

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

Monday 13 March 2023 at 6.00 p.m.

Committee Members Present

Councillor A. Hicken (Chair)

Councillor A. Garcha

Councillor L. Harrison

Councillor S. Nasreen

Councillor F. Mazhar

Councillor C. Statham

Councillor V. Waters

Portfolio Holder

Councillor S. Elson - Children's Services

Officers Present

Colleen Male - Director (Childrens Social Work)

Isabelle Vanderheeren - Director (Early Help)

Nikki Gough - Democratic Services Officer

54/22 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Rattigan and Councillor Jukes.

55/22 Substitutions

There were no substitutions.

56/22 Declarations of interest and party whip

There were no declarations and no party whip of interest.

57/22 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)

There were no items to be considered in private session.

58/22 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2023 were considered by the committee.

Resolved

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 13 March 2023 be approved as a true and accurate record.

59/22 Child Neglect Strategy

The Director (Early Help) presented the report (annexed) and highlighted the salient points. The Committee was informed that child neglect was a strategic priority for the Walsall Safeguarding Partnership, the strategy aimed to drive development and improvement. A child neglect steering group was established in January 2021, and this group identified key principles in effectively supporting children, who experienced neglect at the earliest opportunity, including:

- Training.
- Seeing and Hearing Children.
- Taking Action.

Members were informed that a comprehensive needs assessment and consultation exercise had identified 4 key strategic priorities, each of which were allocated to a lead partner to strengthen the shared accountability of the child neglect agenda. The outcomes framework would be used to determine if the strategy had made an impact.

There then ensued a series of questions, the Director (Early Help) explained that training took place across the partnership, with volunteers trained on awareness and low-level intervention. There were family hubs in four localities, and work would take place with the voluntary sector to further develop this work. Details of a conference were provided, and it was noted that this had been filmed to enable it to be used as a training resource.

In response to questions from Members, Officers explained that some children suffering from neglect were already known to the Authority, whereas others were referred through early help and children were also referred through schools. The police and schools made up the majority of external referrals.

It was noted that the health visiting service continued to face challenges in relation to its workforce.

Resolved

That the Committee supported the work being done with partners through the safeguarding partnership board in relation to the prevention and support of mitigating against the impact of child neglect.

60/22 Walsall Children and Young People Strategic Alliance

The Director (Early Help) presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The Walsall Right 4 Children transformation programme launched in September 2018. In January 2021, a review of the strategic partnership was carried out in collaboration with the CCG, Walsall Healthcare Trust, the Safeguarding Partnership and the Safer Walsall Partnership. The outcome of which recommended the development of the children and young people strategic alliance. The Committee were informed that the alliance provided an opportunity to develop a good understanding of the needs of children and young people in Walsall and a system wide change, which needed to take place to enable improved outcomes.

The Alliance had selected two key areas of focus the first 1001 days of a child's life and school exclusions.

Officers responded to a series of questions, explaining that education colleagues had come together to commission a piece of work in relation to the exclusion of children and to determine the key issues within the system. It was stressed that if children were out of school they were vulnerable and at increased risk of harm. It was stressed that they should be proactively supported to prevent exclusion. A discussion was held around the causes of exclusion, which included unidentified SEN. The need to create a system in which children got the right help at the right time was part of the long-term strategic vision. Family hubs would make information to families more accessible. Challenge was provided in relation to a lack of available support via services to prevent the exclusion, and the need for all parts of the system to be fixed to ensure adequate support could be provided.

Recommendation

That the Committee support the work being done with partners through the development of a Walsall Children and Young People Strategic Alliance to secure better outcomes for children growing up in Walsall.

61/22 Recommendation Tracker

The Democratic Services Officer confirmed that the committee work programme had been circulated.

Resolved

That the recommendation tracker be noted.

62/22 Areas of Focus 2022/23

Resolved

That the areas of focus for the municipal year 2022/23 be noted

Date of next meeting

The date of the next meeting was noted as 18 April 2023 at 6:00 p.m.

There being no further business this meeting was terminated at 7:00 p.m.

Signed:

Date: