

Council – 24 February 2011

Children's Services

Progress Report of Councillor R Andrew, Portfolio Holder

2010 has been both a demanding and successful year for children's services. We have faced a number of challenges including Ofsted inspections which have been frequent and robust. Demand for our services has been an impact of the economic recession. Balancing the need for investment in our children's future whilst managing significant budget reductions will continue to be a key challenge in the immediate years ahead. We will need to focus our attention on effective preventative measures and target resources to our most vulnerable groups to reduce demand on high cost acute services.

Specialist Services has continued to make significant progress over the last year.

This has been confirmed by a series of external inspections undertaken by Ofsted:-

- ❖ Walsall Adoption Service June 2010 – from 'satisfactory' to 'good'.
- ❖ Walsall Fostering Service August 2010 – from 'satisfactory' to 'good'.
- ❖ Walsall Private Fostering Service February 2011 – from 'unsatisfactory' to 'good'.
- ❖ A second unannounced inspection of safeguarding services December 2010 – no priority actions and our integrated approach to the assessment of domestic violence was cited as an area of strength.

Our 5 residential homes continue to be regularly inspected and 3 are categorised as 'outstanding' (2 of these for the second time), 1 is rated 'good' and 1 'satisfactory'.

The apprenticeship scheme for care leavers was recognised with a quality mark award by Ministers in February 2011.

Specialist Children's Services has one major capital project Eldon residential home which offers short breaks for severely disabled children. Planning permission has been gained for a new build on the Alumwell site. This will replace a building which is no longer fit for purpose with a more flexible building which will better meet the needs of these children including an outreach service able to care for children in their own homes where this is the preferred option. It will also enable partnership working with Healthtec planned at the same site.

The recent budget setting process proposes an investment of £2.1m additional funding for services for the most vulnerable children.

The Children and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel have continued to take an active interest in this area setting up a working party to 'Review Safeguarding and Services for Vulnerable Children' in July 2010. This was chaired by Councillor E Hughes and included members from all the major parties: Councillor B Cassidy, Councillor D Shires, Councillor R Martin and Councillor A Paul.

The working party examined the challenges facing Specialist services in depth, the rise in referrals, the rise in child protection work, the number of children in care post baby Peter and the difficulties in recruiting and retaining experienced social work staff.

The working group agreed that safeguarding services for vulnerable children were critical to the success of the borough. They were satisfied to note the significant progress and developments made in a number of key areas during the life of the working group. They were also keen that officers remained innovative in delivering effective services in the context of increased demand and a challenging funding environment.

The working group identified a key role for Members, particularly as part of inspection activity and as corporate parents.

We are pleased to report that 100% of our children in care and children with a child protection plan have an allocated worker.

Education

In 2010 schools in Walsall, working in partnership with Walsall Children's Services Serco, continued to improve the outcomes of children and young people at the different key stages. The latest data matrix from the Department for Education was issued at the end of January 2011. Steady improvement has gone on over a number of years that reflects the hard work of children and the school staff. At Key Stage 2 schools scored 81%, 80% and 74% for Level 4+ in English, Maths and English and Maths combined. These results all exceed the national average for the first time. Our improvement in English this year was the 8th best local authority nationally and for English and Maths combined was the 12th best nationally.

At Key Stage 4, the results again took a good step in the right direction. For 5 + A*-C GCSE, schools achieved 75%, level with the national average for the first time. Walsall was the 12th most improved authority nationally at this measure. At the 5 + A*-C GCSE including English and Maths, schools achieved a fraction under 50%, at 49.5%. The improvement was in the top third of authorities and with an improvement faster than the national improvement, is closing on the national average. Schools have set themselves challenging targets that should lead to another significant step in 2011, hopefully reaching the national average.

At 6th form, the results have improved steadily since 2008. Although the results are still below the national average, the rate of improvement is well in the top half of authorities and, with the growing collaboration across schools and providers, gives good heart for future improvement. A number of strategies are in place across Walsall schools to improve performance.

Even with this good progress there can be no room for complacency and Walsall Children's Services Serco will continue to work with schools to raise standards for all children, including those children from vulnerable groups.

The proportion of schools graded good or better by Ofsted has steadily increased over recent years. A small number of schools were placed in a category under the new inspection regime. They are all on target to come out of category status. There is still considerable room for further improvement for schools to move from satisfactory to good or outstanding, particularly at secondary and post 16. The small number of secondary schools inspected each year does mean that change in status is not recognised quickly. The nursery and special schools have consistently led the way with almost all being good or outstanding.

A number of large educational capital programmes have been undertaken in 2010/11 including a new building at Barcroft Community and replacement mobile classes and remodelling at Chuckery and Caldmore. Children's Centres facilities are being improved at Streetly and Pelsall as well as work being undertaken at centres across the Borough. Further work is planned in 2011/12.

Moving forward there will be major changes in the way we work with schools, in line with the coalition government direction of travel. Even with all the changes Walsall Children's Services Serco will continue to put all resources available into improving the life chances of children, whatever sort of school they attend.

Education contract review

- The council has carried out a fundamental review of the education contract to ensure that the council is well positioned to respond to:
 - ❖ The Government policy direction of devolving more autonomy to schools.
 - ❖ The Government's public sector deficit reduction programme will result in a substantial reduction in the contract value
 - ❖ Focus on future service delivery which will ensure continued improvement in educational attainment
- This review involved Headteachers at every step to ensure that the impact on frontline support services to schools is minimised where ever possible
- Going forward the council will support the transformation of education where schools are given increasing responsibility to drive up improved outcomes

Joint Working with Public Health

Our close working with colleagues in Public Health and sharing of analysis work has led to the production of detailed analysis of needs in each Children's Area Partnership (available online) to assist in identifying local priorities.

Think Family and Whole Family Assessment

In line with Walsall's commitment to prevention and early intervention, Children's Services has worked with partners to look at where it needed to align its activity and what made a difference. There was emerging evidence that showed how preventative work with families could reduce costs of children in care, children with child protection plans and those children on the edge of foster care.

Nearly 40 Walsall children have been diverted from care thanks to good social work practice via the Think Family intervention programme, avoiding an estimated cost £22,500 per child. Of the 39 children diverted from care, 21 were also de-listed from child protection plans.

These innovative approaches to prevention and early intervention are now embedded within a team of 5 Intensive Support Workers. The vision in March 2011 is for the Department for Education (DfE) to deliver free training to a further 60 multi agency staff. This will significantly increase our ability to deliver the approach to more families, improving outcomes and to generate more efficiency savings. Walsall will be taking full advantage of this training.

Integrated Workforce Development

Children's services has led the development of an Integrated Workforce Development Strategy and common induction programme with partners and have created both a Social Worker Recruitment and Retention and a Learning and Development Strategy. These developments are demonstrating impact on a reduction in costs and improvement in quality of services provided. A framework has been introduced and a refreshed training programme has been implemented based on a detailed training needs analysis and so far is proving very popular with our specialist services.

Walsall are also leading on a West Midlands Succession Planning and Talent Management programme for Children's Services on behalf of the National College.

Integrated Young People's Support Services

IYPSS and Youth Justice Services achieved a positive inspection outcome in November 2010 and were assessed as good against overall performance and on its partnership capacity to sustain and improve performance inspected in June 2010. The service has continued to reduce both rates of offending and re-offending by young people.

First time entrants to the Youth Justice System reduced by 47% in 2009/10 and are projected to reduce further in 2011/12 exceeding our reduction target. IYPSS has supported the wider partnership in reducing reported youth ASB which fell by 25% in 2nd quarter of this year.

In 2009/10 the numbers of young people aged 16 – 18 not in Education, Employment or Training reduced to 8.1% and numbers whose destination were not known also reduced to 4.7%. We are projected to meet both our 2011/12 targets in a very challenging context.

Over 85% of young people are satisfied or very satisfied with the service they receive from IYPSS. Young people continue to have their voice heard and to make a positive contribution to the decisions which affect their lives through local and borough wide youth forums. Over 7,000 young people voted in the United Kingdom Youth Parliament (UKYP) elections which saw Walsall's two elected UKYP members sit with colleagues in the House of Commons for a 'youth debate' chaired by the Speaker.

The 'Dictated Choices' project saw young people from Darlaston produce a film and educational resource pack exploring issues of peer pressure, relationships, substance misuse and family and community expectations. The young people are now training staff in Walsall and the wider West Midlands with the resource pack. Walsall IYPSS have worked alongside Sheffield University to involve young people from Walsall in a European research project focused on the engagement of young people who have experienced violence.

IYPSS has made further efficiencies utilising the Working Smarter principles and objectives and embedding its leadership and delivery arrangements within the Area Partnership structure. IYPSS lead on the Area Partnerships 'Youth' thematic groups. This, alongside a focus on placing young people at the centre of governance and delivery and on early intervention and prevention, ensures that Walsall's IYPSS is fit for the challenges ahead.

Key challenges

- ❖ Safely reducing the number of children in care by investing in targeted prevention – demand may increase further if recession persists.

- ❖ Improving our GCSE and A-Level results.
- ❖ A small number of schools were placed in category under the new Ofsted inspection regime. There is still considerable room for further improvement for schools to move from satisfactory to good or outstanding.
- ❖ Reducing the increase in obesity amongst school children and improving the health of mothers.
- ❖ Ensuring that Pelsall Children's Centre and new library and health centre is delivered on time.

Councillor Rachel Andrew
Cabinet Member
Children's Services