

**16 February 2017**

**Children's Services Performance Reporting End of Quarter 3  
(April to December 2016)**

**Ward(s)**                      All

**Portfolios:** Cllr R Burley – Portfolio Holder for Education and Children's Services

**Executive Summary:**

The report provides an overview the performance of Children's Services to the end of Quarter 3 (April to December 2016)

**Reason for scrutiny:**

The report provides information about the key indicators within Children's Services so that the Scrutiny Panel is fully aware of the range of indicators, the areas of good performance and areas which need to improve, including information about action being taken to address the areas for improvement. This information enables Scrutiny to monitor, scrutinise and challenge performance in Children's Social Care and ensure itself that the Department is focused on the right priorities for improvement.

**Recommendations:**

**That:** Scrutiny notes the contents of the report and understands the strengths, areas of improvement and actions to address them.

Scrutiny provides challenge on the content of the report and receive assurance about corrective action being taken to secure improvement

**Background papers:**

Children's Services Performance Scorecard  
Presentation of Q3 score card

**Resource and legal considerations:**

None arising directly from this report.

**Citizen impact:**

The delivery of effective Children's Early Help and Social Care Services has a direct impact on the welfare and wellbeing of children and young people. Walsall is

a Corporate Parent for some of our children and will undertake this role well. It links directly to the Corporate Priority to improve Health and Wellbeing and the Children's services priority that all children and young people in Walsall are safe, happy and learning well. The delivery of effective social care and Early Help services ensures that children in Walsall are safeguarded and protected from harm.

**Environmental impact:**

None directly arising from this report.

**Performance management:**

Monitoring the effective delivery and impact of services to children young people and their families and the impact is essential so that the Council can be assured that the resources at its disposal are being used to maximum impact. The performance management process operating in Children's Services and with key partners ensures that data, intelligence and evidence are available to assess and drive performance improvement. Children's Services has a monthly Performance and Improvement Board in place to monitor performance and the impact of actions to address areas of improvement.

**Equality Implications:**

The Council's equality of opportunity policy and procedures are operated by the Council and Children's Services Directorate. Any issues of inequality are challenged and addressed by the Directorate's Senior Management team and the Performance and Improvement Board.

**Consultation:**

Regular consultation with parents/carers, staff, children and young people inform the Directorate's Performance Management Framework.

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## Report

This is narrative accompanies the Scrutiny Board scorecard to summarise the key areas of improvement and sustained performance and areas for improvement.

### 1. **Front door to Children's Social Care Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and Early Help Hub**

1.1 **Early Help:** The number of contacts directly to the Early Help Hub has increased in 2016/1. This is in part due to the widening of the function of the Hub to provide information, advice and telephone signposting to appropriate agencies. The number of early help assessment has reduced because the use of family star has increased. This is an assessment tool that is easy to undertake with children and families and can be used instead of the early help assessment. There has been a reduction in the number of cases closed with a positive outcome. This is due to better recording and also due to a number of families who have failed to engage with the early help offer and have consequently been stepped up to social care.

We recognise the need to further support early help and partnership staff to enhance and develop their skills to engage parents and prevent failure of engagement. It is important to note that where necessary families who do fail to engage are referred to social care (where engagement is not an option).

1.2 **Rate of referrals** stabilising at a level in line with statistical neighbours but still above the England average. The MASH and effective Early Help services are having an impact on this. The number of referrals resulting in no further action for Children's Social Care Services has reduced. This demonstrates that the changes at the 'front door' with the implementation of the early help hub and MASH are now embedding and sustaining effective practice quality assurance work routinely reviews the contacts that progress to referrals. This demonstrates that these have been appropriately assessed as requiring a service.

1.3 **Re-referrals rates continue to reduce.** There is further work to be done to bring performance into line with statistical neighbours and national averages. Focused audit and case monitoring work has been undertaken to understand the reasons for re-referrals which relate largely to repeat domestic violence and neglect cases.

1.4 **Timeliness of child and family assessments:** The majority of assessments are completed within the 45 day timescale and this is good performance in relation to statistical neighbours and England average. There are reviews at 15 days and 30 days to ensure timeliness is met. There is monitoring to continually audit and dip sample to improve the quality of assessments. The majority of children and family assessments are complete within the Initial Response Service or Children with Disabilities team with a small number being completed in Safeguarding and Family Support. The quality of the assessments and initial plans for children need to continue to improve.

### 2. **Child in Need and Child Protection**

2.1 **Child in need (CIN):** The number of CiN is stable. The full year is likely to see a small increase because as the number of children on child protection plans

reduces they are supported and risk is managed on a CiN plan for at least three months. CiN are actively worked and there is a step-down process to ensure follow up in Early Help to sustain improvements. Audit activity has highlighted that the process for reviewing CiN plans needs to be robustly monitored to minimise drift and ensure that emerging or new risks are effectively managed.

**2.2 Children subject to child protection plans:** there has been good progress to ensure that the right children are made subject of a child protection plan. We have reviewed the format of the child protection conferences as part of implementing restorative practice. This has been well received by families and professionals and is beginning to have an impact in changing the way in which we all consider risk and the appropriateness of a child protection plan for each child. Audit activity has highlighted that the quality of child protection plans needs to improve to ensure that actions are always outcome focused and demonstrate impact. In addition the effectiveness of core group activity needs to be monitored to ensure that progress against the child protection plan is consistently and robustly monitored and challenged. The practice of Team Managers chairing the first core group is being reinforced to address this and focused work is being undertaken to improve core group activities.

### **3. Looked after Children and Care Leavers**

**3.1 Looked after Children:** admission rates have gradually reduced over the last three quarters due to more robust pre-proceedings work and edge of care work. However LAC remains high with continued challenges in relation to discharge of care orders at home and variation of orders to Special Guardianship Orders. It is expected that 14 children placed at home with parents will have their care orders discharged by the end of March 2017. A dedicated group manager has been appointed to oversee the discharge work in the Corporate Parenting Team as part of the wider transformation work.

**3.2 Placement stability:** long-term stability for children who have been looked after for 2.5 years and remained in the same placement for over 2 years has declined slightly since March 2016 from 64.5% to 61.8% at the end of December 2016. This is under review with audit and quality assurance being undertaken to fully understand the causes and address any areas for improvement that rise.

**3.3 Adoption:** performance against all the key indicators remains good.

**3.5 Care leaver in suitable accommodation:** 90 % of care leavers are in suitable accommodation. The service knows the reasons why the remaining 10% (12 young people) are not classified as being in suitable accommodation, which includes 7 young people in custody, 3 are not in touch of their own choice. There are 2 young people staying with friends and action is being progressed to secure suitable accommodation that meets their needs.

**3.6 Care Leaver in suitable education, employment or training:** 54% are in suitable education, employment and training which means that 46% are NEET. The NEET action group led by the Head of the virtual school is proactively tracking and implement actions for all young people that are NEET. This is a significant priority for the service and a detailed delivery plan is in place monitored by the Corporate Parenting Board. The YEI Impact programme is having a good impact

with 23 16-24 year olds so far engaged.

4. **Youth Offending:** Performance against all the key indicators remains good.
5. **Staffing:** Recruitment and retention continues to be a key challenge. There continues to be insufficient experienced social workers applying for permanent posts, however we are very successful in the recruitment of newly qualified workers. This means that to ensure there is resilience in the service we continue to be reliant on agency social workers in the short term. The number of agency workers is highest in the Safeguarding and Family Support Service. A recruitment and retention strategy is in place with the objective to reduce this reliance on agency workers for example, by recruiting newly qualified workers and retaining those currently in the programme and supporting them to develop in to experienced workers and stay with Walsall. The proposed case load promise and introduction of senior practitioner role in some parts of the service will provide a career pathway for workers who wish to stay in practice. The recruitment and retention strategy outlines a three year plan to develop and retain our newly qualified workers so they stay with us and grow in experience and skills. This is supplemented by a robust learning and development programme.

The following initiatives are also in place to support recruitment:

- Step up to Social Work programme is a fast track intensive post graduate social work training programme. We currently have five 'Step Up' students who will finish in March 2017 and will commence employment with us as newly qualified workers. These are students who have demonstrated resilience in completing the demanding programme in 14 months and have high academic ability.
- Front line is a Government initiative which provides an alternative approach to training social workers. In essence social work trainees are recruited and learn 'on the job' within safeguarding teams. They train in a unit of four trainees with a consultant social worker who oversees their development. The programme lasts for a year and they have academic input at the beginning of the programme for five weeks. The West Midlands has been successful in securing involvement in this programme, which will start in September. In Walsall we will have 8 front line trainees in two units both based within the Safeguarding and Family Support Service at Essington Lodge. When they complete their programme they are then employed as newly qualified social workers.
- Grow your own scheme – we are offering to support three existing staff a year to go through the Open University 4 year route to qualifying as a social worker. This will be funded by the apprenticeship levy.

There is an active recruitment campaign and we will be at the Compass job fair in March.

- 6 **Audit activity:** Consistency and quality of social work practice continues to be the main priority including robust supervision and management oversight. To this end the supervision policy has been re launched and all front line managers have had training. The unit model is being rolled out across all the service areas with the case holding team in SFS, LAC and CwD. This is an approach to organising social workers and each unit will be led by a Team Manager who will have direct line management and supervisory responsibility for 6 to 7 social workers. They

will be supported by a senior social work practitioner whose main focus will be on supporting practice improvement. The unit will have a weekly meeting with a set agenda, which will include organising work for the week, sharing feedback from audit activity, sharing and addressing performance and undertaking reflective learning on specific cases or specific area of work.

An intensive practice uplift programme will take place over the next three months to focus on improving consistency and compliance with basic practice focusing on the following areas. This will involve small bite sized workshop activities within each unit to reinforce good practice standards and expectations. This will be in addition to the ongoing learning and development programme.

- Using an analytical chronology
- Assessment and analysis
- Improve risk management
- Ensuring children's voice is heard and recorded
- Relationship building ...seeing children more than the statutory minimum
- Outcome focused plans and care planning for LAC

## 7 Summary of Achievement and Priorities

<b>Achievements</b>	<b>Priorities</b>
<p>Sustained improvement at the Front Door</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embedding of Early Help</li> <li>• Stable referral rates</li> <li>• Reduction in re-referrals</li> <li>• Sustained improvement of assessment timeliness</li> </ul> <p>Secured two Frontline units for Walsall to start in September 2017</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Successfully recruited two Consultant Social worker</li> </ul> <p>Caseloads gradually reducing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All ASYEs have 15 children</li> <li>• LAC caseloads reduced towards 15 children</li> <li>• SFS – slightly higher at 20</li> </ul> <p>Unit model being rolled out across the teams to ensure parity with the Frontline approach</p> <p>Realigned Management arrangements in Looked After Children and Safeguarding</p>	<p>Ensure stability of the workforce. This continues to be a challenge in the safeguarding and family support service where there are still too many agency workers.</p> <p>Implement the caseload guarantee within Safeguarding and Family Support Service with capacity to ensure the complexity as well as the number of cases are considered</p> <p>Ensure the consistent quality of good social work practice, recording and supervision/management over-sight.</p> <p>Ensure the embedding of good quality case work and reporting through the Mosaic system and start the rollout of mobile technology for social workers.</p> <p>Discharge / variation of care orders to reduce numbers of children at home on care orders and to increase Special Guardianship Orders for close family carers where placements are stable and secure</p>

<p>Family Support Service to improve supervisory ratios</p> <p>Updated recruitment and retention policy – rolling recruitment campaign producing steady results</p> <p>Completed phase 1 of ‘Owning and Driving for Performance’ – management programme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 80 front line managers completed over three months</li> </ul> <p>Safeguarding service championing restorative practice in chairing of child protection conferences with positive feedback</p> <p>Good engagement with regional migration partnership re dispersal of UASC</p> <p>Recruitment of new Group Manager to Safeguarding Family Support Service</p> <p>Appointment of project manager to lead on LAC transformation work</p> <p>Adopting Mocking Bird model for fostering</p> <p>Three successful events for LAC supported by Foster Care Association</p>	<p>Increase the number of care leavers in employment and training</p> <p>Recruit more foster carers</p>
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