

CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

TUESDAY 8 APRIL, 2014 AT 6.00 P.M. AT THE COUNCIL HOUSE

Panel Members Present	Councillor B. Cassidy (Chair) Councillor G. Perry Councillor D. Shires Councillor P. Lane Councillor T. Jukes Councillor E. Hughes
Non elected voting members	S. Raynor (Lichfield Diocesan Education)
Non elected non voting Members present	R. Bragger (Primary Teacher Representative) D. Blackwell (Secondary Teacher Representative)
Portfolio holder present	Councillor R. Andrew
Officers Present	Rose Collinson - Interim Executive Director, Children's Services; Sue Butcher - Interim Assistant Director (Specialist Services) Lynda Poole – Assistant Director – Access and Achievement Karen Grandison - Principal Education Psychologist Karen Marcroft - QA and Performance Information Manager (Head of Service) Neil Picken – Senior Committee Business and Governance Manager

398/14 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor R. Martin.

399/14 SUBSTITUTIONS

None.

400/14 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest or party whip identified at this meeting.

401/14 MINUTES

Members considered the minutes of the meeting held on 25th February, 2014.

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 25th February, 2014, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

402/14 **CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT ACTIVITY, INCLUDING PERFORMANCE.**

The Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) presented a report which provided an overview of work being undertaken to deliver the priorities in the Strategic Improvement Plan with a particular emphasis on securing a ministerial decision to lift the Improvement Notice. In doing so, the Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) introduced Lynda Poole who had recently been appointed to the position of Assistant Director (Access and Achievement).

Members were advised that Children's Services were much better placed to achieve and build on improvements already made.

Members attention was directed to the exception report which focused on placement stability.

The QA and Performance Information Manager (Head of Service) advised that:-

- Looked After Children's short term placement stability (% with 3+ moves in 12 months) had improved (decreased) since June 2013, though the number of looked after children has shown a significant increase: so performance is now good.
- Long term stability (% Looked after for 2.5+ years and in the same placement for 2+ years) is recovering after a mid year dip in performance and still lies just below the regional and national average.
- Both areas had historically had underperformance reported due to Paris reports that were not aligned to statutory guidance, this has been identified and rectified.

A member questioned whether assessment timeliness had improved, specifically the number of initial assessments completed within 10 days? In response the QA and Performance Information Manager (Head of Service) advised that over the last few months performance in this area had been above the national average.

The Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that other authorities had moved to a single assessment, however, Walsall had not yet adopted this approach. Before doing so electronic recording systems needed to be reliable and this matter was being addressed with the implementation of a new system to replace PARIS. The QA and Performance Information Manager (Head of Service) advised that the quality of recording was also improving and regularly audited to ensure consistency.

The Interim Assistant Director (Specialist Services) explained that the structure of specialist services was not ready to move to a single assessment. Changes were also necessary to the current computer system to facilitate a change to single assessments. This was a main driver for the restructure of specialist services and the merging of teams to ensure that the move to single assessments would be possible.

A member raised concern that the number of looked after children (LAC), given the socio economic make up of Walsall should be circa 475, however, it was well above this and rising.

The Interim Assistant Director (Specialist Services) advised that the number was currently 624. It was explained that the higher figure was, in part, due to the fact that figures were suppressed in 2011/12 which was now impacting. There were measures in place to reduce the number of LAC. There was greater emphasis on the safe discharging of LAC as this was an area which could be improved. A project group had been established to look at this in more depth. In addition, a drive was underway to improve and speed up adoption processes. The Adoption Improvement Grant was used to 'family find'

A Member asked whether re-referrals were contributing to the high number of LAC. In response, the Interim Assistant Director (Specialist Services) advised that this was a contributing factor, however, Early Help was not yet as strong as it could be and so it was key to ensure that Early Help provision was effective.

The Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that Early Help services were being developed but there was a gap in 'middle help' which required improvement.

A discussion was held regarding the staff turnover rate. The Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that there had been a 'peak' following the inadequate judgement by Ofsted in 2012. Over the last few months there had been a significant decline in turnover although neighbouring Authorities had increased the rate of pay which could impact upon Walsall's workforce. The number of agency staff had been reduced.

The Chair sought clarity as to the council's education provision. The Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) explained that there had been improvements at early years and primary level though it was accepted that some nursery providers could be improve further. It is important that Children's Centres reach out to those who need them the most.

The Chair asked whether information was available as to the number and reasons for persistent absence and permanent exclusions form school. The Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) assured Members that a briefing would be provided on this matter.

Responding to a question regarding the number of those not in education, employment or training, the QA and Performance Information Manager (Head of Service) agreed to circulate figures to the Panel, as they were unavailable at the meeting.

The Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) summed up by stating whilst there was still some learning to do, overall, education in Walsall was more positive. Schools and governors were improving. The Chair expressed a view that visits could be undertaken in the next municipal year as improvements should become clear.

Resolved

That the Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) produces and circulate a briefing note, detailing the number and reasons for persistent absence and permanent exclusions from school.

403/14 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS PRIORITIES

The Panel considered a report (annexed) providing an update on special educational needs priorities.

The Panel were advised that practices across Health, Children's and Adults' Services were being reformed to meet the requirements of new special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) reforms. The new system places children, young people and their families at the centre of service delivery and places a duty on agencies to work collaboratively.

In Walsall a multi agency strategy group involving parents/carers is working on these developments. A key change with the reforms is that parents and children would only have to tell their story once rather than to each agency. Personal budgets were also being considered for implementation.

A pilot project in Walsall was a single Education, Health and Care Plan with a range of children in special and mainstream schools. The new approach was person centred with plans produced with children, rather than for them.

It was explained that there were 7 special and mainstream schools that provide for SEN. In addition there was outreach support and a number of children were in independent special school provision outside of the borough. Work was being undertaken with schools to develop options for future provision.

A Member asked how it would be possible for children and parents to tell their story 'once' given that a number of agencies would be involved. The Principal Education Psychologist advised that at present parents and children have to repeat their story to each agency. In the new plan a key worker would be allocated to 'hear the story' and would then relay this to other agencies during a 'family conversation'.

The Interim Assistant Director (Specialist Services) advised Members that she would be responsible for SEND as part of the reshape. It would be led by a group manager and matrix managed.

A member indicated that the principles of change were good and that plans were a step forward, however, there was a natural concern that, with special needs places in schools in demand, getting the right child, at the right school at the right time was challenging. Given this it was asked how children are assessed and re-assessed to ensure that the placement is appropriate and most suited to the child or young persons' needs? The Interim Executive Director, Children's Services advised that the present system was overly bureaucratic as Walsall had not reviewed SEND provision for 10 years. There are good special schools, however, these were providing for needs types that we now have less of. Action is required as children are now able to live with

profound disabilities due to improvements in medical science which would not have been the case 10 years ago. Mainstream schools are now much better placed to support children with moderate difficulties and so the entire system needed to be revisited to ensure that every child and young person receives the best education and support available. It is important that Walsall children and young people live, learn and grow up in Walsall.

It was explained that schools were good at identifying children which may need additional support and that work had been undertaken with SEN Coordinators to 'rest the button'. The Principal Education Psychologist advised that there was a SENCO coordinator, educated to Masters level, at each mainstream school that dealt with fairly complex cases. There was a SENCO forum in place to share learning and best practice and school to school support was being developed.

The Chair questioned whether the reforms would be complete by September 2015? It was explained that every effort was being made to ensure it was implemented in time.

The Chair suggested that the matter be revisited in the 2014/15 municipal year as the Panel needed to be assured that services are improved. This was welcomed by the Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) who stated that communication was vital as many people were used to existing systems which would change.

The Chair suggested that a change in culture would be required to successfully implement a new system. The key was for parents to tell their story once and place them at the centre of the process. Further, it was important that the process was streamlined and that parents do not feel that they have to 'battle' to get their voices heard.

A Member asked about the transition into adult social care. The Principal Education Psychologist advised that the reform covered individuals up to the age of 25. Work was being undertaken with Adult Services to smooth the transition stage. The Chair suggested that a case study of a transition be considered when the matter comes before the Panel in the 2014 Municipal Year.

A Panel Member queried the training in place for Senco staff. It was explained that training had started for SENCO staff and that key worker training would commence in the summer term.

The Panel Member requested that a full range of options be submitted to the Panel for Members consideration. It was agreed that this would be presented to the Panel.

Resolved

That Special Educational Needs Priorities be added to the 2014/15 work programme.

404/14 COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

The Principal Corporate Performance Officer provided an update on progress with implementation of the new Complaints Procedure (annexed). In doing so, he explained that a further update would be provided in July, 2014.

It was highlighted that a particular area of focus was that of learning from complaints. The Operational Manager's Group met monthly and identified and disseminated learning from complaints. The Group also monitor and improve the effectiveness of the complaints procedure and provide weekly reports to the Assistant Director to improve compliance with timescales.

A new training programme was being rolled out from April including face to face and e-learning.

Members were advised that Council4Kids were being engaged in the production of the annual report for 2013/14. This details an overview of complaints received during the year, and the learning identified. Council4Kids views would be on the overall effectiveness of the complaints procedure would be used to shape the final report which would be presented to Scrutiny in July, 2014.

The Chair questioned whether or not the annual report would identify whether a complaint had been submitted by a child or an adult. In response, the Principal Corporate Performance Officer confirmed that there would be a breakdown.

A member questioned whether feedback was provided to complainants on the lessons learnt and the actions taken, if required, to prevent similar occurrences arising in future. The Principal Corporate Performance Officer advised that this information was included in the response letter. Work was being undertaken with managers to ensure that the use of language when responding was consistent.

The Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) emphasised that the speed of the response was very important.

The Chair commented that the review of complaints and the new procedure would help the Council with vexatious complainants which were costly in terms of staff time. It was important that the Council was confident in responding appropriately and taken steps to deal with vexatious complainants.

The Principal Corporate Performance Officer explained that there had been two complaints to the ombudsman, however, the ombudsman found in favour of the Council on both occasions.

Resolved

- 1. That a further report on Complaints be submitted to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel in July, 2014;**
- 2. That the report be noted.**

405/14 PUPIL PREMIUM BRIEFING

The Panel considered a report (annexed) providing an overview of Pupil Premium funding.

It was explained that Pupil Premium is additional funding given to publicly funded schools in England to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and close the gap

between them and their peers. During the 2014 to 2015 financial year, pupil premium funding would rise to £2.5 billion.

The Interim Executive Director (Children’s Services) advised that more could be done to ‘close the gap’ in Walsall. Some schools had achieved more than others and so opportunities to pair such schools with others which had not performed as well was being implemented.

The Chair questioned how schools spent this money and the impact it had? In response, the Assistant Director – Access and Achievement advised that the criteria had been tightened to ensure that the money was spent specifically on the child. This was now a measure when Ofsted review schools. It was also explained that schools should not carry forward pupil premium into the next financial year as it should be spent on children’s education in –year.

The Chair suggested that a further discussion on this matter be considered in the 2014-15 municipal year. This should include details on allocation, accountability of schools to ensure that pupil premium is being spent as intended and the potential impact universal infant free school meals for all.

Resolved

That Pupil Premium be added to the 2014/15 work programme.

406/14 WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN

Members considered the work programme and forward plan (annexed).

Resolved

That the work programme and forward plan be noted.

407/14 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was noted as 29 April, 2014 at 6.00 p.m.

The meeting terminated at 7.45 p.m.

Chair:

Date:.....