

CHILDRENS SERVICES SCRUTINY AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

Thursday 11th December at 6 p.m.

Conference Room 2, Council House, Walsall

Committee Members Present

Councillor A. Nawaz (Chair)
Councillor M. Statham
Councillor B Allen.
Councillor D. Barker
Councillor J. Fitzpatrick
Councillor M. Follows
Councillor T. Jukes
Councillor E. Russell
Councillor S. Samra
Councillor M. Statham
Councillor V. Waters

Portfolio Holders Present

Councillor T. Wilson - Children's and Health and Well Being

Officers Present

D. Carter – Assistant Director (Social Care & Safeguarding Service Area)
A. Potts - Assistant Director (Early Help and Commissioning)
L. Murphy – Walsall Safeguarding Board Chair
H. Kucharczyk - Head of Performance Improvement and Quality
I. Vanderheeren - Transformation lead
C. Parrish – National Management Trainee
N. Gough – Democratic Services Officer

30/18 Apologies

There were no apologies received for the duration of the meeting.

31/18 Substitutions

There were no substitutions related to this meeting.

32/18 Declarations of Interest

Councillor B. Allen declared an interest as an employee of Walsall Healthcare Trust.

33/18 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)

There were no items to be considered in private session.

34/18 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 8th November 2018 were approved as a true and accurate record.

35/18 Safeguarding Children Annual Report

The Chair of the Safeguarding Board introduced the report and noted that it described the period covered by her predecessor. There was a requirement to produce an annual report, which provided an overview of partnership performance in relation to safeguarding children and young people and of the delivery of the statutory Safeguarding Children Board arrangements.

The Committee were advised that the business unit, which supported the Safeguarding Board, had been strengthened. The Chair complimented the team supporting the Board. The Chair of the Board described the successes and strengths as listed within the summary section of the document.

The role of the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) was described, and the Committee were informed that the Walsall LADO had received 288 contacts, which was consistent with previous years.

The Committee were informed that there has been a 14% increase in referrals to children's social care in 2017/18 and an 18% increase in the number of child and family assessments that were carried out. The number of children subject to section 47 enquiries had also increased by 30% in 2017/18, and the rate of looked after children was also higher than the national average and more work was needed to allow this to be understood. The volume of work placed an increased pressure on staff.

Following a question from a Member, the Chair of the Board explained that Safeguarding Boards were a requirement after the death of Victoria Climbié, a review carried out led to a change in legislation, which required the development of safeguarding boards across local authorities, police, CCG. However in the future the Director of Children's Services, Chief Nurse, and Borough Commander would have responsibility for the design of the safeguarding board arrangements. The arrangements in Walsall were unlikely to change significantly. The Assistant Director informed the Committee that there had been a number of development days, and an additional away day was planned for the New Year to consider the future arrangements. The Portfolio Holder stated that he attended the Board and the benefit of an independent Chair was clear.

A Member noted that the police and CCG needed to take equal responsibility for safeguarding children in the Borough and questioned why the number of children killed or injured in Walsall was higher than nationally. The Chair of the Board stated that infant mortality skewed the data and due to small numbers it was difficult to form conclusions. However, work was being done to explore if it could be analysed on a Black Country level. The Committee discussed the local context and demographics in the area, data highlighted adversity faced by some children in the Borough. The Committee agreed that it would be useful to receive a briefing note from the Health and Well Being Board/Public Health on infant Mortality in Walsall.

A Member challenged how the 'graded care' tool (to identify levels of neglect) had been rolled out and embedded. The Chair of the Board stated that it had been rolled out across Local Authority services (Children's Social Care and Early Help) and that further work was needed to improve the quality of completion. Future work would include the roll out of the graded care tool at a partnership level.

The Committee discussed the impact of poverty on children. A member questioned why teenage conceptions has increased and it was noted that this sat under the Health and Well Being Board, it was agreed that further work would be done to understand these issues.

A member challenged how engagement was being achieved across the Board and questioned where work was needed. The Chair stated that engagement with schools had improved and this was positive. At Board level there had been an improvement in attendance of key partners. It was remained a challenge to ensure that practitioners referring children provided detailed information on the referral.

In response to a Member query the Chair explained that data from 2017 was inclusive of some deaths from 2016/17 which was due to lack of capacity in the business unit, it also replied on partners sending information over in a timely manner. Members were reassured that this had since been improved.

Resolved

- 1. That the Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report be noted.**
- 2. The Health and Well-being Board/Public Health were asked to provide a briefing note to Committee Members on infant Mortality and teenage pregnancy in Walsall.**

36/18 Draft Revenue Budget and Capital Programme 2018/19 – 2021/22 Policy Paper

The report provided details of the proposal relating to the 'review of contracts for perpetrator and counselling services'. During consideration of the Draft Revenue Budget and Capital Programme 2018/19 – 2021/22 at the previous meeting held on 8th November 2018 it was agreed that consideration of this item would be deferred until the Committee meeting due to be held on 11th December 2018.

This proposal seeks to cease two contracts for services commissioned as part of the 'Toxic Trio' investment approved by Cabinet in February 2016. The two services affected by this proposal were:

1. A programme for perpetrators of domestic violence
2. Counselling Service for children aged 5 to 11 years affected by domestic abuse.

The Committee were informed that there were a range of alternative services available and the impact of the programme could not be demonstrated. The savings proposals were out for consultation, which closed on 21st December 2018.

The Committee challenged whether the capacity of the alternative provision described – the regional programme commissioned by the Police and Crime Commissioner could meet the future need if the contract was ceased. However, Officers described the lack of measurable impact relating to the safeguarding of children as a result of the programme and also that any reductions in the numbers of children coming into care could not be directly attributed to the programme.

Members agreed that there should be a robust transition period if the services were ceased, in particular for those children receiving counselling services. The provision of alternative services should be monitored to ensure the impact is mitigated.

Resolved:

- 1. That the policy proposal 'review of contracts for perpetrator and counselling services' be noted.**
- 2. There should be a robust transition period, for children in particular, with prompt access to services without barriers.**
- 3. The future service provided should be monitored to ensure that the impact of caseation is mitigated.**

37/18 Social Care Year-end Performance and Benchmarking

This report outlined Walsall's final 2017-18 performance for children's social care key indicators compared with the previous two-years from the two key statutory returns that were submitted to the Department for Education each year

The report included the benchmarking data released by the Department for Education, which highlighted Walsall's performance against statistical neighbours (those local authorities that are most like Walsall in key demographic and economic indicators), the 14 local authorities in the West Midlands region and the national, England average.

The report out-lined a significant increase in demand in 2017-18 for social care services and an increase in the number of children who are subject of a child protection plan. Despite the increase in demand, performance in respect of timeliness of assessments and initial child protection conferences remained good.

Also, despite increasing demand, the number of looked after children continued to fall and placement stability and distance looked after children were placed from home was improving. Outcomes for looked after children were mixed, with improvements in some areas and decline in others. Outcomes for Care Leavers had improved significantly and performance for this cohort is good across the board.

The Head of Performance Improvement and Quality presented the key performance information to the Committee. A Member asked for the progress in development checks, immunisation and dental checks for looked after children. The Assistant Director stated that this was an issue highlighted in the Ofsted action plan. This was a work stream of the Corporate Parenting Board and the data was improving however there were issues in the availability of the health staff to deliver these checks.

Resolved

That the Social Care Year-end Performance and Benchmarking was noted.

37/18 Right for Children Transformation programme

Significant progress has been made delivering activities in the transformation programme, which was intended to reduce the circumstances, which lead to children requiring a statutory intervention. Appendix 1 – What Works Centre Diagnostic November 2018 and appendix 2 – Proposed Walsall Right 4Children operating Model was tabled (annexed). The Committee were informed that appendix 2 described a partnership approach to looked after children and the need to connect children to localities.

Four key areas of progress included:

1. Partnership with the What Works Centre (WWC)
2. Prevention work stream
3. Restorative Practice work stream
4. A developing partnership with the private, voluntary and community sector

A Member asked for a more detailed plan for each key area to be taken to a future meeting of the Committee.

Officers were asked how schools had been engaged in the process, the Transformation Officer explained that 70 schools had engaged and completed a survey, which evidenced a commitment to engage in the process. Officers explained that the programme gave maximum opportunity for the Authority to have a relationship with schools.

It was hoped that partnerships would be strengthened to ensure that children accessed the supported needed, that a child only told their story once and was supported by one worker. A Member challenged the quality of care provided and how this was measured. Members were informed that there were several plans that aimed to do this and focussed targets were needed. It was suggested that the scrutiny committee could scrutinise information to see if this approach was working.

Officers suggested that performance information relating to the transformation programme could be presented to scrutiny in the future. Officers assured the committee that governance arrangements were in place and this included a monthly update to the performance board.

A Member challenged if staff feedback had been sought on the programme, Officers informed the Committee that 17 workshops had taken place to ensure that staff were engaged. The Committee were assured that staff were enthusiastic and engaged with the programme.

Resolved

That the report be noted

38/18 Work Programme 2018/19

The Committee's work programme for 2018/19 municipal year was noted. Members were advised that a briefing note on the Regional Adoption Agency had been circulated outside of the meeting to provide members with a briefing on the joint approach. If Members needed any further information they were asked to contact Democratic Services who would facilitate a response.

The Committee were asked to nominate representatives to participate on the Ofsted Working Group for the remainder of the municipal year.

Resolved

That Councillor V. Waters would join the membership of the Ofsted working group.

39/18 Forward Plans

The forward plan of key decisions from Cabinet and the Black Country Executive Joint Committee were considered. It was requested that a report on the Regional adoption agency be circulated to Members.

Resolved

The forward plan was noted.

The date of the next meeting was agreed as 11th December 2018. There being no further business the meeting terminated at 7.15 p.m.

Signed:

Date: