

# EDUCATION AND CHILDRENS SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Agenda Item  
No. 6

**DATE: 16 OCTOBER 2017**

## **OFSTED INSPECTION OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN IN NEED OF HELP & PROTECTION , CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER AND CARE LEAVERS**

**Ward(s)** All

**Portfolio:** Councillor Nawaz – Children and Young People

### **1. Purpose of report**

To inform the Committee of the outcome of the recent Ofsted Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers and review of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB)

To advise the Committee of the actions taken to date in response to Ofsted's recommendations

### **2. Reason for scrutiny**

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee monitors the quality and performance of the Council's services to children and their families; the outcome of the recent inspection and the planned improvements are integral to this.

### **3. Recommendation**

- To consider the findings of the Ofsted Inspection
- To note the actions being taken in response to Ofsted's recommendations set out in **Appendix 1** and to identify any further actions required by the Committee at this stage
- To note that an action plan is being prepared and will be submitted to Cabinet on 13 December 2017
- To agree to receive a quarterly update on Ofsted improvements and monitor progress against key areas of performance

### **4. Background**

Ofsted inspected Children's Services over a 4 week period from 20 June to 13 July across the 4 week period. The inspection was based on the Ofsted Single Inspection Framework (SIF) which covers all service areas from Early Help , front door

arrangements (referrals into MASH), Children in Need , Children subject to a Child Protection Plan , Looked After Children and Care leavers, Fostering and Adoption services. The final report, previously circulated to scrutiny member, was published on 4 September 2017 (<https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/local-authorities/walsall>)

The report sets out the key judgement of Walsall's Children's services as '*Overall Children's Services in Walsall requires improvement to be good*'.

Individual judgements were:

1. Children who need help and protection –*Requires Improvement*
2. Children Looked After and achieving permanence – *Requires Improvement*
  - 2.1 Adoption performance – *Good*
  - 2.2 Experiences and progress of care leavers – *Requires Improvement*
3. Leadership , management and governance – *Requires Improvement*

Within the report it states that whilst 'services are not yet good overall, the local authority '*understands well its strengths and areas for development. There are a number of wide ranging initiatives, such as the caseload promise, a comprehensive training and development offer and a clear practice framework based on restorative practice. Progressively this commitment is strengthening practice and the quality of services*'

The report sets out 12 recommendations for improvement ( detailed in **Appendix 1**) , which in summary cover:

- Understanding and application of thresholds
- Front line management oversight of practice and decision making
- Assessment, safety planning and interventions for children at risk of sexual exploitation
- Care leavers who are not in education , training and employment
- Care leavers access to good physical and emotional health services and health histories
- Pathway planning for care leavers
- Guidance and legal advice when placing children in arrangements with friends and family
- The application of private fostering regulations
- Plans for permanence and fostering to adopt arrangements
- Life story work for children looked after
- Scrutiny committee and corporate parenting board arrangements
- Use of performance information to manage and support front line practice

The Local Safeguarding Board (LSCB) was also reviewed during the inspection and deemed to require improvement

Within 70 working days of the publication date of the final report, the Council is required to submit a post inspection action plan to the Secretary of State and her Majesty's Chief Inspector (**The Education and Inspection Act 2006 Regulations 2007**). The last submission date will be **11 December 2017**

The action plan is now being prepared to address the areas for improvement

identified (the recommendations and required improvement actions will be incorporated within the existing single Strategic Improvement Plan )

Each recommendation will have a defined set of management actions which are owned by specific senior officers within the Directorate. They will each have a timescale, a set of specific measures and outcomes which benefit children, young people and families.

## **5. Resource and legal considerations**

There are no legal implications arising from this report. Resource requirements will be considered in relation to any service improvements necessary.

## **6. Citizen impact**

The services and the improvements that the Ofsted report concerns play a key role in the quality of life and outcomes for the children, young people and families of Walsall.

## **7. Environmental impact**

None

## **8. Performance management**

The quality and performance of the Council's services for children and their families, including progress against the improvement plan will be monitored monthly at Children's Services Divisional Management Team and Performance Board. It is proposed to provide a quarterly update to Children's services scrutiny committee

## **9. Equality Implications**

Responding to the recommendations set out in the Ofsted report will secure improvements in the equality of services, which, when achieved will have a positive impact on our most vulnerable children, young people and families.

## **10. Consultation**

There is no requirement for specific consultation about this report.

4 staff engagement sessions have taken place since the publication of the report to share findings and seek staff input into the action plan for improving services. Officers are working with partners critical to responding to Ofsted's recommendations and improving services to secure their input and buy in to the action plan for improvement

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**Signed:**

Eleni Ioannides

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**Walsall children..... Safe, Happy, Learning Well...**

## Ofsted Inspection – Walsall Children’s Services 2017

### Executive Summary

In July this year, an inspection team from Ofsted assessed Children’s Services as ‘Requiring Improvement to be Good’ overall, with adoption rated as ‘Good’. The executive summary of the inspection report published on 4 September 2017 and an initial response of what we are, or will do, to meet Ofsted’s recommendations and improve outcomes for children, young people and families in Walsall is provided below. Children’s Services Strategic Improvement Plan and other plans are being revised to ensure we are focussing with pace on these important issues.

Link to Full Ofsted Report: <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/local-authorities/walsall>

Ofsted Said ...	We Are/We Will...
<p>1. Services for children in Walsall are not yet good overall. Senior leaders have worked intensely to improve the quality of children’s social care services and to ensure that children receive the help and protection that they need. The director of children’s services (DCS) and the senior management team provide visible leadership; they are keenly focused on improving children’s services and the lives of vulnerable children and families in Walsall. The local authority understands well its strengths and areas for development. There are a number of wide-ranging initiatives, such as the caseload promise, a comprehensive training and development offer and a clear practice framework based on restorative practice. Progressively, this commitment is strengthening practice and the quality of services. However, the necessary improvements are not yet in place across all services and, as a result, some key areas still require improvement to be good.</p> <p>2. The local authority recognises the improvements that need to be made. Significant corporate investment and increasing momentum are enhancing the workforce and improving service quality through the ‘practice uplift’ initiative. Restructuring to smaller social work teams with lower supervision ratios, along with manageable caseloads, is improving services for some children. Social workers, including newly qualified social workers, are increasingly well trained and supported.</p>	<p>The senior leadership team under the interim DCS, Eleni Ioannides, continues to lead and support staff to focus on improving children’s lives. We continue to engage with staff at all levels (4 staff engagement sessions have taken place since September) to ensure we understand current strengths, issues and required actions to improve..</p> <p>The newly appointed permanent DCS Sally Rowe ensures continuity of leadership and will own and drive improvements to be good.</p> <p>We continue to develop our performance frameworks to help us evidence how well we are doing, and what we can do better. We will maintain a focus on strengthening practice and embedding the good things we have started. Our attention will also be in specific areas, such as CSE and understanding of thresholds, which we know requires a partnership approach to improve.</p> <p>We will continue to make every effort to reduce caseloads, despite a ‘bulge’ in increased referrals, child protection plans and associated work to protect and support children and their families.</p> <p>We will use the regional peer review and self evaluation event in November to</p>

	challenge and support our planned improvements to be good.
<p>3. Embedding and sustaining positive change is undermined by the high turnover rate of frontline social workers and first-line managers. This constant change, across many service areas, continues to challenge the delivery of the local authority's ambitious improvement plan. Performance information available to frontline managers has yet to become effective. Without this level of assurance at the front line of services, the local authority cannot be certain that it has an accurate overview of every child's circumstances.</p>	<p>As at 4<sup>th</sup> September, we have had 35 new members of staff appointed with a further 9 in the process of starting. Currently there are 39 social work vacancies across IRS, SFS and Corporate Parenting services and our vacancy rate is gradually reducing. There are just two team manager vacancies, and this is a significant achievement.</p> <p>We had already commenced a programme of support to front line managers, including issuing guidance to access a range of reports on Mosaic; a review of reports available, introduction of dashboards via Qlikview, a 'performance portal' of information including access to research and plans for a 'managing performance' workshop for managers and to access and utilise performance information, which is on schedule to be completed by 31 October 2017.</p>
<p><b>Ofsted Recommendation 12:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure that frontline managers have routine access to performance information so that they can effectively manage and support good frontline practice.</li> </ul>	
<p>4. Good-quality staff supervision is not yet established across all teams. Inspectors saw some case supervision records which critically evaluate progress by challenging and providing detailed and purposeful actions. In many cases, management oversight is too brief and the rationale for decision-making is not always evident on children's files. This means that it is not always possible to track key events and identify evidence for decisions made. As a result, there is drift and delay in taking action when risks increase or progress is limited or not sustained. This is more evident where social workers have experienced a constant churn of team managers and have high caseloads. In the past six months, supervision has been of a better quality.</p>	<p>Better frequency and quality of reflective supervision, as well as management oversight generally has been a driver for the new unit model which was implemented earlier in the year. We have recruited permanent team managers, reduced caseloads in <b>some</b> areas, and we will monitor supervision closely through audit and a new supervision monitoring system.</p> <p>We will continue to reduce caseloads to our caseload promise, pro-actively monitor supervision and take action where necessary; improve management oversight through reinforcing practice standards and expectations at all levels and ensure that this is improving by offering ongoing support and training and monitoring impact on casework via the audit process.</p>
<p><b>Ofsted Recommendation 2:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure that frontline management oversight of practice improves the quality of decisions and the provision of help to children.</li> </ul>	
<p>5. Multi-disciplinary teams across the borough deliver intensive early help services successfully, providing support to a wide range of needs. Early help is making a positive difference to children's lives, but is not yet reducing the number of referrals to children's social care. Partners' understanding of the thresholds of need is not sufficiently established across all</p>	<p>Research tells us that it can take 18 months to two years before effective early help will have a positive impact on reducing referrals to children's social care, as uncovering unmet need, increased demand and other factors also impact on referrals.</p>

<p>agencies. Although referrals from professionals are timely, a high proportion of contacts either do not meet the threshold for statutory intervention or are insufficiently detailed for managers to make a decision about the next steps. Consequently, the local authority is not yet effective in building an accurate enough picture of children's circumstances to make sure that they always receive the right support for their needs.</p>	
<p><b>Ofsted Recommendation 1:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure that thresholds of need are understood and applied at every stage of the child's journey.</li> </ul>	<p>That said, we will continue to integrate Health Visitors in the delivery of Early Help and target the additional capacity this should give us at CiN and CPP whilst strengthening the alignment between SFS and Early Help Locality panels to ensure the right children receive the right help at the right time. The Local Safeguarding Children's Board have an important role in revising the Thresholds document and ensuring children's needs are met at the right level.</p> <p>Walsall children's services has already reviewed which organisations / partners are referring inappropriately or referring without full information, and we will work with these specific organisations / partners to improve their understanding of thresholds. We are simplifying the multi-agency referral form and working with partners to improve information provided.</p>
<p>6. Social workers and managers do not always sufficiently understand the impact of children living in situations of neglect, domestic abuse and parental drug misuse and, in a small number of cases; children have not received the necessary level of support. Work to protect children at risk of, or experiencing sexual exploitation, is not rigorous enough. Risk assessments are evident but vary in quality, and there is limited analysis. As a result, risks of sexual exploitation to some children, including children looked after, are not responded to effectively.</p>	<p>The LSCB is implementing a Neglect Strategy which includes impact of 'toxic trio'. We have recently implemented the Graded Care Profile and will improve use of this tool in identification of Neglect. We will ensure we have a greater focus in this area.</p> <p>We will target training on improving the use of risk assessment models and safety planning for children at risk of CSE.</p>
<p><b>Ofsted Recommendation 3:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve the response to all children at risk of child sexual exploitation, making sure that all assessments, safety plans and interventions are of a consistently good quality.</li> </ul>	
<p>7. Some children who should be looked after experience delays when the threshold for care has been met. A small number of children who are already looked after experience delays in permanence planning. Friends and family fostering arrangements are not always sufficiently assessed. This can leave children looked after without the right level of support and protection. Service improvements are clearly evident in adoption, where services are good. However, the local authority does not yet routinely support children to live with their adopters at the earliest opportunity through foster to adopt arrangements.</p>	<p>'Reduce the number of looked after children, safely' is one of the four priorities in children's services. Over the past year, a LAC reduction strategy and our improvement plans include actions to achieve this. This includes achieving better quality assessments and decision making through the recent 'practice uplift' together with permanency tracking.</p>



<p><b>Ofsted Recommendations 1,9,7:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that thresholds of need are understood and applied at every stage of the child's journey.</li> <li>• Take steps to ensure that care plans for all children who have a plan for permanence progress within the child's timescale to avoid children experiencing delays, including the identification and support of children who could be placed in foster to adopt arrangements.</li> <li>• Ensure that managers and social workers have clear guidance and legal advice when placing children in arrangements with friends and family, to ensure that their meets are fully understood and met.</li> </ul>	<p>We will work with staff and Managers to help them further develop their understanding of thresholds through bespoke workshops, service days, supervision and service days.</p> <p>We will review and streamline the current PLO process to improve the quality of early permanence planning and relaunch the PLO process via workshops which include front line social works, senior practitioners, team mangers, independent reviewing officers and Legal managers.</p> <p>The LAC tracking process will continue to monitor and oversee the progression of children through the court process.</p>
<p>8. The majority of children are seen alone by their social workers and, in many cases, social workers make the time to see children very regularly. Social work visits routinely include direct work with children, using a range of interactive tools. Social workers work hard to establish positive relationships with children, and for many children, whose wishes and feelings influence their assessments and plans, this is a strength. However, the high turnover of staff can hinder relationships, as some children experience frequent changes of social workers and team managers. Improvements in the role of the independent reviewing officer (IRO) add benefit for the majority of children and assist them to understand their situations. However, not enough children with a plan for permanence benefit from life story work.</p>	<p>Over the past six months, regular child visits and direct work has been a key priority, and Ofsted recognised the improvement made. However we will improve further so that all children are visited when they should be.</p> <p>We expect our workforce to become more stable from September, as new permanent workers start.</p> <p>We will review our approach to undertaking life story work with children who are in long term looked after.</p>
<p><b>Ofsted Recommendation 10:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve the delivery of life story work for children looked after.</li> </ul>	
<p>9. Services for care leavers have improved significantly. However, they are not yet good. Pathway plans do not support care leavers to develop important skills for their independence. There have been significant gaps in the health provision for care leavers. As a result, a high number of young people do not have a clear view of their physical and emotional health needs or their health histories.</p>	<p>We will further improve care leavers access to education, employment and training through the work that we doing earlier on with PEPs and continue working with the IMPACT programme.</p> <p>We will work with colleagues in Health through the Corporate Parenting Board to improve the support care leavers receive in terms of their health needs.</p>
<p><b>Ofsted Recommendations 4,5,6:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the number of care leavers who are in education, employment and training.</li> <li>• Enable care leavers to have access to good physical and emotional health services and ensure that they are able to understand their health histories.</li> </ul>	<p>We will continue to build on the improvements made in the Care Leaving Service through revising the pathway plan, improving how we work with young people much earlier on to develop independence skill.</p>



Appendix 1

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that pathway plans set realistic targets for care leavers to support their progress into a fulfilling life.</li> </ul>	
<p>10. The scrutiny committee does not sufficiently understand and effectively challenge the quality of services for children. Scrutiny does not challenge officers effectively about the quality of services and the impact of social work practice. The corporate parenting board is not yet evidencing the impact of its focus and challenge. It cannot demonstrate how its work is influencing service delivery and outcomes for children looked after and care leavers.</p>	<p>The Scrutiny Panel will review the approach to ensure there is a clearer focus on the difference that services are making for children and young people.</p> <p>The new Corporate Parenting Strategy and Pledges implemented in April this year need time to embed. However, we will 'pick up the pace'. We will implement a new outcomes framework so that we focus on what difference the Board is making, The key work streams will drive the improvements and developments of the work we do with children and young people who are looked after and we will ensure that they are involved in this work.</p>
<p><b>Ofsted Recommendation 11:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve the functioning of both the scrutiny committee and corporate parenting board to ensure that their work has a positive impact on improving services for children and the outcomes that they achieve.</li> </ul>	
<p>11. The current arrangements for ensuring the safeguarding of privately fostered children are poor; the local authority is not meeting its statutory duties.</p>	<p>The Safeguarding Children Board has established a task and finish group to oversee the current awareness raising and information sharing in relation to Private Fostering.</p> <p>The current processes for receiving notifications, undertaking the relevant assessments and monitoring / supervising placements will be revised and disseminated via workshops with front line staff and managers to ensure that there is a consistent understanding of the criteria and regulations in relation to private fostering.</p>
<p><b>Ofsted Recommendation 8:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that managers and social workers correctly apply private fostering regulations so that children who meet the criteria have thorough assessments of their needs and that these include all required safeguarding checks.</li> </ul>	

If you would like more information, please contact Andrea Potts on [andrea.potts@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:andrea.potts@walsall.gov.uk)

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