

Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

**Agenda
Item No 11.**

5th September 2017

Children's Services Performance Reporting Quarter 1 (April to June 2017)

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Cllr Aftab Nawaz – Portfolio Holder for Education and Children's Services

Executive Summary:

The report provides an overview of the performance of Children's Services to the end of Quarter 1 (for the period April to June 2017) with a focus on safeguarding, help and protection and Looked After Children.

Reason for scrutiny:

The report provides information about the key indicators within Children's Services so that the Scrutiny Panel is fully aware of the range of indicators, the areas of good performance and areas which need to improve, including information about action being taken to address the areas for improvement. This information enables Scrutiny to monitor, scrutinise and challenge performance in Children's Social Care and ensure itself that the Department is focused on the right priorities for improvement.

Recommendations:

That:

Scrutiny notes the contents of the report and understands the strengths, areas of improvement and actions being taken to address them.

Scrutiny provides challenge on the content of the report and receives assurance about corrective action being taken to secure improvement.

Background papers:

Resource and legal considerations:

None arising directly from this report.

Citizen impact:

The delivery of effective Children's Early Help and Social Care Services has a direct impact on the welfare and wellbeing of children and young people. Walsall is a Corporate Parent for some of our children and will undertake this role effectively. This links directly to the Corporate Priority to improve Health and Wellbeing and the Children's services priority that all children and young people in Walsall are safe, happy and learning well. The delivery of effective children's social care and early help services ensures that children in Walsall are safeguarded and protected from harm.

Environmental impact:

None directly arising from this report.

Performance management:

Monitoring the effective delivery and impact of services to children, young people and their families is essential so that the Council can be assured that the resources at its disposal are being used to maximum effect. The performance management process operating in Children's Services and with key partners ensures that performance data, intelligence and evidence are available to assess and drive performance improvement. Children's Services has a monthly Performance Board in place to monitor performance and the impact of actions to address areas of improvement. A monthly summary of information from the Performance Board is provided to all staff and discussed in Unit meetings. A copy of the one page summary to all staff which summarises our performance framework is attached as Appendix A.

Equality Implications:

The Council's equality of opportunity policy and procedures are monitored by the Council and within the Children's Services Directorate. Any issues of inequality are challenged and addressed by the Directorate's Senior Management team and through the Performance Board.

Consultation:

Regular consultation with parents/carers, staff, children and young people inform the Directorate's Performance Management Framework and self-evaluation work.

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Report

Appendix A gives a summary on a page of performance process and this narrative accompanies the Scrutiny Board scorecard for the end of Quarter 1 (Appendix B) and summarise the key areas of sustained performance and areas for improvement.

1. 0-19 Locality Support (Early Help)

- 1.1 A total of 399 new children received support through an Early Help Assessment/multi-agency plan to date. This included 208 children who stepped down from a Social Care Child and Family Assessment.
- 1.2 56.6% of the 1,142 requests for early help services in the first three months of this year were via the Early Help Hub. 24.4% were via MASH, 13.5% via step down from social care assessment and 5.5% stepped down from children in need review. This illustrates a 'flow' of cases between early help and social care to ensure they receive the right support as children's needs are identified or change. In June, 36.7% of referrals to early help were re-requests within 12 months, a fairly constant proportion since January 2017.
- 1.3 The biggest referral sources apart from social care step-downs were 'other' (23.6%), schools (16.3%) and health services (14.5%). Apart from requests for information (23.7% of all referrals), Neglect (12.2%), Domestic Violence to parent/carer (11.1%) and Physical abuse (10.1%) were the three main reasons for referral.
- 1.4 The LAs 0-19 Family Support service is the lead professional in 61.1% of cases, with the remaining 38.9% held by schools and education. Work with health visiting services will start to have an impact next month when health visitors will undertake the role where appropriate.
- 1.5 More children/families are using the Outcomes star to measure progress, and to the end of June, 54.5% of cases have been closed for a positive reason (needs met, or stepped down to single agency). The proportion stepped up to social care also reduced to 24.9%.

2. Social Care Contacts and Referrals

- 2.1 There has been a considerable increase in contacts, referrals and assessments in the first three months of the year:
 - There were 3,708 contacts to MASH, which equate to a rate of 2,242 per 10,000 0-17 population. The proportion where the outcome is no further action to children's social care has reduced from 66.7% last year to 59.6% to June 2017.

- Referrals to social care increased from 693 per 10,000 0-17 population to 928 year to date, with a similar proportion to previously leading to a child and family assessment (91.9%).
- The subsequent increase in assessments undertaken has also put additional pressure on the service, but the proportion to timescale has been maintained at 99% within 45 working days. The increase has, however, impacted on the quality of assessments undertaken.

2.2 The increase in demand, including to all partners, has been discussed at both the MASH Management Group and also Children's Services Performance Board. Reasons are largely an increase in high level domestic abuse i.e. physical assaults, breach of non-molestation orders etc. and also an increase in referrals of physical abuse as well as an increase in referrals from Schools. MASH Management Group have agreed pieces of work to be trialled including Police triage all DV referrals against some agreed criteria prior to being made a contact in MASH, poor quality Multi-Agency Referral Forms (MARFs) to 'pushed back' to the referrer prior to being made into a contact and the referrer contacted and discussion held to improve the MARF; review of the current MARF to simplify and improve quality. In addition, close liaison with schools who have initiated the largest increase in contacts and referrals, and activity supported through school improvement colleagues is underway.

3. Child Protection

3.1 The recent increase in need for social care services has also created an increase in children protection activity.

More child protection enquiries (Section 47s) have historically been undertaken in Walsall than in comparator authorities or the England average, and this has increased further. 498 Section 47 enquiries were undertaken in the first three months of the year compared to 1,514 for the whole of last year. An audit undertaken during April and May on a 10% sample of Section 47s resulting in no further action (as requested by WSCB) was reported to the July Performance Board found that the threshold relating to undertaking a Sec47 enquiry was met in 96% of the dip sample and recommended that WSCB should be assured of the appropriateness of the Section 47 activity and that appropriate outcomes are reached almost every case audited with social work practice in capturing the voice of the child and using that to shape the plan and outcome being secure in the majority of cases.

3.2 421 children were subject of a child protection plan at 30th June compared to 333 at 31st March – an increase of 26% in three months and significantly above similar authorities and England average. More children are becoming subject of a plan (180 in the first quarter) than ceasing (92). A higher proportion (27.1%) are subject of a plan for the second or subsequent time, and the proportion who were subject of a plan for over 2 years has increased from 2.5% in 2016/17 to 10.6% year to date. Despite this increase in number, 89.7% of initial child protection conferences

are held within 15 days of strategy discussion which is better than the England average of 76.7%.

- 3.3 Since 30th June, the number has continued to escalate, and analysis is underway to better understand the reasons for this increase and to be assured that we have the right children subject of a plan and their needs cannot be met in other ways.

4. Children in need

- 4.1 There has not been an increase in the number of children in need to the same extent as other social care activity. There are 1,545 children in need at 30th June not including those who are subject of a child protection plan or looked after. This equates to a rate of 395 per 10,000 0-17 population in line with our comparator authorities.

5. Looked After Children and Care Leavers

- 5.1 Walsall currently has 644 looked after children, a rate of 97.1 per 10,000 0-17 population which is well above the national average of 60 per 10,000 compared and 87 in our statistical neighbour authorities. More children are starting to be looked after (53 in the first quarter of this year) but more children are also ceasing to be looked after indicating that some children are spending less time looked after.
- 5.2 We anticipate this will improve as the work that everyone is undertaking to reduce drift, improve edge of care and progressing cases to discharge through use of adoption and SGOs will ensure fewer children become looked after and they achieve a permanent, stable home (including return home where appropriate) in a timely manner. This is one of our four priority areas.
- 5.3 Walsall has more children placed out of borough (49.8% compared to 42% comparator authorities), but only 13.7% are placed more than 20 miles or more which is fewer than our comparator authorities.
87.4% of looked after children had statutory visits undertaken to timescale, and stability of placements continues to be good for short term placement stability (i.e. 3 or more moves in a year) at 6.7% but those looked after for 2.5 years in the same placement for 2 years remains below the national average of 68%.
- 5.4 2.2% of children looked after children for over a year have offended, which is better than 3.1% last year and the national average of 5%.
- 5.5 There are 181 care leavers at 30th June compared to 171 at the end of May. The percentage of care leavers not in suitable accommodation has improved to 6.1%

against a national average of 7% and fewer care leavers are NEET (not in suitable education, employment or training).

6. Adoption

6.1 Timeliness and outcomes for children for whom the plan is adoption continue to improve. 23.2% of children cease to be looked after due to adoption, and timescales against the national Adoption Scorecard indicators is better than national average. 55.1% of children wait less than 14 months between entering care and adoption compared to 53% last year and national average of 47% (three year average).

7. Workforce

7.1 The average caseload for front line workers (all open social care cases) was 17.6 at 30th June compared to 17.2 the previous month. This is in line with the caseload promise interim target of 20 cases for social workers as an average across the service at 31st July 2017 and 15 by 31st December 2017. However this masks areas of the service where caseloads are well excess of 20 specifically within the Safeguarding and Family Support service where cases are approaching 25 which is more than the agreed 15 per worker.

7.2 Whilst 86% of social care staff received supervision in June, this fell to 53% in June, mostly due to Ofsted inspection which commenced on 20th June. Regular, reflective supervision for everyone should a key priority for every manager, as current performance is not good enough.

8. Audit activity

8.1 A review of 2016/17 audit activity was undertaken and reported to the May Performance Board. This highlighted key learning that was incorporated into the practice uplift which took place between April and June 2017.

8.2 There has been substantial audit activity in the first quarter of this year which can be summarised as:

- Support to team managers by Principal Social Worker in improving audit skills
- Standard monthly audits:
 - 16 cases reported to June performance board
 - Ofsted 20 case audits
 - Early help audits each month
 - Themed audits (reported to Performance Board 30 May 2017)
 - Are children living outside of Walsall receiving the same attention as those in borough? (13 audits completed)
 - Are care plans robust enough to ensure the safety of our most 'high risk' young people (7 audits completed)

- Are the right children coming into care? (Audit of 10 most recent admissions to care, and 7 most recent discharges).
- The length of time a child is CIN is longer than our statistical neighbours and England average. We have just restructured into the unit model in Walsall. Are our thresholds for CIN/CP correct? (258 cases reviewed via CIN Panels).
- Private Fostering (4 cases audited)
- Are we Southwark Compliant in the way we respond to 16 and 17 year olds who are homeless (12 cases audited)
- Reported to June Performance Board
- Report on high number of Section 47s

8.3 In August, we agreed a new audit process in line with the Essex model, which focuses as much on learning and remedial action from audit as undertaking audits themselves. This will ensure we are able to monitor and demonstrate improvement across the department as well as individual workers. An audit database has been created to support this.

9. Summary of Achievement and Priorities

9.1 A summary of achievements and priorities are encapsulated within the Ofsted Inspection Report which is published on 4th September, and are therefore not repeated here. Many of the areas for improvement and priorities which Ofsted identified, we had already identified ourselves and had plans underway for improvement, demonstrating that we are aware of our strengths and priority areas for improvement.