

EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

21 JUNE, 2016 AT 6.00 P.M. AT THE COUNCIL HOUSE

Committee Members Present	Councillor C. Towe (Chair) Councillor T. Jukes (Vice-Chair) Councillor D. Barker Councillor A. Ditta Councillor N. Gultasib Councillor M. Follows Councillor E. Hazell Councillor A. Kudhail Councillor T. Wilson Councillor R. Worrall
Portfolio Holders Present	Councillor R. Burley – Children's Services and Education
Non elected voting Members present	M. Wollaston (Parent Governor) C. Fletcher (Parent Governor) T. Tunnell (Parent Governor)
Non elected non voting Members present	R. Bragger (Primary Teacher Representative) P. Welter (Secondary Teacher Representative)
Officers Present	David Haley - Director (Children's Services) Lynda Poole – Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) Debbie Carter - Assistant Director (Children's Social Care) Andrea Potts - Assistant Director (Early Help, Children's Commissioning and Workforce Development) Karen Marcroft - Head of Service – Quality Assurance & Performance Information Lloyd Haynes – Senior Finance Manager Craig Goodall – Democratic Services Officer

587/16 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors M. Follows, G. Perry and D. Shires.

588/16 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions.

589/16 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

There were no declarations of interest or party whip for the duration of the meeting.

590/16 **LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985 (AS AMENDED)**

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

591/16 **MINUTES**

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 19 April, 2016, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

592/16 **AREAS OF FOCUS 2016/17 INCLUDING PERFORMANCE DATA**

The Committee considered what areas they wished to focus on during the ensuing year.

Members received a presentation on services within the remit of the committee and performance information (annexed). The following is a summary of the discussion which took place during the presentation.

Access and Achievement

The Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) highlighted current activity, challenges and progress within her areas of responsibility.

A discussion took place on how the number of school places in the borough could be increased. Following a question it was explained that the government would fund the expansion of existing schools but new schools would need to attract funding and a sponsor to be an academy or free school. The Chair noted he was aware of a local network who were looking to set up free schools.

The committee enquired about the school admission and appeal process. Members learned that each school had to set a published admission number which set the number of children it could admit in each year. Parents were then required to apply to the authority expressing their top three preferences. Following the allocation of places 94% (approximately 3,000) of pupils placed received their first preference school. If parents were not allocated the school they wanted they had a right of appeal. The number of appeals for each school varied.

Children's Social Care and Safeguarding

The Assistant Director (Children's Services) highlighted recent achievements, challenges and performance headlines for the Initial Response Service, Child Protection and Looked After Children (LAC).

A discussion took place on the management of LAC and related issues. Members were informed that the cost of LAC was £18m part of this expense was external residential care which was very costly. There were 52 children living out of the borough but only 11% lived more than 20 miles away. There was an improving picture with regard to increasing the number of local authority foster carers.

There was an increasingly challenging environment to recruit experienced social workers. For example, a recent recruitment campaign for experienced staff had attracted no applicants. Experienced staff were more inclined to undertake agency work which was more lucrative. In the last year 37 social workers had been recruited but 27 had left giving a net gain of 10. This instability, combined with vacancies, meant that an Ofsted judgement of 'requires improvement' would be the best possible outcome. Moving forward more social workers with reduced caseloads were required.

Following a question the Assistant Director explained private fostering and encouraged Members to be vigilant and report any cases they came across. Similarly with unregistered schools.

Early Help, Workforce Development and Commissioning

The Assistant Director (Early Help, Workforce Development and Commissioning) highlighted ongoing work in her area to Members.

A discussion ensued on activity taking place to create a 'Social Worker Academy' in order to create sufficient social workers to fill the vacancies that existed. It was explained that individuals with experience of working with children and young people were being given the opportunity to undertake training to become Social Workers. There was an opportunity to expand this idea on a regional level that was currently being explored.

Information regarding eligibility for free school meals was requested. In particular could families who claimed tax credits receive free school meals?

Performance Information

The Head of Service (Quality Assurance & Performance Information) provided the Committee with an extensive overview of important performance data (annexed).

Following the informative presentations the Committee discussed and agreed topics for its areas of focus for 2015/16.

Resolved:

That:

- 1. The following areas of focus be included on the Committees work programme for 2016/17:**
 - a. Children’s Social Care and Safeguarding;**
 - b. Early Help 0-19 locality delivery model – including Youth Service delivery;**
 - c. Provision and outcomes for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities;**
 - d. Self evaluation ahead of Ofsted inspection including relevant performance data;**
 - e. Protecting vulnerable groups including child sexual exploitation and radicalisation;**
 - f. Regional Adoption Agency – options and recommendations;**
 - g. Quarterly reports from Education Challenge Board;**
 - h. 5 year school places strategy;**
 - i. Teacher supply and recruitment;**
 - j. What is the impact of the pupil premium?;**
 - k. Parental responsibility for education: ‘getting children school ready’;**
 - l. 16-18 Review Outcome;**
 - m. Young carers in education;**
 - n. Child and adolescent mental health services;**
 - o. New Belongings – progress with cohort met previously;**
 - p. Question Time event with New Belongings;**
 - q. Young people not in education, employment or training.**

- 2. A working group to consider child poverty be established with the following membership:**
 - a. Councillor D. Barker;**
 - b. Councillor E. Hazell;**
 - c. Councillor T. Jukes;**
 - d. Councillor M. Ward.**

- 3. A working group to consider mental health of children and young people be established with the following membership:**
 - a. C. Fletcher**
 - b. Councillor N. Gultasib;**
 - c. Councillor E. Hazell;**
 - d. Councillor T. Jukes.**

- 4. Answers to the questions provided by Councillors Hazell and Barker in advance of the meeting be circulated to all Members of the Committee;**

5. **Further information be provided to Committee Members on the following areas:**
 - a. **Number of respite foster carers available;**
 - b. **Data on the time spent by social workers in court;**
 - c. **The Early Help service;**
 - d. **The eligibility criteria for Free School Meals and the affect on families claiming tax credits.**

6. **The following committee members undertake visits to Children's Homes and report back on them:**
 - a. **Bluebells – Councillor T. Wilson**
 - b. **Hilton Road – P. Welter**
 - c. **Lichfield Road – Councillor E. Hazell**
 - d. **Redruth Road – Councillor C. Towe**
 - e. **Spindle Tree Rise – Councillor T. Jukes**

7. **Briefing sessions with Democratic Services and Children's Services Managers be arranged for the Committees new co-opted members.**

593/16 CORPORATE FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE – FINANCIAL MONITORING POSITION FOR 2015/16 (PRE-AUDT)

The Committee were informed of the final revenue and capital outturn position for 2015/16.

The Senior Finance Manager reported that there had been significant pressure on the Children's Services revenue budget during 2015/16. Financial pressures caused by high numbers of LAC and agency staff had required the use of £4.4m from corporate reserves and a further £2m of mitigating actions to be undertaken in order to reach a year end overspend position of £45,000. He added that there was a capital carry forward of £3.2m.

The Executive Director reported that the pressures in the Children's Services budget had been recognised and an additional £6m had been allocated for 2016/17. There was currently a £1m overspend but this money was being used to train 25 new social workers. He added that Cabinet were currently considering options to fund those training places.

Following a question the Executive Director reported that market supplements were paid to staff in the Initial Response Service to attract and retain staff. He added that a review of salaries for experienced social workers would take place but the service had to be mindful of the impact on other council services.

The Service Finance Manager informed the Committee that the Council was the accountable body for the Dedicated Schools Grant but detailed decisions about its use were taken by the Schools Forum.

The Chair discussed future finance reports with the Committee. They requested that future reports include information on agency staff and LAC costs and focus on any other areas which were overspending and/or pressurised. Further to this requests for year-on-year financial comparisons were to be included.

Resolved:

That future finance reports focus on the following areas:

- a. Agency staff and looked after children budgets;**
- b. Any other areas that are overspending/pressurised;**
- c. Include year-on-year financial comparisons.**

594/16 FORWARD PLANS FOR WALSALL COUNCIL AND BLACK COUNTRY JOINT COMMITTEE

Resolved:

That the forward plans be noted.

595/16 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was 6 September 2016.

The meeting terminated at 8.43 p.m.

Chair:

Date:.....