- 11.1 At this time work is still ongoing to determine the exact level of resource required to support the improvements required in order to manage the service effectively post inspection. Early estimates are that a further £200,000 would be required. This value is included in the budget plans that are currently being developed for 2013/14 and beyond.

21. Citizen impact

- 12.1 The details of progress made so far and further improvement required, as outlined in the report, will have a positive impact on improving the quality of provision and services for children and young people and their families in Walsall. Delivering the required improvements will ensure that the contribution made by local services involved in safeguarding young people and the quality of service provided for looked after children is effective and of a quality that ensures children and young people in Walsall are safe, happy, healthy and have a bright future.

13. Community safety

- 13.1 There are no community safety implications arising from this report.

14. Environmental impact

- 14.1 There are no environmental impact implications arising from this report.

15. Performance and risk management issues

- 15.1 Failure to adequately deliver sustained improvements to services and meet the requirements of the Improvement Notice risks the safety and protection of children and young people. The delivery of the objectives in the improvement plan will be risk assessed and mitigated as appropriate.
- 15.2 The Improvement Board monitor progress and impact on a monthly basis. This is in addition to developing service, partnership wide performance management and quality assurance arrangements. The Department for Education (DfE) will also assess and evaluate progress and impact on a 6 monthly basis. This will include written reports from the independent chair of the improvement board and from the Leader of the Council as well as other supporting evidence, including external review and inspection.

16. Equality implications

- 16.1 Working in partnership to ensure that children and young people are safe, cared for and protected is key to ensuring they are safe, happy, healthy and have a bright future as responsible productive citizens now and in the future. The improvements identified will address inequalities in current service delivery and protect the most vulnerable and at risk children. Service delivery will take into account the diverse communities we serve and support cultural diversity and children's sense of identity.
- 16.2 There are no equality implications as a result of this report.

17. Consultation

- 17.1 There is on-going engagement with partners at a strategic level at eh Improvement Board. One aspect of improvement is to ensure that other key partnership boards e.g. the Walsall Children's Safeguarding Board (WSCB) and the Children and Young People's Partnership Board (C&YPPB) are productive, mutually challenging and impact positively on better outcomes for children. This will also apply to the (currently shadow) Health and Wellbeing Board. At an operational level, a multi-agency group, chaired by the Assistant Director Specialist Services, representing all key partners, is championing implementation of the delivery plans to support improvements.
- 17.2 Staff briefings are now in place on a 6 weekly basis to ensure key messages are communicated and provide regular opportunities to capture feedback and learning from those delivering the services. Regular visits to teams and services provide additional opportunities for feedback and feed-forward as do email updates. Briefings are currently taking place within partner organisations.

Background papers

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

Improvement Notice – published November 2012.

Improvement Plan available.

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