

**Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee  
Conference Room 2, Walsall Council House**

**Tuesday 27 September 2022 at 6.00 p.m.**

**Committee Members Present**

Councillor A. Hicken (Chair)  
Councillors T. Jukes  
Councillor A. Garcha  
Councillor P. Kaur  
Councillor Mazhar  
Councillor Nasreen  
Councillor L. Rattigan  
Councillor Waters  
Councillor Whitehouse  
Councillor K Sears

**Portfolio Holder**

Councillor T Wilson

**Officers**

Julie Jones	-	Group Manager
Philip Rutherford	-	Strategic Lead Youth Justice Services
Isabel Vanderheeren	-	Director Early Help and Partnerships
Colleen Male	-	Director - Children's Social Work
Nikki Gough	-	Democratic Services Officer
Reena Farmah	-	Democratic Services Officer

**10/22 Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillor Harrison, Councillor C. Statham and Councillor Horton.

The Chair welcomed Members to the meeting and introductions were made.

**11/22 Substitutions**

Councillor Whitehouse substituted on behalf of Councillor L. Harrison and Councillor K. Sears substituted on the behalf of Councillor C. Statham for the duration of the meeting.

**12/22 Declarations of interest and party whip**

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

**13/22 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)**

There were no items to be considered in private session.

**14/22 Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 26 July 2022 were considered by the Committee.

## **Resolved**

**That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 26 July 2022 be approved as a true and accurate record.**

### **15/22 Early Help Strategy**

A report was submitted to the Committee and a presentation made by the Early Help Group Manager [annexed].

The Early Help Group Manager spoke to the presentation and informed the Committee about Walsall's Early Help partnership and its aim to provide intervention with the right support to prevent the needs of vulnerable families from escalating to reduce the demand for statutory intervention. The Walsall Early Help partnership, was one where all organisations and services worked with and for children, young people and their families in a collective and coordinated way.

The Committee noted the levels of the early help offer including partners who delivered a range of interventions from signposting to local universal services, delivering single agency support through to more intensive support targeted at levels of need;

- Level 1 Universal services (universal)
- Level 2 Early Help (vulnerable)
- Level 3 Partnership Early Help (complex)
- Level 4 Children family assessment (acute).

The Committee was informed of the Partnership's responsibility for delivering the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities Supporting Families programme, launched in March 2021. The programme was aimed at providing targeted interventions for families with complex interconnected problems and was directly associated to the delivery of the partnership approach at level 3.

The Supporting Families programme had a number of priority areas. Where three or more needs were identified an assessment was conducted by the Early Help team to provide support via an agreed family support plan.

At this point in the meeting members were shown a video regarding the launch of the Early Help Partnership Strategy 2021-2024, which was overseen by an action plan associated with the strategy.

The Early Help Group Manager explained that the demand and needs of children, young people and families with complex needs were increasing following a review conducted in December 2021, these needs were regularly reviewed.

The Portfolio Holder stated that the success of the partnership was dependent upon partners working together. The Portfolio Holder highlighted that the service was non-statutory, however the Council endorsed the service due to its success and positive outcomes for families and young people in the borough. The Council had successfully secured additional funding to support the service.

A Member questioned how success was measured in this area. The Early Help Group Manager responded that its success was evident in the uptake and willingness of families to engage. Support provided since Covid-19 had given families confidence in the service and families had helped shape the service and set priorities. The Director of Early Help and Partnerships described the model of partnership working and links with WHG. Information, data and resource sharing was key across the partnerships. Early help worked closely with the youth justice team on prevention and provide support.

A Member commented that the use of the Locality Hubs was successful and asked whether the service was considering introducing more across Walsall. The Early Help Group Manager explained that Walsall was 1 of 75 local authorities that had been awarded funding for the hubs. The Portfolio Holder stated that prior to the hubs model services was delivered centrally, these had now been moved into the locality, which had helped improve relationships with partners. To further strengthen this training was provided to the partnership and mechanisms to improve communication had been developed.

A Member asked if families at level 1 and 2 were supported. The Early Help Group Manager explained that help was available at different levels, however it was when 3 or more needs were identified that a co-ordinator was allocated to help and support the family.

A Member queried the data for teenage pregnancy and national comparisons, it was questioned how the service was engaging on prevention with these individuals. The Early Help Group Manager explained that the teenage pregnancy team and the steering group had responsibility to reduce numbers of teenage pregnancies. Awareness training was delivered within schools using evidence informed programmes. A discussion took place regarding engagement being positive with secondary schools and families. The Portfolio Holder commented that teenage pregnancy had historically been an issue within the locality. He explained that the service engaged with key partners to address issues as Walsall was above the national average. The Director for Early Help and Partnerships commented that the service aimed to do more work to destigmatise asking for help. The accessibility of data and ease of use of websites was under review to improve accessibility and the sharing of key information about services with partners.

A Member asked whether the number of families requiring help had increased to due the cost of living pressures. The Early Help Group Manager confirmed that the number of families requiring support had been consistently increasing. Finance was one of the Presenting needs of families, the partnership work with the Department for Work and Pensions helped to support these families, finance was anticipated as being an issue for families as the cost of living continued to increase.

The Chair asked for clarity regarding targets and demand for supporting families, he asked whether the service could meet demand if they increased and whether targets were achievable. The Director of Early Help and Partnerships explained that the supporting family target was separate to demand. The supporting families target related to a Government programme which had its own associated targets and was based on data sharing.

A discussion took place at this point in the meeting regarding data accessibility and promoting communication about services. Suggestions were made from members that leaflets should be distributed via schools and colleges, which would be available in multiple languages in order to remove barriers. Members suggested for websites to be accessible and user friendly, including child friendly websites to increase awareness amongst families. The Early Help Group Manager explained that leaflets and websites were used to promote support available and acknowledged this was an area for improvement.

The Chair asked how early help volunteers were sourced and whether they had specific skills set to support families and what their role involved. The Early Help Group Manager explained that the volunteers were from various backgrounds; retired teachers, college students. The service held a profile of all the volunteers containing information of their background and skills, the profile was shown to families in order for them to decide which volunteer they wished to work with, depending on the family's needs. The volunteers' undertake training to support families.

Officers were asked what the biggest impact was on families as a result of Covid-19. The Early Help Group Manager answered; isolation, the decline of emotional health and wellbeing, increased anxiety / behavioural issues amongst teenagers.

The Committee agreed that the service should continue and be funded by the Local Authority. Members congratulated the Early Help Service for the successful service provided.

### **Resolved**

- 1. That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee request that Cabinet continue to fund the Early Help Service.**
- 2. That the direction of travel for the Early Help Partnership be supported.**
- 3. That progress and achievements be noted.**

## **16/22 Youth Justice Annual Plan and Strategic Priorities**

The Strategic Lead for Youth Justice Service spoke to the report (annexed). The Officer provided Members with an overview of the service explaining that the Walsall Youth Justice Service (YJS) was a statutory multi-agency service under Section 37 of the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act in partnership with the Local Authority, Walsall Children's Services, West Midlands Police, National Probation Service and Health [annexed].

Members noted that the service has three national key performance indicators:

- Reducing the number of young people entering the justice system for the first time.
- Reducing re-offending.
- Reducing the use of custodial disposals.

The Officer discussed with Members the Walsall Youth Justice Service Strategic Plan 2022 – 2025 [annexed], the key priorities were highlighted;

- Reducing serious youth violence.
- Responding to disproportionality.
- Transitions and resettlement.
- Identifying and responding to unmet need (health).
- Voice of our children.

A Member questioned what factors contributed to the high percentages for boys in the youth justice system and the impact of Covid-19 on this cohort. The Officer explained that this included a number of factors; a decrease in mental health, increase in anxiety and challenging home lives. The justice service was impacted by the pandemic and delayed proceedings.

The Officer informed Members that Covid-19 for some families' aggravated issues.

A Member shared examples of car crime and antisocial behaviour taking place in their constituency and asked what type of interventions would take place for these individuals. The Officer explained that the intervention and support depended on the child's need and each plan was bespoke, partners worked together to support these needs, it may not be necessarily about the behaviour portrayed at the time of the crimes, but to understand the events leading up to the crimes. Support could be provided from early help or social care colleagues depending on the needs.

A Member questioned if recruitment and retention was an issue for the service due to the challenging work environment. It was confirmed that recruitment and retention was an issue across the service. Colleagues across the West Midlands were experiencing similar issues with recruitment and retention of staff and this was not a Walsall specific issue, this was a key focus area within Children's Services.

A Member questioned the reasons behind trends relating to areas of deprivation and queried whether there were any other factors contributing to the high rates of anti-social behaviour. The Officer responded that over the years there has been a decline in good quality youth services.

A Member questioned whether the youth justice service worked with housing associations to share data about residents that were regularly cause issues. The Officer confirmed that the service didn't receive data from housing, as a regular issue, however the services work closely together on anti-social behaviour issues. The Director of Early Help and Partnerships explained the model of partnership working and links with WHG. Information, data and resources sharing was key across the partnerships. Early help worked closely with the youth justice to review prevention and provide support.

A Member questioned the process around the 'Trailblazer Devolution Deal'. The Officer confirmed that the details of the devolution offer were yet to be shared. An alternative to custody was always a more favourable option.

**Resolved**

- 1. That the Youth Justice Annual Plan and Strategic Priorities be noted**
- 2. That a progress report be taken to a future meeting of the Committee.**

**17/22 Recommendation Tracker**

The Democratic Services Officer confirmed that the committee work program had been circulated. Members requested a progress report on the Youth Justice Service be heard at future a meeting.

**Resolved**

**That the recommendation tracker be noted.**

**18/22 Areas of Focus 2022/23**

Members noted the Committees work program and the forward plan for Walsall Council and the Black Country Executive Committee. Members were asked to e-mail Democratic Services with any additional areas of scrutiny that they considered should be included in the areas of focus.

**Resolved**

**That the areas of focus be agreed for the municipal year 2022/23.**

**19/22 Date of next meeting**

The date of the next meeting will be 3 November 2022 at 6:00p.m.

There being no further business this meeting was terminated at 7:45p.m

Signed:

Date: