

**Children and Young People
Scrutiny and Performance Panel**

**Agenda
Item No.**

24 February 2015

6

**The quality and performance of Children's Service:
An analysis of key indicators as at the end of Quarter 3 of 2014-15.**

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Cllr B. Cassidy

Executive Summary:

This report describes and comments on the performance and impact of services to children and their families, in the form of a dataset that is provided quarterly to this Scrutiny Panel together with analysis of the most significant indicators. Officers believe that the data shows a direction of travel that is generally positive. They will continue to use such indicators to inform action that is needed to achieve and sustain improvement and embed the highest quality of practice across the service.

Reason for scrutiny:

The Children's Services Scrutiny Panel receives a similar report to this each quarter, as part of its regular monitoring of the quality and performance of the Council's services to children and their families.

Recommendation:

That the report be received.

Background papers:

None other than an appendix containing the latest key performance indicators for Children's Services.

Resource and legal considerations:

No additional resources are required at this time and there are no specific legal considerations.

Citizen impact:

There is none specific to this report. However, the services it concerns play a key role in the quality of life of – and outcomes for – the children and young people of Walsall.

Environmental impact:

None

Performance management:

This report brings together a range of data and findings that are the products of a variety of internal performance management processes and systems.

Equality Implications:

This report has no specific equalities implications.

Consultation:

This report describes the impact of a range of services, many of which are delivered through partnership arrangements and are subject to consultative processes. However there has been no need for specific consultation about this report.

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1. Context and purpose

- 1.1 Panel Members received a report in November 2014 describing progress in service quality and impact since the lifting of the Government's Improvement Notice in July 2014. Members should be aware that Children's Services is currently engaged in a thorough update of the self-assessment prepared by the previous Director, Rose Collinson, in the summer of 2014. That evaluation will in turn inform the preparation of service plans to set out the work required to continue the improvement journey. Officers would expect to share the results of that self-assessment with the Panel at a future meeting.
- 1.2 This report is one of a regular pattern in which key performance data is submitted to the Scrutiny Panel. The data is provided at Appendix 1 and the purpose of this report is to highlight and provide commentary on those items that appear most significant.
- 1.3 The January 2015 Scrutiny Panel received a report and presentation on the plans for the introduction of the Mosaic system. Although the current Paris system does not adequately support good quality social work, it remains capable of providing the aggregated data that managers need in order to properly control service provision. The attached scorecard shows the position at the end of December 2014, so Members should be aware that some of the indicators represent three quarters of a full year's activity.

2. Analysis

- 2.1 The majority of our performance indicators are showing a positive direction of travel or a steady state at a level that we believe is appropriate for Walsall. For example, it is heartening to report a significant improvement in the timeliness of Initial and Core Assessments; a large reduction in the number of first time entrants to the Youth Justice system; gradually improving placement stability for Looked After Children; and further reductions in the time lost to sickness absence.
- 2.2 As described in previous reports to this Panel, perhaps the biggest challenge to our service is the rate at which work is presented to and accepted by its "front door". Some of this is a reflection of business processes and some a consequence of levels of need in the Borough. A large majority of assessments are found to need no further action from Children's Social Care. This suggests a misunderstanding of thresholds for intervention and a challenges the management of rise in universal and early intervention services. It also reflects Ofsted's 2012 conclusion that our arrangements for receiving work and responding to child protection needs was inadequate. Immediately following this inspection there was a directive that all levels of referrals went through the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Team (MAST). This culture was established and

remains in many organisations today. Under the auspices of the Local Children's Safeguarding Board, work is being planned to address the accurate implementation of thresholds. A multi-agency training programme is being implemented. We are also working on the introduction of a Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) which will provide a more effective and efficient way of handling such incoming work. Members will be regularly apprised of progress with these initiatives.

- 2.3 The increase in the rate of re-referral is almost certainly part of the same set of issues and factors and is one that officers will continue to monitor carefully and address with corrective action to bring down
- 2.4 The number of children Looked After in Walsall continues to be notable and is a topic often considered by Scrutiny. Officers will always exercise caution in commenting on this (because we can never exercise complete control over the need for such care) but this quarter is the third in succession to show a slight decrease from the last. This begins to demonstrate the impact of an operational group established in Children's Services to safely reduce the number of LAC and outside Borough placements. Further developments are planned with a view to continuing this trend. Notable amongst these is the "Edge of Care" team which is due to be operational from April 2015. Bringing together and reshaping existing resources, it will use intensive, tried-and-tested techniques to assertively try to keep families together, especially those in which the challenging behaviour of a young person leads parents to want to divest themselves of their parental responsibilities.
- 2.5 There is an "Adoption Scorecard" that shows the performance of each Local Authority area in terms of finding permanent homes for Looked After Children. This indicator is not as strong but is one element of a set of factors that are overwhelmingly positive. We do confidently expect this year's scorecard to show further improvement. Members will be pleased to hear that the service has managed to successfully place 37 children for adoption so far this year. This compares favourably with last year's overall figure of 29. Of these 37, nine were sibling groups of two children.
- 2.6 There is a rise in the re-offending rate by young people, which more than doubled over the past year. However, this is a direct consequence of the halving of the rate at which youngsters are entering the criminal justice system. In fact the number of re-offenders has reduced by 86 young people, but those in the system will naturally be the more serious and recidivist ones. Although the following statistics are not included in the dataset, they are noteworthy: The numbers of young people in custody and on remand have significantly decreased from last year. In 2013/14 there were 29 custodial sentences, while – in the first three quarters of the current year there have been eight. There is a

similar picture for secure remands which have fallen from 24 to 8 over the same period. It is in the light of performance such as this that the Youth Justice Board has highlighted Walsall as one of the top 20 performing teams nationally.

- 2.7 In the Early Years, the percentage of Walsall pupils achieving a 'Good Level of Development' (GLD) has improved by 7% from 2013 to 53% in 2014. Although an improvement, this compares to a national figure of 60%. Analysis shows that boys perform significantly worse than girls, with just 45% achieving a GLD, compared to 62% of girls. Performance of Year 1 pupils in the Phonics Screening Test continue to be above the national average, as has been the case since this measure was introduced. 75% of Walsall pupils in Year 1 were deemed to be working at the expected level in 2014, which is a 3% improvement since 2013.

At Key Stage 2, whilst results for the combined Level 4+ in reading, writing and maths have improved slightly over the past few years to 72%, the gap to national widened to 7% from 4% in 2014 and outcomes for the individual core subjects are all below national averages.

At Key Stage 4 in 2014, there have been significant changes to the GCSE specification and how results are reported. Walsall closed the gap to national for the percentage of students gaining 5 or more GCSE's at A*-C including English and maths, but at 48%, the overall average was 5% below national.

At Key Stage 5, results in Walsall schools have dipped slightly on 2013 outcomes to 764 points per candidate, but results are still above the national average. There are wide variations in outcomes between schools, with 13 schools being below the national average.

Persistent absence rates in Walsall remain static from 2013, being 1% above the national average.

Latest figures show that 71% of Walsall schools are currently graded good or better by Ofsted, and this is 10% below the national figure. Ten more primary schools and 2 secondaries need to reach good or better to meet the national figure.

- 2.8 The latest figure for the rate of teenage pregnancy shows a very welcome and significant decrease from the previous one. The same cannot be said of the steady increase in children measured as overweight or obese. A recent survey (not reported in the appendix) of young people in Walsall found a significant number reporting themselves as regularly going to bed hungry. This perhaps demonstrates the complex and challenging nature of this problem. Recently, the Health and Wellbeing Board decided to adopt this issue as a priority. That is positive and Members will no doubt look forward to seeing the impact of that attention.

- 2.9 Members will be aware that – aside from the cost of our Looked After Children – we are financially challenged by our reliance on a large number of agency social work staff. However, that number has fallen rapidly in recent months and we expect to see that trend continue thanks to a variety of initiatives that officers continue to take to improve the recruitment and retention of staff by the Council. A tasking group is in place to manage the strategy on the recruitment, retention and development of our social work staff.
- 2.10 The final statistic worthy of note is the decrease in the number of complaints received by the service. Care needs to be taken in interpreting this; an increase in complaints is not necessarily indicative of a decrease in service quality, as it can derive from improved understanding of how to complain and the perceived value of doing so. We are confident that this decrease in the number follows from moves to address issues early and without them having to become formal complaints. Officers expect to be able to expand on that conclusion when the Complaints Annual Report is submitted to this Panel later in the year. Members can also expect that report to better demonstrate how the service is learning from the complaints it investigates, following steps currently being taken by the management team.

3. Conclusions and Recommendations

- 3.1 It is difficult (and perhaps unhelpful) to try to reduce the messages contained in this dataset to a single conclusion. However, officers believe that the trend is generally positive, while continuing to use such indicators to inform action that is needed to achieve and sustain improvement and embed and sustain the highest quality of practice across the service.
- 3.2 It is recommended that, after discussing any items of interest to its members, the Panel notes the content of this report.

Tony Griffin
February 2015