

## **CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **COUNCIL CHAMBER, WALSALL COUNCIL HOUSE**

**Tuesday 8 March 2022 at 6.00 p.m.**

#### **Committee Members Present:**

Councillor A. Hicken ( Chair)  
Councillor F. Mazhar (Vice Chair)  
Councillor Bashir  
Councillor G. Flint  
Councillor Kaur  
Councillor K. Murphy  
Councillor A. Nawaz  
Councillor L. Rattigan  
Councillor C. Statham

#### **Portfolio Holder**

Councillor T. Wilson (Via Teams)

#### **Officers**

Colleen Male - Director, Children's Social Work  
Isabel Vanderheeran - Transformation Lead  
Rita Homer - Head of Family Safeguarding and Localities  
Neil Picken - Principal Democratic Services Officer

37/21

#### **Apologies**

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillors A. Hussain and M Nazir for the duration of this meeting.

38/21

#### **Substitutions**

None.

39/21

#### **Declarations of Interest and party whip**

There were no declarations of interest for the duration of the meeting

40/21

#### **Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)**

There were no items to be considered in private session.

41/21

### **Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 31 January, 2022 were considered by the Committee.

### **Resolved**

**That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 31 January, 2022 be approved as a true and accurate record.**

42/21

### **Family Safeguarding – Progress in 18 Months**

The Head of Family Safeguarding and Localities presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed).

There then followed a period of questioning by members. In response to a question regarding cost savings, officers advised that they had been working on a partnership model with engagement of key agencies to embed cultural and systemic change. Budgets were being used differently to create better outcomes. This was supported by the Portfolio for Children's Services who confirmed that positive outcomes should always come before the costs.

The Chair referred to the service delivered in the Butts area and asked whether EHCP's were undertaken at that location. Officers advised that work was underway with colleagues in education and a further report would be submitted to a future meeting as it linked with locality decision making.

A member sought assurance that there was still contact once a child was no longer on a child protection plan. Officers confirmed that the child would still be a child in need and the situation would be managed under a child in need plan until the child's needs were addressed. This is to prevent patterns of repeat referrals.

In relation to Hubs, it was asked whether need was being met in the same way across all localities. Officers confirmed that the offer would be the same but that where possible but data would be used in a more sophisticated way so that each areas offer was tailored to meet need.

Members queried whether for some families, this type of intervention wasn't suited. Officers explained that family safeguarding was specific to the trio of vulnerabilities. However, we are considering how we can extend the model. A number of pilots would be carried out in near future.

Clarity was sought on the process and specifically which team takes the lead to co-ordinate what's required and what input the community has. Officers highlighted that Child and family assistants identify the needs of the family and group supervision was led by child social care

team manager. Members were advised that each partner focussed on the outcome of the child but was informed by a multi-disciplinary perspective. A member noted the point but raised concern that with a group of people involve, the child's needs may get lost and that this may not happened if there was one person focussed on the child. Officers explained that the social worker is the lead professional and that the model was in place to ensure that as well as focusing on the needs of the child, that the adult practitioners were in place to help each family member. In terms of input from the community, Members were informed that next area of focus as we move into the localities is that they would build resilience within communities over the coming 12 months and move to a 'hub and spokes' model of delivery. This was important as once a statutory intervention was no longer in place, there needed to be support for family's within local communities.

The Chair asked whether the localities model would be operational when the hubs opened to which officers explained that work has already started with Early Help already working in localities and Social Work Teams working from a central base but within their localities. Time to Talk multi-agency discussions are already established across each locality. There is a clear plan on how we will strengthen partnership working within each of the localities which will improve outcomes for children and their families.

Discussion ensued on how perpetrators are supported. Officers advised that whilst there was a national shortage of probation officers, Walsall were partnering with a Coventry based organisation, the police and SWP to identify ways to deliver support to perpetrators. A Member asked what was being done to retain the workforce to which officers explained that posts were fixed term as they were paid for by a funding stream. It is important that we can move to permanent contracts at the earliest opportunity.

In closing, the chair sought clarity as to how EHCP plans interlinked with child protection plans. Officers informed committee that the EHCP pulls together all the needs of the child and that all plans aligned with the EHCP.

### **Resolved**

1. That the proposals for the ongoing implementation and development of the Family Safeguarding Model, both internally and across the Partnership, be supported: and
2. That a further update be provided to the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee in December, 2022.

The Lead on Transformation for Children's Services introduced the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed).

There then followed a period of questioning by members. A member asked what the challenges were to engage with children. Officers explained that a broad approach was undertaken to engage children as it was clear from 'The Big Conversation' that children open up to the person with whom they have the best relationship. This could be a professional or an individual from the voluntary sector. A particular challenge was engaging with adolescents as some expressed feeling that engaging won't make a difference. It was important to engage with all children and young people and to explain that it would and could make a difference. By ensuring that children and young people talk to the person they have the best relationship with enables the council to hear what they have to say and includes checking whether changes have been made which, to them, have made a difference.

In response to a query regarding socio economic data of the 1700 children, the Committee heard that a national survey had been undertaken. The officer agreed to review the analysis to establish whether it contained information regarding ethnicity. Work was being undertaken to understand communities with Walsall Together as some groups would take up preventative support whereas others wouldn't. It was important to undertake work to understand the reasons for this.

At the invitation of the Chair, the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services emphasised that the child's voice was at the heart of the service and that it was important to feedback to them.

The Chair thanked members for their questions and in closing, asked what Ofsted had said regarding the voice of children. Officers confirmed that Ofsted recognised that young people were at the heart of decision making.

### **Resolved**

That the report be noted.

36/21

### **CAMHS Briefing Note**

The Committee received a briefing note providing responses to questions raised at the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 12<sup>th</sup> October, 2021.

Whilst for noting only, the Director – Children's Social Work explained that this service was not run by the local authority and was under significant pressure due to high levels of demand. It was important to work collaboratively to achieve the best outcomes for children and young people.

Discussion followed as to how best to constructively challenge and support CAMHS. Further to which it was:-

**Resolved**

That a joint letter from the Chair of the Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Portfolio Holder for Children’s Services and Director of Children’s Services be set to the Chief Executive of CAMHS to acknowledge the challenging environment within which they are working, thank them for attending numerous council committees and explain that the Council wish to continue to work in partnership to achieve the best outcomes for children and Young People.

37/21

**Areas of Focus**

The Committee considered the areas of focus document.

**Resolved**

- 1. The areas of focus and forward plans were noted; and**
- 2. That Family Safeguarding be added to the 22/23 work programme for December, 2022.**

The date of the next meeting was 13<sup>th</sup> April, 2022 at 6.00 p.m.

**Termination of Meeting**

The meeting terminated at 7.15 p.m.

Signed .....

Date .....