

EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

22 NOVEMBER, 2016 AT 6.00 P.M. AT THE COUNCIL HOUSE

Committee Members Present	Councillor C. Towe (Chair) Councillor T. Jukes (Vice-Chair) Councillor D. Barker Councillor A. Ditta Councillor N. Gultasib Councillor M. Follows Councillor E. Hazell Councillor E. Russell Councillor M. Ward Councillor T. Wilson
Leader of the council	Councillor S. Coughlan
Portfolio Holders Present	Councillor R. Burley – Children's Services and Education Councillor I. Shires – Agenda for Change
Non elected voting Members present	T. Tunnell (Parent Governor)
Non elected non voting Members present	R. Bragger (Primary Teacher Representative) P. Welter (Secondary Teacher Representative)
Officers Present	Paul Sheehan – Chief Executive David Haley – Executive Director (Children's Services) Lynda Poole – Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) Debbie Carter - Assistant Director (Children's Social Care) Carol Boughton - Head of Service - Safeguarding & Quality Assurance Dianne McKinley – Group Manager Lloyd Haynes – Senior Finance Manager Bob Spencer – Prevent Coordinator Neil Picken – Senior Democratic Services Officer
In attendance	Alan Critchley - Independent Chair Adult and Children Safeguarding Boards

620/16 **APOLOGIES**

None

621/16 **SUBSTITUTIONS**

There were no substitutions.

622/16 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

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

623/16 **LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985 (AS AMENDED)**

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

624/16 **MINUTES**

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 October, 2016, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

625/16 **PROTECTING VULNERABLE GROUPS**

A report was submitted [see annexed] providing an overview of the issue of child sexual exploitation (CSE), including the national and regional response activity around this significant priority for the council and the wider partnership. The response in Walsall led by the Walsall Safeguarding Board was also set out.

Child Sexual Exploitation

The Chair expressed his disappointment that Partners were not in attendance despite being invited. He emphasised the importance of CSE and stressed that all Partners need to be committed to do everything in their power to prevent CSE. In light of the non – attendance by Partners, the Chair recommended that a special meeting be convened in the New Year. This was supported by the Committee.

The Head of Service (Safeguarding & Quality Assurance) together with the Prevent Coordinator and Independent Chair of the Adult and Children Safeguarding Boards then provided an overview of the national, regional and local response to CSE.

Members were advised that the Local Government Association (LGA) had undertaken a very thorough peer review, facilitated by a national lead on CSE. Findings were positive and identified that safeguarding procedures work well for CSE in Walsall. Members were assured that staff made appropriate referrals when concerns arose.

The Chair sought assurance that the Children's Safeguarding Board was effective which was provided by the Independent Chair of the Board.

The Chair raised concern that when missing children are found, the return interview undertaken by the street teams was not compulsory and could only be offered. The Head of Service (Safeguarding & Quality Assurance) confirmed that children or their parents could refuse the interview. However, if there was information that other issues were present, the multi agency screening hub (MASH) would be asked to undertake a check across partners to determine the level of risk. If there were no issues, the interview could not be forced on either the parent or child. If additional concerns were identified the appropriate level of social care intervention would be put in place. If a pattern of behaviour arose and the child frequently went missing the risk would escalate and appropriate intervention would take place.

The Chair asked what benefit regional working had for Walsall at a local level. The Head of Service (Safeguarding & Quality Assurance) advised that regional working had been very helpful over the last few years to develop an understanding of CSE and how to respond to it. Regional working ensured that the same definitions were used across borders and between agencies, with clear language adopted to avoid any confusion.

The Chief Executive clarified that 'region' in this context referred to the West Midlands Police Area. He advised that the Regional Strategic CSE Coordinator provided regular reports to the Chief Executives' Group which provided opportunity to compare and contrast approaches in different authorities and identify areas of best practice.

Attention turned to the multi agency sexual exploitation meeting (MASE) which considers how best to protect a child that has been assessed as being at serious (high) or significant (medium) risk of harm from CSE. The Chair noted that, as with meetings following a child going missing, the parents and child were invited to attend, but attendance was not compulsory. The Head of Service (Safeguarding & Quality Assurance) confirmed that whilst it was better for the parent and/or child to be in attendance, it was not compulsory. Members were assured that every effort was made by social workers to engage and encourage attendance. This was part of the restorative social work practice of working with parents and children to keep them involved and engaged. This was supported by the Independent Chair (Adult and Children Safeguarding Boards), who advised that there were clear examples of good practice by social workers and Street Teams to engage parents and young people. The Head of Service (Safeguarding & Quality Assurance) highlighted that should the parent/child not attend they are fully informed about the discussions held and decisions taken. Whilst the point was noted, the Chair asked if the Council made representation to Government to make attendance at this meeting compulsory. The Chief Executive explained that as the Council works permissively, without any change to statutory guidance or indeed the law, it would be a challenge to change the current position.

A Member sought clarity as to whether outcomes for children and young people were tracked. The Head of Service (Safeguarding & Quality Assurance) confirmed that the outcomes were tracked using a number of methods.

A Member queried whether residential staff received training and if so, whether West Midlands Police provided this training. The Executive Director (Children's Services) confirmed that training was undertaken at all levels within Residential Homes and confirmed that he would enquire about the training offered to private residential homes by the Police. The Vice-Chair gave an example of an approach adopted by another local authority. The Executive Director confirmed he would follow this up.

Radicalisation and the Prevent Agenda

The Prevent Coordinator highlighted that a Channel Panel had been established, Chaired by the Executive Director (Children's Services), to coordinate support for individuals. A Contest Board had also been constituted to provide oversight and scrutiny of the work of the Prevent Coordinator.

The Chair highlighted the good work carried out by schools, including their Governing Bodies, in relation to this issue noting that they took their responsibility seriously. The Prevent Coordinator commented that Governing Bodies were integral to driving improvement in schools. Every school in Walsall had engaged with the Prevent training programme.

The Chief Executive provided reassurance that the Home Office Head of Counter Terrorism had attended the Chief Executives' Group and confirmed that he was satisfied with the approach taken in Walsall. That said, there remained challenges as the National Model for Prevent would not fit every locality. It was understood that the National Model would be tailored to local circumstances. In closing, the Chief Executive advised that the Counter-terrorism local profiles (CTLPs), which identified the threat and vulnerability from terrorism and extremism relating to terrorism in local areas, would soon be released. He assured Members that should he have any concerns, they would be acted upon swiftly.

A Member referred to the CTLP. He noted that whilst the report specifically mentioned Syria it didn't appear to specifically address right wing groups within the UK. The Prevent Coordinator advised that all groups were considered on a case by case basis and he advised that there was a right wing presence in Walsall.

Resolved:

1. That a Special Meeting be convened in January 2017 to consider Child Sexual Exploitation;
2. That the Police and other Partners, including Health be urged to attend;
3. That the Executive Director (Children's Services) confirm the arrangements in place regarding the training provided by the Police to staff within private residential homes in another local authority and determine whether this model is transferable to Walsall.

626/16 **LOCAL AUTHORITY SUPPORT FOR UNACCOMPANIED ASYLUM SEEKING CHILDREN**

A report was submitted [see annexed] setting out an overview of work being undertaken in Walsall with regard to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC).

Members noted that the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) was established in July 2016 to ensure a fairer distribution of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASCs) across all Local Authorities and all regions across the UK. It is intended to ensure that any one Local Authority does not face an unmanageable responsibility in accommodating and looking after unaccompanied children simply by virtue of being the point of arrival of a disproportionate number of unaccompanied children. At this stage involvement is on a voluntary basis; however, under the Immigration Act 2016, there is the option to mandate Local Authority compliance with the scheme.

A report to Cabinet in October 2016 recommended that Walsall voluntarily takes part in the NTS for UASCs and that the reception of new children into Walsall is done in a measured and planned way. Cabinet agreed to the proposed approach for Walsall to accept 15 UASC over a period of 3 years, commencing in April 2017.

In relation to the resettlement of children from Calais, Officers explained that the Council would be provided with up to 4 days notice of an arrival. The details provided would be the number of individuals and their gender. Whilst an initial assessment will have been carried out before the individuals arrive, the Council would carry out its own assessment.

The Chair asked what the initial assessment would entail. It was explained that this had not been made clear but a Merton Compliant Assessment to establish the individuals age would be undertaken.

A Member sought clarity on the number of UASCs. It was clear in the report that Walsall currently had 10 individuals that had not been a part of the NTS. Cabinet had agreed to accept 15 UASCs over a period of three years and the expectation of Government was for Authorities to accept 0.07% of the Borough's population of children and young people. In Walsall this is 45.

The Chief Executive advised that the 10 individuals already within Walsall's care are likely to have been trafficked and were vulnerable. It was the intention of Cabinet to learn from those councils that were early adopters and take time to plan for future UASCs.

It was asked what impact the additional number of UASC could have on the budget. Members were advised that UASCs would place additional budget pressures on the Council over and above the National Transfer Rates (the amount paid to the local authority by the Home Office). This would place significant challenges and un-budgeted cost pressures on the Council. By way of mitigation, a National Controlling Migration Fund of £100m would be available over the next 4 years. Councils would be able to bid for this fund. It wasn't yet clear whether this could be used to fund social worker posts.

The Chief Executive stated that there was concern as the young people will have experienced very difficult situations which would impact upon their mental health into adulthood. The pressures on budget would shift in time from children's services to adult social care as the individuals age. A Member stated that there was already pressure on the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). The Group Manager advised that Public Health were working with Partners to identify the most appropriate support for the children as CAMHS may not be the right organisation to meet the children's needs.

A Member asked why 6 of the 10 UASC were fostered through an independent fostering arrangement and whether this incurred more cost than those in internal fostering arrangements. The Group Manager clarified that the costs were higher when using an independent fostering arrangement. The Council were using a new marketing campaign to recruit more internal foster carers and to provide the skills required to care for UASCs. However, it was important that individuals are in the right placements to suit their needs and so a mixture of independent and internal carers were used.

The Chief Executive was asked to provide assurance that he was working to identify a long term plan. The Chief Executive advised that he attended an officer network at a regional level to discuss long term strategies. The Local Government Association was also lobbying the Government to ensure that Councils receive appropriate funding.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

627/16 REBALANCING THE BUDGET: OPTIONS FOR CONSULTATION

A report was submitted [see annexed].

Members commented on a number of saving proposals as follows:-

Saving reference 7 – Review demand for Out of Borough Special Educational Need Short Breaks

Concern was expressed that Bluebells would not be able to meet the needs of some of the individuals currently using Out of Borough commissioned respite.

The Executive Director advised that Bluebells was a high quality facility which would be able to meet the vast majority of individuals needs. As such, if the needs of individuals could be accommodated, they would be transferred from Out of Borough short break provision. It was emphasised that a full needs assessment would be carried out before any decisions were taken. It was stated that to maximise efficiency Bluebells needed to run to capacity and at present it is not.

A Committee Member advised that there was a significant demand for the service. However, many individuals were not being assessed. The Executive Director

(Children's Services) advised that this would be considered during the assessment and review process.

Saving reference 8 – Review and reduce short breaks

Concern was expressed that the level of need of individuals accessing short breaks could mean that they were unable to access term-time after school clubs and school holiday clubs. It was asked, in light of this, whether the saving of £200k was realistic.

The Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that benchmarking with other Authorities had taken place. Walsall had, historically, offered a high level of support in comparison to other authorities and the resource was no longer available to continue at that level. He advised that the saving was achievable and that support would be offered appropriately.

Saving reference 9 - Reduction in spend on Looked after Children including those in Out of Borough Placements

It was asked whether this saving was realistic and achievable.

The Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that a number of strategies were in place to deliver this saving. It is a challenge, but more must be done to discharge children from care more quickly where it is safe and appropriate to do.

Saving reference 13 – Review and reduce Youth Services and align functions to the 0-19 Early Help locality model

It was asked how the implications of implementing this saving proposal would be mitigated.

The Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that the model proposed would have some resource available to deliver focussed work within the 0-19 Early Help Locality Model. It was anticipated that the voluntary and community sector would deliver some provision in future. Corporate resource is being used to maximise revenue from external sources.

The Chair expressed concern that the voluntary and community sector would be expected to fill the void as funding to them became more challenging.

Saving reference 14 – Cease or identify alternative funding for the School Improvement Service

The Committee supported the School Improvement Service and noted that it had contributed significantly to school improvement. It was suggested that support would

still need to be offered to mainstream schools and so use of the word 'cease' at 2.1 on page 45 of the report as submitted was misleading.

The Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) noted the point made.

The Panel Resolved:

That the savings proposals be noted.

628/16 CORPORATE FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE – QUARTER 2

A report was submitted [see annexed] detailing the 2016/17 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 2016 to September 2016).

The Chair noted that with use of reserves there was still a forecast overspend of £1.144m. He asked for assurance that this would not increase. The Senior Finance Manager advised that Finance were working closely with senior managers within Children's Services to prevent the forecast overspend from increasing further.

A Member sought clarity on the cost of £38k for an interim appointment. Officers advised that this was a social care management position that had been funded through reserves. The post was no longer in the structure.

Resolved

1. That the revenue forecast for the 2016/17 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 2016/17 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.

629/16 LEARNING FROM NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S CHILDREN'S SERVICES

A report was submitted [annexed] which provided an overview of the learning from the recent visit to North Yorkshire Children's Service in relation to the need to continue to improve services for Looked After Children and Care Leavers and reduce the costs associated with Looked After Children and Out of Borough placements as set out in the current medium term financial strategy options.

Members were advised that the visit had helped the Council to consider its approach to Children's Services and establish what steps need to be undertaken to improve. A project group had been established and project officer appointed to lead the group.

It was emphasised that the number of Looked After Children needed to be reduced safely and, in order to do that, a more systematic, multi-agency approach was required. There was also a need to reduce caseloads to enable social workers to focus on a more relationship based form of social work.

The Chair asked whether there was one fundamental learning point that would make a difference if applied in Walsall. The Assistant Director (Children's Social Care) advised that there was no 'quick fix' but quality leadership, creativity and innovation were key to ensuring delivery of work in a different way.

The Assistant Director (Children's Social Care) explained that it was inspiring to see what is achievable with investment into the service. She emphasised that Walsall had good people in the workforce that are flourishing with the right vision and strategic plan.

The Chair asked whether other Councils had adopted a similar approach. The Assistant Director (Children's Social Care) advised that Leeds had made significant improvements lifting themselves from an Ofsted rating of 'Inadequate' to 'Good'. Staff from Leeds were now training staff at Walsall.

A Member questioned whether the project officer was new or an existing member of staff. They also challenged the Assistant Director on the timescales for completion stating that timescales should be realistic and achievable. The Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that engagement with Partners was crucial and the Project Officer had been appointed to undertake this task. The project plan had been prepared to meet the deadline and he assured Members that this would be closely monitored.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

630/16 WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLANS

Members considered the work programme and forward plans.

Members requested that the following items be considered at a future meeting:-

- Five Year Sufficiency Strategy;
- School Funding Cuts;
- Validated Exam Results
- Scorecard for Special Educational Needs.

Resolved:

1. That the work programme be updated to include the following;

- Five Year Sufficiency Strategy;
- School Funding Cuts;
- Validated Exam Results
- Scorecard for Special Educational Needs.

2. That the forward plans be noted.

631/16 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next meeting was 10 January, 2016.

The meeting terminated at 8.40 p.m.

Chair:

Date:.....