

Council – 23 February 2012

Children's Services

Progress Report of Councillor R Andrew, Portfolio Holder

In 2011 the council made a substantial investment in children's services to ensure that we continued to meet the increasing need for protection and safety of children in Walsall that followed the recession and impact of Baby Peter. Children's services have developed a strong partnership relationship across a wide range of agencies focused on improving the life chances of vulnerable children and I am pleased to report the largest decrease in the number of Looked After Children for two years. Walsall children have achieved the best ever 5+A*-C (inc English and Maths) results, with the 8th best improvement nationally. We are developing a new relationship with schools to adapt to the increasing number of academies and managing the transfer of services into the council following the termination of the contract with Serco. The opening of the Black Country University Technical College within Walsall has established strong partnerships with the business sector to ensure our young people have the best opportunities for future employment.

Specialist Services has continued to make significant progress over the last year. This has been confirmed by a series of external inspections undertaken by Ofsted:-

- Walsall Adoption Service June 2010 – from 'satisfactory' to 'good'.
- Walsall Fostering Service August 2010 – from 'satisfactory' to 'good'.
- Walsall Private Fostering Service February 2011 – from 'inadequate' to 'good'
- The most recent unannounced inspection of referral and assessment services by Ofsted in December 2010 found no priority actions were required.

We are proud of our children's home estate with 3 homes judged 'outstanding' and 2 judged 'good'. We are 6th best council in the country for ensuring children in care have the chance for an adoptive family. We place more children with foster parents than similar councils.

We continue to have positive feedback from the courts and have been invited to lead a seminar for our Black Country colleagues on our approach to permanence and special guardianship. Councillors are actively involved through the corporate parenting board panels visiting children in the homes and meeting with parents.

The vulnerable children service has seen much improvement in workforce stability with most permanent positions now filled and with a subsequent reduction in the use of agency workers. A coherent training strategy has involved workers in exciting developments and a new career pathway provides a clear structure and opportunities to the workforce. The service has maintained strong performance in ensuring that children with a child protection plan, looked after children and privately fostered children are seen by social workers within statutory timescales.

New operating model for children's services

Children's services have commenced a major redesign of services through our 'New Operating Model' aimed at improving life chances of vulnerable children within troubled families. The early results has led to the largest fall in looked after children in 2 years at a time when many other councils have seen continued increases in the number of children taken into care. We are redesigning our whole service, across both targeted and prevention and specialist service and using working smarter principles to test and design our new area family support teams based within localities working directly with schools and their communities to provide multiagency support direct to our 'troubled families'.

Walsall's Think Family (Whole Family Assessment) Project had a national target for the number of families worked with in 2010/11 of 100 which was achieved. The target for 2011/12 is 160 and we are on track to deliver this. Think Family workers focus on looked after children returning home sooner and also to prevent children at risk becoming looked after. This way of working has also contributed to the large fall from 518 to 486 (March 2011 to December 2011). Our new operating model builds on this work by providing an integrated multiagency service that uses targeting, prevention and early intervention with timely family support to ensure family resilience is enhanced. In addition we will increase the proportion of children placed in council foster care and ensure that commissioning and procurement delivers lower unit costs across external placements.

The prevention element of the new operating model in Walsall will establish multiagency area family support teams (AFSTs) within each of the six area partnerships and at the heart of each children's centre cluster. As part of Working Smarter, we are piloting and testing this new way of working from January 2012 in the Bentley and Darlaston area partnerships. In Bentley the team is based at King Charles Primary School, and are working together using a whole systems approach to successfully support troubled families with multiple problems. It has proved to be an extremely positive experience for both the family and staff involved. A range of issues were resolved within 2 days which if left, would have resulted in the family requiring more specialist support and at higher cost to the council and other agencies involved. More 'troubled families' are receiving this new whole family approach in the second AFST learning pilot which has recently started in Birchills area. A further 4 AFSTs will be rolled out during the summer and autumn 2012.

Walsall's commitment to working with some proposed 800 'troubled families' over the next 3 years is currently being negotiated with the department of Communities and Local Government (CLG). Funding is available to Walsall alongside a payment by results formula which will further enhance Walsall's new way of working and its children's centres core purpose. Senior officers across Walsall Children's Services partnership have recently completed a review of the authority's parenting strategy publishing both a revised strategy and commissioning a range of evidence based parenting programmes to train staff from across the wider children's services partnership. Walsall aims to significantly increase the number of evidence based parenting programmes in the 2012/13 period. We are working closely with the Director of Public Health and staff on the transition process and drafting the new JSNA which will inform joint commissioning over the next few years.

Education

The Education Act 2011 has led to a radical change in the role of the Council in providing support to schools and as a result Cabinet took the decision to terminate the contract with Serco and the transfer of services to the council, 4 services will transfer in April 2012: the education business partnership, Alumwell children's centre, disability assessment services and school finance services. We have resourced a small project team to ensure there is a seamless transition of staff and services from Serco with minimal impact on schools and pupils.

Council officers are engaged with both primary and secondary Headteachers to develop the visioning and preparation for the future. A primary and secondary Headteacher have joined the transition team which is listening carefully to the needs of schools and developing a structure to ensure appropriate support will be available. At the latest 'Futures' planning meeting held with Chairs and Vice Chairs of Headteacher Forums an agreement on what core offer would be required and areas where other expertise can be brokered, created and provided to meet both individual school needs and school cluster needs was reached. Plans are in progress to develop Walsall's learning communities which will continue to raise standards and develop opportunities for all children and young people across the borough. We are directly working with Headteachers on how we can best work together in the future to maintain a broad family of schools, embracing maintained, voluntary aided, independent and academy schools. Headteachers at our recently converted academy schools in Walsall are committed to this approach.

Walsall is now seeing a change to the governance arrangements across its schools with an increasing number of Academies. The current Government have allowed schools which were judged to be outstanding by Ofsted to be offered the opportunity to convert to academy status from September 2010 onwards. Later it was announced that schools judged good with outstanding features in particular areas, including special schools could also apply. A number of schools in Walsall have taken advantage of this route to convert to academy status. As the Academy programme develops, primary school conversions are also being considered. 10 of our secondary schools have converted to academies as well as 4 primary schools. A further 4 secondary schools and 4 primary schools are in process of converting.

In 2011 schools in Walsall continued to improve the outcomes of children and young people at the different key stages. The latest data matrix from the Department for Education was issued in January 2012. At KS2 the attainment for Level 4+ for English and mathematics combined shows a 1% point increase when compared to 2010 and currently stands at 75%, this is ahead of national, statistical neighbour and Black Country averages.

At Key Stage 4, the results again took a good step in the right direction. For 5 + A*-C GCSE, schools achieved 83%, above the national average (80%) for the first time. For 5 + A*-C GCSE including English and Maths, schools achieved 56%. Walsall was the 8th most improved authority nationally at this measure. At KS5 there is a marked move away from A/AS level moving towards other KS5 qualifications and this is reflected in a reduction in the Average Point Score across all providers. In schools, however, we continue to see an increase in Average Point Score. This

improvement trend is also reflected in outcomes for those children and young people who are most vulnerable. At KS2 L4+ English and maths there is improvement for pupils eligible for FSM and at every stage of SEN. As we begin 2012 there are no schools in an Ofsted category in Walsall.

Recently completed capital projects include Barcroft Primary, Christchurch Primary and Birchills Primary. Major projects under construction include Grace Academy, Shelfield Academy, the new Eldon House respite centre and the Innovation Centre at Alumwell. Projects in the pipeline include a major extension at Caldmore Primary, Stroud family Centre remodelling. In addition, other projects recently completed include major rebuilding at Croft Primary, Kings Charles and Hilary primary. The service has also delivered early works at the Black Country UTC and 4 transfer Academies. This range of projects represents an investment of approximately £80m in the Borough. In addition the council successfully bid for £8m additional capital bid to improve educational facilities for special needs children at Elmwood and provide a new build on the Alumwell site, this Innovations centre will provide training and pathways to employment for young people across the borough.

School Meals

We acknowledge the positive contribution that school meals make to our children's life chances. Officers have been asked to work with Head teachers, sport & leisure, green spaces and the NHS to complete a comprehensive action plan to deliver the best meals possible for Walsall's children.

Children's Workforce & Partnerships

Over the last year the Integrated Workforce Development Strategy has begun to deliver a stable and well equipped workforce. We have created both a Social Worker Recruitment and Retention and a Learning and Development Strategy which together are showing positive impact on both the costs of the service and more importantly the quality of the service. We now have a framework for common induction across the Children's Partnership which commenced in February 2011. A refreshed training programme has been implemented based on a detailed training needs analysis and our local Leading Integration in the Children's Workforce programme has produced results, to the extent that Walsall are now leading on a West Midlands Succession Planning and Talent Management programme on behalf of the National College. All of these things together have contributed towards improvements and better outcomes for children across all levels of the children's workforce. 2012 promises to be a year which will bring challenges and innovation to the way we develop our workforce alongside our new operating model.

Youth Anti-Social Behaviour

There is little doubt that the vast variety of activities that were on offer to young people throughout the borough, during the summer has had a significant impact on reducing overall ASB incidents. Even more importantly it is clear that the co-ordinated partnership approach allowed opportunities for young people to engage in positive activities and prevented any copy cat disorder issues that were experienced

within neighbouring areas such as Birmingham, West Bromwich and Wolverhampton during the summer.

Additionally, it is important as highlighted in a recent police report that all relevant partner agencies use the model of co-ordination used by Walsall council's integrated young people's support service in order to evaluate the success of any activity that is organised in the future. The 2011 summer period saw a reduction in Youth ASB of 30.7% compared to the same period the previous year. This was also reflected within the figures for weekend youth ASB. 2010/11 saw further reductions in first time entrants (FTEs) to the Youth Justice system following two consecutive years of record reductions.

After successful direct intervention by Walsall Cabinet the council secured £1.287m from the DfE via the Big Lottery to build a brand new young people's centre next to the site of the Joseph Leckie School. Walsall young people have been directly involved in raising additional funds to contribute to the build as well as steering the building design and proposed programme. Construction started on 22nd August 2011 and is on scheduled for completion by 31st March 2012. The 'My Place' centre has been developed following the award of a capital grant to fund new or refurbished facilities to 'improve places to go and things to do for young people'. This centre is one of only 70 such developments across the country. The Walsall project has ensured partnership engagement from the onset and programmes are being created to contribute explicitly to reducing youth employment by developing work ready skills and entrepreneurship, working as part of the Walsall Works programme, together with Education Business Partnership, Wolverhampton University, Walsall College, Joseph Leckie Academy and local businesses.

Key challenges

- Continue to reduce number of Looked After Children and the time they spend in care through increased preventative support to Children in Need
- Improve attainment at KS5
- Reduce absence (primary and secondary) and the gaps in attainment
- Work with partners to address and reduce Child Poverty

Councillor Rachel Andrew
Cabinet Member
Children's Services