

EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

TUESDAY 24 NOVEMBER, 2015 AT 6.00 P.M. AT THE COUNCIL HOUSE

Committee Members Present	Councillor R. Burley (Chair) Councillor E. Hazell (Vice Chair) Councillor A. Ditta Councillor M. Follows Councillor T. Jukes Councillor D. Shires Councillor S. Wade
Portfolio Holders Present	Councillor E. Hughes (Care and Safeguarding) Councillor C. Towe (Learning, Skills and Apprenticeships)
Non elected non voting Members present	P. Welter (Secondary Teacher Representative)
Officers Present	David Haley - Director (Children's Services) Lynda Poole – Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) Tony Griffin - Interim Assistant Director (Children's Social Care) Andrea Potts - Assistant Director (Early Help, Children's Commissioning and Workforce Development) Carol Boughton - Head of service - Safeguarding Phillipa Creswell - Regional Strategic Child Sexual Exploitation Coordinator Amarita Fernandez - Child Sexual Exploitation Coordinator Ross Hutchinson - Lead Accountant Neil Picken – Senior Committee Business and Governance Manager

533/15 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Mr R. Bragger, Mr S. Raynor together with Councillors A. Kudhail, G. Perry and T. Wilson.

534/15 **SUBSTITUTIONS**

None.

535/15 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

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

536/15 **LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985 (AS AMENDED)**

There were no agenda items that required the exclusion of the public.

537/15 **MINUTES**

Members considered the minutes of the meeting held on 13 October, 2015.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 October, 2015, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

538/15 **CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION (INCLUDING GROOMING, FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION, TRAFFICKING AND FORCED MARRIAGE)**

The Assistant Director (Children's Social Care) introduced the report which provided an overview of the work being carried out in Walsall to address the issues of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), Grooming, Female Genital Mutilation, Trafficking and Forced Marriages.

He explained that the issue of CSE had previously been considered by the Committee on 14th April, 2015.

The Chair then invited the Regional Strategic Child Sexual Exploitation Coordinator and the Walsall Child Sexual Exploitation Coordinator to address the Committee to provide information on their roles.

Members sought clarity as to how young people at risk were identified. It was explained that a number of agencies, partners and individuals could notify children's services of any concerns. A screening tool was then used to ascertain the level of risk to the individual from CSE. A National Working Group (NWG) risk assessment (a standardised tool across all Local Authorities) tool was then completed. A further assessment would then be made by the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). The MASH took the decision as to whether the individual was at low, medium or high risk. If deemed a high risk, a Multi Agency meeting (a MASE meeting) would be

convened where the risk factors were discussed and actions to mitigate the risk agreed with a plan drawn up to implement these.

A Member suggested that this was a very long winded process and queried whether this put individuals at further risk whilst they were being discussed at several different groups. The Child Sexual Exploitation Coordinator advised that the process happened quickly with the first assessment undertaken within 24 hours. Discussions thereafter took place on a daily basis. Members were assured that a lot of work would be undertaken prior to the CSE process by way of a child protection enquiry.

The Regional Strategic Child Sexual Exploitation Coordinator advised that there was a significant amount of pressure on young people. Members were reminded of the 'See me, Hear me' framework and website which was a hub of online resources that raised awareness of CSE, provided information and signposted to services available. It was targeted at young people, parents and professionals such as schools.

A member asked what direct support was in place for young people. In response, it was explained that there were Street Teams, Targeted Youth Support and the Myplace centre. The Street Teams and Targeted Youth Support work with those at low to medium risk whilst work at Myplace focussed on low risk and prevention. High risk cases are allocated a social worker and additional support from the appropriate professional within the multi agency team.

In terms of forced marriage, the Head of Service (Safeguarding) advised that whilst forced marriage was not common in the Borough, training to identify and take appropriate action for both this and Female Genital Mutilation was provided by the Walsall Safeguarding Children Board and had been undertaken by staff.

A Member questioned whether parents' voices were heard and acted upon when they raised an issue of concern. The Head of Service (Safeguarding) advised that the information would be treated in the same as any other referral, confirming that appropriate advice and support would be provided.

The Chair asked whether there were any gaps in terms of the Council and its Partner's approach. In response it was stated that more joined up work could be done to support and safeguard children with learning disabilities and also post 18 provisions which required further discussions with adult social care. The Head of Service (Safeguarding) advised that schools had become much better at making referrals regarding Female Genital Mutilation.

A discussion took place regarding training for taxi drivers as they were well placed to identify any suspicious activity. The Portfolio Holder (Care and Safeguarding) advised that the Taxi Liaison Committee was pro-active and were seeking funding to enable them to undertake training. The Chair, supported by the Committee, recommended that further training on CSE and wider issues such as grooming, Female Genital Mutilation, forced marriage and radicalisation should be arranged and offered to all members of the Council.

In closing, a Member asked how many children had gone missing from school and did not return following the summer holidays. The Head of service (Safeguarding) agreed to provide a briefing on this following the meeting.

Resolved:

1. That the Head of Service (Safeguarding) provide a briefing note to clarify how many children had gone missing from school and did not return following the summer holidays;
2. That training on CSE and wider issues such as grooming, female genital mutilation, forced marriage and radicalisation should be arranged and offered to all members of the Council.

539/15 FOSTERING AND ADOPTION WORKING GROUP

The Interim Assistant Director (Children's Social Care) presented the report [annexed] which provided an update on the progress made toward the recommendations of the Fostering and Adoption Working Group.

Members were advised that in relation to recommendation 9 – the number of assessments carried out externally – the quality of assessments undertaken was not to the standard expected. To reduce the reliance on external assessments, 3 additional staff had been appointed to undertake family and friend assessments. It was expected that the appointees would commence work in the New Year.

Work undertaken in relation to Fostering was highlighted with Members and advised that greater collaboration with other Authorities would result in greater chances of finding matches between children and foster carers. It was noted that Walsall are leading work on the Regional Adoption Agency proposal across the Black Country and with Telford and Shropshire.

With regard to Mosaic (the new case management system), Members heard that had officially 'gone live' and was proving to be beneficial.

In terms of the work of the Fostering and Adoption Panels, the Interim Assistant Director (Children's Social Care) explained that he was the Adoption Decision Maker and had attended 4 Panel meetings to ensure that they were effective. Members were informed that both Panels were effective and undertaking well the functions placed upon them.

The Chair referred to the recommendation within the report to appoint two members of the committee to become Looked After Children Champions. It was explained that this could be considered further at the meeting to be held in February 2016. It was also suggested that a further update on the implementation of MOSAIC be considered at that meeting.

Discussion followed on instances whereby allegations are made against parents and children become adopted only to find that the parents are found innocent. The

Interim Assistant Director (Children's Social Care) advised that the needs of the child always came first. It was a difficult situation which happened very infrequently. Ultimately, it was the decision of the courts as to whether a child would be adopted.

In terms of performance, the Committee expressed the view that more should be done to improve the recruitment of foster carers as use of agencies was expensive. The Portfolio Holder (Care and Safeguarding) advised that he had met with a local church group who were keen to promote the fostering service and signpost people to the Council's services.

Given the need to recruit foster carers, the committee asked whether the reasons given by Foster Carers for their resignations were being recorded. It was crucial to learn from these reasons to shape and develop services, wherever possible, to prevent further resignations. Related to this, a Member suggested that a complaint had been made against a foster carer, however, following investigation, it was confirmed that there was no case to answer. Despite this they were still de-registered. The Interim Assistant Director (Children's Social Care) advised that following allegations and an investigation the carer would be re-assessed to establish whether they were still able to foster. Should this be the case, they could continue. Should they not be of the standard required, they would be de-registered. The Portfolio Holder (Care and Safeguarding) stated that all Foster Carers should be thanked, particularly those that have been providing a service for a considerable period of time.

The Chair returned to the issue of recording reasons for resignations and again asked whether reasons for resignations had been captured. In response, the Interim Assistant Director (Children's Social Care) advised that the system to capture the information had been established and was ready to be populated. It would take some time as the information could only be captured as and when foster carers chose to leave.

In closing, the Chair recommended that all Members of the Committee should be afforded the opportunity to attend the Total Respect Training which was delivered by Walsall Care Leavers.

Resolved:

1. That the following items be added to the agenda for the meeting to be held in February, 2016:-
 - MOSAIC;
 - Looked After Children Champions.
2. That Total Respect Training be arranged for Members of the Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

540/15 **THE TOXIC TRIO – SUBSTANCE MISUSE, MENTAL HEALTH AND DOMESTIC ABUSE**

The Portfolio Holder (Care and Safeguarding) presented the report [annexed] which detailed the impact of the issues of domestic abuse, mental ill health and substance misuse. He emphasized that these three issues were present in 75% of all Serious Cases Review nationally and impacted on children affected in many different ways.

The Committee were advised that the Council were investing to save by committing £860k to up-skill staff, link together services, develop further capacity and implement training programmes.

The Chair stated that improved co-ordination was the key to ensure that the impact of any funding was maximised. The Portfolio Holder (Care and Safeguarding) agreed stating that in times of austerity it was all too easy to become inward focussed. Better communication and coordination together with the drive to work collectively was important.

A Member of the Committee concurred but questioned whether it was an achievable goal. The Assistant Director (Early Help, Children's Commissioning and Workforce Development) assured Members that there was a desire and commitment to make it work. There was a need to ensure that the pathways for those affected were clear and that appropriate support was in place.

A Member asked whether there were any particular hotspots within Walsall. It was explained that this information would be developed once locality working bedded in. It was expected that the situation would be more prevalent in some areas than others but clarified that resources would be targeted to areas which required most support.

The Chair referred the committee to page 44 of the report which set out the challenges and gaps in the way help is currently provided to children and families impacted by the 'Toxic Trio'. She questioned whether the additional funding would be sufficient to overcome the challenges and plug the gaps. The Assistant Director (Early Help, Children's Commissioning and Workforce Development) advised that the £860k was new investment spread over 2 years and was an addition to existing budgets. A lead commissioner had been appointed to stimulate the market and buy contracts. It was expected that if the model was successful it would pay for itself after the 2 year initial investment ended. The focus of the initiative was to stop the problems from happening, stop existing problems from getting worse and stop issues happening again.

The Chair expressed concern that there were a lot of 'ifs'. The Portfolio Holder (Care and Safeguarding) acknowledged that it was a leap of faith but it had worked elsewhere. It was important to try solutions rather than do nothing. The Assistant Director (Early Help, Children's Commissioning and Workforce Development) advised that the alternative would be to increase the threshold which would exacerbate the problem. The Chair acknowledged the points made and made it clear that she wanted the initiative to succeed but cautioned that there was also a need to be realistic about what could be achieved.

A Member of the Committee suggested that the work undertaken to address the Toxic Trio should be considered again by the Committee in 6 months time. This was supported by the Committee.

Resolved

That the work undertaken to address the 'Toxic Trio' be added to the work programme for consideration in June, 2016.

541/15 FOCUSED DEBATE ON PRIORITIES 5 & 6 OF THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT ACTION PLAN

The Portfolio Holder (Learning, Skills and Apprenticeships) introduced the report and advised that he, together with the Executive Director (Children's Services) and Assistant Director (Access and Achievement), had met with the School's Minister and the Regional School's Commissioner in London earlier that day.

He advised that the Commissioner was challenged as it was clear that Academies were dragging the overall results of the Borough down. The Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) advised that changes made to Sponsors and leadership arrangements at both Primary and Secondary schools were resulting in improvements.

The Portfolio Holder (Learning, Skills and Apprenticeships) advised that in some Academies, Governance arrangements were weak. This issue had been raised with the Regional Commissioner. The Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) advised that successful federations had been approached to establish whether they would wish to expand. The response had been positive. The Department for Education had recommended that Sponsors should be more local. Lastly, some well performing Headteachers had expressed an interest in leading additional schools.

A Member of the Committee advised that in some Academies the pressure on staff was too high which had resulted in staff leaving or becoming ill and taking sick leave. Headteachers, in some circumstances, were also being forced out. It was asked what was to be done about the working conditions within Academies. The Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) advised that the Council is in dialogue with the Department for Education about changes in leadership and work was underway with Sponsors and leadership teams to address issues. It was clarified that teaching and learning was critical to success. It was accepted that there was always some turbulence when Headteachers leave schools.

A Member queried whether the issue with Academies was particular to Walsall or a National issue. In response, the Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) explained that there were good and bad examples of Academy performance across the Country. Walsall's statistical neighbours had similar issues of underperforming, sponsored Academies. It was explained that original Academies came with contracts which are difficult to withdraw from. Newer contracts are set up for easier withdrawal if necessary. Overall, it was important that all schools worked together in collaboration and effectively with the Local Authority.

A Member expressed concern that some Headteachers could overstretch themselves when taking on additional schools to the detriment of their substantive school. The Portfolio Holder (Learning, Skills and Apprenticeships) advised that successful Headteachers build a strong management team with good governance arrangements in place. The schools would be such that it would allow for the Head teacher to focus attention on another school whilst maintaining a monitoring role at their original school.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

542/15 DRAFT REVENUE BUDGET

The Committee considered a report [annexed] setting out the portfolio plans for future service delivery for the Children's Social Care element of the Care and Safeguarding Portfolio and Access and Achievement services elements of Learning Skills and Apprenticeships Portfolio.

Members considered the report and made the following comments for further consideration by Cabinet:-

Response to the draft budget

The Panel made it clear that the proposed savings expected of Children's Services should be realistic given the significant overspend in previous years which required subsequent use of reserves to balance the budget.

Saving reference 16 – Review and seek to reduce the number of looked after children (LAC)

The Committee questioned how this would be achieved given that previous attempts to do so had little success. It was also made clear that any changes should be made safely and with the best interest of the child at the heart of the decision.

The Executive Director advised of numerous initiatives, such as the investment to reduce demand for statutory intervention (proposal 24). Early help was a key area and edge of care teams would assist in providing support to families, where appropriate and safe, to prevent a child or young person entering care. In addition, the Committee were assured that the Council's thresholds were accurate and being consistently applied. A systematic review would be undertaken of all placements to ensure that children and young people were in the right place. Where children could return home or achieve permanency this will be expedited more quickly.

Saving reference 14 – Review and reduce short break services (Policy)

The Committee sought clarity on the introduction of a 100 hour cap on short breaks and expressed concern that this could lead to a rise in Looked After Children (LAC) and impact upon foster carers. The Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that the reduction would bring the Council into line with comparator Local Authorities. It was clarified that should a child need the service as part of their Care Plan it would be provided.

Saving reference 22 – Review all children's external residential placement packages and seek to develop and provide alternative cheaper provision where appropriate.

It was identified that the cost of external placements were costly and efforts to reduce this were supported. The Executive Director assured Members that any changes would be made safely and with wrap around care.

Saving reference 26 – Invest to save: Reduce the number of social work posts within children's services as a result of the investment in toxic trio prevention.

The Committee stated that any proposal to reduce staff should not have a negative impact on the level of care and support provided to the children and young people receiving it. The Executive Director advised that the use of non qualified social workers would be used to provide additional support. It was proposed that 13 Social Worker facilitators would be appointed.

Saving reference 30 – Generate additional income through marketing under occupied internal short break placements and charging other local authorities for use of them.

The committee sought clarity that this would not impact existing short break placements for those within the borough. The Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that there was capacity to offer other Local Authorities use of the facility as it was not fully used.

Saving reference 149 – Consider ceasing to provide the Toy Library service and distribute existing stock across Children's Centres and organisations working with and on behalf of the council (Policy)

The Committee noted that this was unfortunate, however, it was accepted that there were difficult choices to be made and so did not contest the saving proposal. Members were assured that the toys would be redistributed to ensure that they were still used.

Saving reference 169 – Reduce Virtual School Service

Concern was raised at the proposed reduction and sought clarity as to what would be in place for LAC. The Committee were advised by the Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) that the service would still be provided. A virtual head would work 5 days a week supported by 2 other members of staff.

Recommended

That Cabinet be requested to take note of the comments made above during deliberation of the budget.

543/15 CORPORATE FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE – QUARTER 2 FINANCIAL MONITORING POSITION 1015/16

The Committee received a report [annexed] summarising the forecast revenue and capital outturn position for 2015/16 based on the financial performance for the first 5 months of the financial year (April 2015 to August 2015) for services within the remit of the Committee.

In presenting the report, the Lead Accountant advised that there had been an overspend of £4.259m linked predominantly to the costs of Looked After Children and use of Agency staff. He further advised that Cabinet had agreed to a one off use of reserves of £4.26m to offset the pressures.

A Member raised concern that within the budget there were proposals to make savings by reducing the number of Looked After Children (LAC). It was clear that this was a significant pressure on the budget and contributed to the huge overspend. It was asked how realistic the saving proposal was? Clarity was also sought on MOSAIC as it was understood previously that the project had gone over budget. In relation to MOSAIC, the Lead Accountant advised that additional funding had become available from Adult Social Care as they had accessed alternative funding. This offset the previous overspend within Children's Services on the project.

In terms of reducing the number of LAC and the overspend, the Portfolio Holder (Care and Safeguarding) advised that there was no single solution to the difficulties faced with delivering services with a declining budget. It was of the utmost importance to try a number of solutions which, together, would have an impact. If a certain element doesn't deliver then this will be reconsidered and another plan adopted. It was important that efforts were continually made to try and improve services within the resources available.

Resolved

1. That the forecast 2015/16 year end financial position for services under the remit of the Education and Childrens Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel be noted;
2. That the forecast 2015/16 capital position be noted;
3. That the action taken to address areas of overspend be noted.

544/15 **AREAS OF FOCUS AND FORWARD PLANS**

The Chair addressed the Committee and made reference to the recent recommendation of Council that a working group be established to consider child poverty. The Committee were asked to consider establishing the working group and to appoint members to serve on it.

The Chair also recommended that two representatives of the Health and Wellbeing Board be invited to join the working group as co-opted members.

The Chair also took the opportunity to thank Tony Griffin – Interim Assistant Director (Children’s Social Care) for his work with the Council. She advised Committee that this would be his last meeting as he would be leaving the Council at Christmas. The Chair wished Mr Griffin well for the future – sentiments echoed by the Committee.

Resolved:

1. That a working group be established to consider child poverty;
2. That the following Members be appointed to the working group:-
 - Councillor T. Jukes
 - Councillor E. Hazell
 - Councillor R. Burley
3. That the Health and Wellbeing Board be requested to nominate two of its membership to serve as co-opted members of the youth poverty working group

545/15 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next meeting was noted as 5 January, 2015.

The meeting terminated at 8.30 p.m.

Chair:

Date:.....