

EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

21 NOVEMBER 2017 AT 6.00 PM AT THE COUNCIL HOUSE

Committee Members present	Councillor C. Towe (Chair) Councillor T. Jukes (Vice-Chair) Councillor D. Barker Councillor A. Ditta Councillor J. Fitzpatrick Councillor E. Hazell Councillor T. Wilson
Portfolio Holders present	Councillor A. Nawaz - Children's Services and Education
Non-elected voting Members Present	Mrs T. Tunnell (Parent Governor)
Non-elected non-voting Members present	Mr R. Bragger (Primary Teacher Representative) Ms W. Duffus (Secondary Teacher Representative)
Officers present	Ms S. Rowe - Executive Director (Children's Services) Mrs L. Poole - Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) Ms C. Goss - Head of Service (SENDI) Mr R. Hutchinson - Finance Business Partner Dr E. Thornbery - Lead Educational Psychologist Mr P. Wells - SENDI Support Dr P. Fantom - Democratic Services Officer
In attendance	Mrs K. Bargh - Head teacher, Rushall Primary School Ms S. Roberts - Director of Quality, Walsall CCG

91/17 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair and Members welcomed Ms S. Rowe to her first meeting of the Committee. Ms Rowe had taken up the position of Executive Director (Children's Services) with the Council on 13 November 2017.

Also welcomed to her first meeting of the Committee was Ms W. Duffus, NASUWT Walsall Local Secretary, who had replaced Ms P. Welter as the Secondary Teacher Representative.

In attendance as an observer was Councillor P. Helliari-Symons, the Chair of Wokingham Borough Council's Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, who was also welcomed to the meeting.

The Chair noted that further to Members' wishes, as expressed at the Committee's October meeting, it was intended that there should be consideration of a single item on SENDI in Walsall at this meeting. However, it had been necessary to include further items, namely the draft revenue and efficiency plan and the corporate financial performance – quarter 2 financial monitoring position. Members agreed that these items should be considered.

92/17 **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor M. Follows, D. James and A. Nazir, and Mr R. Bragger.

93/17 **SUBSTITUTIONS**

There were no substitutions.

94/17 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

There were no declarations of interest or party whip for the duration of the meeting.

95/17 **LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985 (AS AMENDED)**

There were no agenda items that required the exclusion of the public.

96/17 **MINUTES**

Further to Minute 80/17, it was confirmed that the establishment of a working group on the Ofsted inspection would be an item for consideration of the meeting of the Committee to be held on 9 January 2018. It was envisaged that the first meeting of the working group would be arranged to take place in mid/late January 2018.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 October 2017, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

97/17 **DRAFT REVENUE BUDGET AND EFFICIENCY PLAN 2017/18 - 2020/21**

The Committee received a report [annexed] on the draft revenue budget and efficiency plan, as reported to the Cabinet on 25 October 2017, which included the latest medium term financial outlook for the period 2017/18 to 2020/21.

Members commented on a number of the savings proposals, as follows:

1. Summary of proposed revenue savings by portfolio

Saving 6 - Review demand for SEN transport. More provision of Special School Places will reduce transport and existing travel costs

Members questioned what guarantee there was that there would not be a negative effect on vulnerable children through this reduction. It was noted that whilst such transport was provided for vulnerable children and that it had to be well thought through, it was also desirable for young adults with learning difficulties such as autism to begin to become more independent, so that they could start to use public transport. Members highlighted the problems that had been experienced by some parents due to changes to the criteria/provision, which meant that their children had either missed the start of the school day or had been unable to attend school.

Savings 9/10 - Reduction of spend on Looked after Children including those in Out of Borough Placements and reduced LAC numbers and costs

Members sought clarification on the accuracy and calculation of the figures and the degree of confidence that money would be saved by bringing in children who were out-of-Borough placements. It was noted that the number of looked after children had increased from 620 to 668 and that there was a different cost for every child, although an average cost was used for calculations; however, any cost savings would have to ensure that the right decision was made for each of the children concerned. Savings would be made in respect of three work streams, namely foster care, residential care (by reducing the number of children being cared for outside of the Borough) and by reducing the number of looked after children.

Saving 11 - Review and reduce Children's Social Care contact service

Members questioned why it was proposed that this service be reduced. It was noted that the achievement of any savings should not mean that any child received less contact time than they would have otherwise had. Also emphasised was the desirability, where possible, for children to have a single point of contact.

Saving 90 - Reduce administrative support – Children's wide

Members questioned why administrative support was being reduced and what would happen in the future as a consequence of this. The importance of administrative support was recognised, and it was noted that the aim was to ensure that all children remained safe but, as savings had to be found, there would be a thorough review of such support and targeting to ensure it was provided in the right places.

Saving 91 - Review and reduce Early Help 0-19 model

Members questioned why a review and reductions were proposed in terms of this model. It was noted that as part of the new contract for 0-19 locality services, it was anticipated that it could be possible to achieve efficiencies due to the introduction of new approaches.

Saving 93 - Review demand for SEN short breaks

Members expressed concern regarding the impact on families of any reduction to the provision of SEN short breaks, given that demand for this was increasing, as this could be especially detrimental to those parents already struggling to manage. Members enquired whether any form of respite would be available for such families, and what the impact/risk assessment was for this, given that any economies would have to be offset against the possibility of these children having to access full-time care. That the short-term costs should be offset against the long-term gains to be made was also noted. Any decisions would be based on a detailed review of current services and future models of delivery.

Saving 95 - Reduce agency social workers

Members questioned whether this was achievable given the workload demands in the Children's Services Directorate. Members noted, however, that it was a Walsall Council policy not to rely on agency or temporary staff but recognised that it might be necessary in certain circumstances. The intention was to replace these workers with permanent staff.

Saving 97 - Review and reduce Children's Social Care Workforce Training & Practice Development

Members were of the view that the offer of development and training was integral to recent improvements in the success of the recruitment process for social workers, as the Council wanted prospective employees (especially those from outside of the area) to see Walsall as an attractive place to work and live. This was being carried out in conjunction with the steps to reduce the caseload for social workers.

Saving 99 - Review and reduce Children's Youth Justice Services or Identify Alternative contributions.

Members noted that when reductions had been made to the Youth Service there had had a number of unforeseen consequences and problems, both for the Council and other agencies. With these ongoing reductions, there were concerns that there would be a continuation of these consequences and problems.

2. Summary of proposed investment/cost pressures by portfolio

Further to the increase in costs relating to changes in demographics, which were expected to increase from £1.6m in 2018/19 to £2m in 2019/20 and 2020/21, it was noted that this was due to increases in the number of children who were coming into placements and whom it was found required further support.

In relation to the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) placement and wrap around support costs, Members sought assurance that the savings indicated could be achieved.

Having regard to the removal of the Police and Crime Commissioner contribution, Members noted that there was uncertainty as to whether this contribution would continue to be made after 2018/19.

Resolved:

1. That the draft budget proposals relating to the Committee's remit be noted.
2. That it be noted that all of the 2018/19 and 2019/20 policy savings had all previously been consulted on as part of the 2017/18 budget setting process and that feedback from the Committee was taken into account at that point in time.

98/17 CORPORATE FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE - QUARTER 2 FINANCIAL MONITORING POSITION FOR 2017/18

A report was submitted [annexed] detailing the 2017/18 year end financial position for services under the remit of the Children's Services Directorate Management Team and based on the financial performance for quarter 2 of the financial year (April 2017 to September 2017).

The Chair noted that with the use of corporate and service resources, there would still be a forecast overspend of £1.175m. The Finance Business Partner advised the Committee that in terms of the overall Council position, risks were reviewed and general reserves set in view of this, and that without the use of reserves the implementation of the in-year action plan would entail an overspend of £6.071m. In response to a question from the Chair on the over spend position with regard to other Directorates, and whether they were within their budgets, the Finance Business Partner indicated that this information could be made available and he was requested to circulate this to the Committee.

With reference to Table 6 of the report, and the explanation of risk relating to looked after children, it was confirmed for Members that the full year effect (FYE) of an increase in the number and/or costs associated with looked after children was £1.6m should the risks increase. The Chair also noted that for the services associated with the Committee, there were risks totalling £2.141m and he asked whether some of the risks had been realised. The Finance Business Partner confirmed that the profiles being done on a monthly basis, this represented what potentially could happen given the overall general revenue of the Council.

A Member drew the Committee's attention to information in the table featuring looked after children numbers from 2010/11 to 2017/18. In particular, she pointed out that for other looked after children, by placement type, for external residential the average cost per week was £3,090; however, for internal residential, the average cost per week was £3,205. The Finance Business Partner referred to the number of internal movements that had taken place and which had contributed to these costs. Further to this, Members requested comparable information for when there were no vacancies.

Resolved:

1. That the revenue forecast for the 2017/18 year end financial position for services under the remit of the Children's Services Directorate Management Team be noted.
2. That the capital forecast for the 2017/18 year end financial position for services under the remit of the Children's Services Directorate Management Team be noted.
3. That the actions being taken to address the areas of over spend be noted.
4. That the additional information requested by Members relating to the over spend position within other Directorates be circulated to the Committee.
5. That the additional information requested by Members for internal residential and external residential costs when there were no vacancies be circulated to the Committee.

99/17 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS, DISABILITY AND INCLUSION (SENDI) IN WALSALL

The Committee received a report [annexed] on the progress to date on the priority areas of the Walsall SENDI strategy and the further work that was needed in advance of an as yet unannounced SENDI area inspection of Walsall to be conducted by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

To provide context, the Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) gave the Committee a brief summary of developments concerning SENDI in Walsall. She reported that the SENDI function had sat with SERCO for many years, but that it had been moved to the Access and Achievement Team last year. The Head of Service (SENDI) had also been recruited last year and a new team had been developed in accordance with an improvement plan. There were other partner agencies participating in SENDI and representatives from health and social care were in attendance at the meeting to update the Committee on their involvement in SENDI.

In terms of preparing for the inspection, the Assistant Director reported that the process was monitored by the Department for Education (DfE) and that there was a positive working relationship. There had been discernible progress, especially during the recent months, due to steps taken to move the SENDI agenda forward. She highlighted the weekly operational meetings held regarding inspection preparation, in addition to which there were monthly meetings with partner organisations.

In relating the collaborative preparations being made in conjunction with Walsall CCG, the Director of Quality referred to the work being carried out in the NHS to address the SENDI agenda. In particular, she mentioned the joint action plan and the joint commissioning strategy for children's services, which offered a good foundation. She also emphasised the importance of the local health offer. In response to a question from the Chair on whether the communication between the NHS and the Council was

satisfactory, she confirmed that it was and referred to the joint action plan and joint communications strategy.

The Portfolio Holder for Education and Children's Services acknowledged that although the service was not yet where he would like it to be, the actions being taken meant that there was movement in the right direction. He reiterated the importance of the joint approach with the partner health organisations. The Chair also made reference to the views of the Chair of the SENDI Challenge Board, given that there were some difficulties that she had brought to the Committee's attention in her reports.

The Assistant Director provided further information on the inspection process, stating that a letter from Ofsted initiating the process was to be expected and that an action plan would then have to be produced. All of the inspections were being monitored and tracked in terms of the recommended actions. She stated that, for example, the national agenda was concerned with the needs of the SENDI pupils and that these needed to be addressed.

Further to questions from a Member, the Head of Service (SENDI) provided information on the Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and the conversion of Statements of Special Educational Needs to EHCPs. She stated that a monthly report was made to the DfE and that despite the requirements being tight, it was hoped that all transfers would be accomplished before the statutory deadline of 31 March 2018. This work was being completed by case officers with support from Early Help staff. She assured the Committee that whilst there was no penalty for not meeting the deadline, everything was being done to ensure that the task was completed within the timescale. Considerable improvement had been made in the collaboration between education and health professionals, yielding dramatic improvements and a positive attitude to the challenges of completing the transfers.

It was noted by the Assistant Director that some of the delays with the transfers had occurred in the schools due to the paper-based documentation. Together with improvements in communications between schools and health agencies, an investigation into the use of CAPITA One module software was being carried out.

It was reported that parents would be able to track progress concerning the contents of the care plan via the relevant portal. Having regard to the updates and improvements made to the Local Offer, the Committee noted that there had been some delays, however, arising from the development of a new IT platform. Assurance was provided by officers that this had been addressed with their being co-operation between the Council's web team and those partners providing services to children with special educational needs. It was confirmed that the development of the new IT platform was being made at an appropriate pace.

Members noted with approval that the section of the report concerned with Citizen Impact had used actual figures, rather than just percentages.

There were questions from Members on the progress being made to promote the inclusion of children with special educational needs in mainstream setting and on section 2 of the report on the response to the SENDI Challenge Board. In highlighting the progress made, the Head of Service (SENDI) informed the Committee that a

session had been run attended by over seventy SENCOs. The Head teacher of Rushall Primary School also commented on the role of school improvement partners and the school-to-school support work being carried out so as to benefit from the expertise of others and through the Autism Resource Provision (ARP).

A Member enquired about the level of receptiveness with regard to the special educational needs of schools, including academies, and was informed that all schools had been receptive to this. Moreover, should any school be uncooperative in this regard, it was stressed by the Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) that they would be challenged. Note was taken of the regional improvement bids made in relation to special educational needs, with there being a bid for £850k having been made for the Black Country inclusion agenda. The Head teacher of Rushall Primary School stated that schools were being proactive and that SEN networks were sharing good practice. The Lead Educational Psychologist added that SEN data was being examined in relation to school improvement, so that there was a balance between the schools' context and the data received.

The information on selected SEN data comparisons with the Council's statistical neighbours, as shown in table 8 to the report, which illustrated the percentage of SEN pupils with a statement of EHCP who reached the expected standard at Key Stage 2, was noted by Members. It was reported by the Head of Service (SENDI) that data regarding Key Stages 3 and 4 was now available and it was agreed that this be circulated to the Committee.

In view of EHCPs being available for young people between the ages of 19 and 25, the Committee sought clarification on the level of engagement with this age group. The Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) reported that whilst there were differing statutory legal requirements, Children's Services worked closely with Adult Services to ensure provision and transition. She acknowledged that much remained to be done, but noted that the Council was working with Walsall College and Walsall Adult and Community College (WACC) and Walsall Housing Group (WHG) to achieve the best outcomes so that fewer of Walsall's young people had to go outside of the Authority. The Portfolio Holder for Education and Children's Services echoed this point, stressing the benefits of closer working between Adult Services and Children's Services, so that young people could obtain the help they required. The CCG's Director of Quality highlighted the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Strategy 0-25, and advised that a case manager for the commissioning agenda had been appointed.

A Member requested clarification regarding those statements which would be transferred to an EHCP without an annual review. The Head of Service (SENDI) advised that all the parents concerned would have received a letter and that annual reviews should have happened as soon as possible; however, if it was not possible to do this in the current academic year, there would be a transfer to EHCP and appropriate advice and support given in such cases. Regarding the recent improvements made when engaging with parents and carers, a Member advised that the name of the relevant organisation was correctly known as 'FACE Walsall', not 'Walsall FACE', as had been stated in the report.

In response to questions concerning high functioning autism, the plan to expand the number of special school places at the six existing special schools for September 2018

and September 2019 was discussed. It was noted that a bid to the Regional Schools Commissioner for a new special school had been unsuccessful. The Chair noted the high quality of Walsall's special schools and also referred to a meeting he had attended at the time with Nick Timothy, formerly political adviser to the Prime Minister, and to the promises made to help increase the number of special school places by the end of this Parliament. The Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) made reference to the Five Year Strategy and the respective phases of the special school consultation exercise.

The Committee noted that with one-quarter of Walsall's children having educational needs were stated, there was a question on how collated information was translated into the Local Offer for Walsall. The Head of Service (SENDI) emphasised the importance of the SEN data so that schools were supported. Given the broad range of needs, the SENCO forums had provided some challenge because those young people were a significant portion of Walsall's school population. The Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) pointed out that as funding followed the needs of each child, secondary head teachers were now reviewing the approach to be followed for next September.

With reference to paragraph 1.3 of the report, and the focus by School Improvement Partners on the progress of children with special educational needs in every school, the Chair observed that the reduction to funding would have an impact on the School Improvement Team's work across the Borough. The Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) stated that there was recognition that more services had to be traded, and that this might be the case for school improvement if the funding was not available. The Executive Director (Children's Services) pointed out that there had been an alteration in the flow of finances, as the Education Support Grant now went directly to schools, and that there had been significant changes and it was important, therefore, to work in partnership with schools.

A Member asked whether Academies paid for the School Improvement Team's services. It was noted that within a competitive market, if Academies did not then they would have to buy this service in and would be responsible for sourcing a comparable service from elsewhere. It was confirmed that the quality of the Team's service provided was checked through the School Improvement Partners and that the Authority challenged the schools through monthly meetings and the gathering of intelligence that could be used when it was necessary to intervene.

Further to the Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) commenting that the SENDI improvements were carried out over a three year timescale, and in response to a question from the Committee, she confirmed that this period had been suggested by the DfE and Ofsted. This was deemed realistic, but she felt that the pace of improvement should quicken and recruitment of high quality staff was integral to the achievement of this.

A Member enquired about SENDI in children's nurseries, and the Head of Service (SENDI) provided information on the strong early years offer for two and three-year olds. There was a focus on the early identification of needs so that provision was appropriate and inclusion funding for individual youngsters was provided. In response to a question on the minimum age for which an EHCP would be completed, it was

confirmed that children as young as two years of age had been given an EHCP. However, there was variation according to the needs of the young people concerned and it was to be expected that there would be a graduated response, so that when the need could not be met then an EHCP would be completed. The Head of Service (SENDI) confirmed that the timescale for statementing was twenty weeks and that if a child had particular needs then resources would be found to fund the school in exceptional circumstances, particularly in the early years setting so that younger children were not without help. However, the school was expected to demonstrate what it had done to support the child.

The CCG's Director of Quality confirmed that the Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Walsall had been updated and that the transition plan was being refreshed and was to be submitted to NHS England. It was envisaged that it would be presented to the Health and Wellbeing Board in December 2017. Members also requested that a copy of the plan be circulated to them by email.

The Chair drew the discussion to a close and thanked all Members, officers and attendees for their contributions during an expansive discussion on SENDI. He had been pleased to note that partner organisations were working together well and that the Committee had received assurance on what actions were being undertaken for improvements to be made.

Resolved:

1. That the progress made on the priority areas for SENDI in Walsall be noted;
2. That the further steps required in advance of the joint inspection be noted;
3. That information on the percentage of SEN pupils with a statement of EHCP who have reached the expected standard at Key Stages 3 and 4 be circulated to the Committee;
4. That a copy of the Walsall CCG transition plan, which was being refreshed and submitted to NHS England, be circulated to the Committee.

100/17 WORK PROGRAMME 2017/18

The Committee received a report [annexed] setting out suggestions for agenda items for the three meetings to be held during the remainder of the 2017/18 municipal year.

The Chair noted that whilst the intention had been for this meeting to consider only one main report, it had been necessary to add extra items to the agenda. He remarked that the Committee would need to be pragmatic about the items considered, as it was possible that additional items may have to be included on the agenda of future meetings. This approach was endorsed by the Members of the Committee.

Resolved:

1. That the Committee's work programme for 2017/18 be noted;
2. That the agenda for the meeting to be held on 9 January 2018 contain items on Child Sexual Exploitation, missing children, the annual complaints report, and the Corporate Finance Report for Quarter 3.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Vice-Chair informed Members that two former looked after children were now in employment with the Council.

The meeting terminated at 8.02 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....