

CHILDRENS SERVICES SCRUTINY AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

Tuesday 25th September 2018 at 6 p.m.

Conference Room 2, Council House, Walsall

Committee Members Present

Councillor A. Kudhail (Chair)
Councillor A. Nawaz (Vice Chair)
Councillor D. Barker
Councillor J. Fitzpatrick
Councillor T. Jukes
Councillor S. Neville
Councillor E. Russell
Councillor S. Samra
Councillor M. Statham
Councillor V. Waters

Portfolio Holders Present

Councillor T. Wilson - Children's and Health and Well Being

Officers Present

L. Allen – Performance Officer (Children's and Young People)
C. Boughton – Head of Service ~ Safeguarding & Quality Assurance
J. Hayden – Walsall CCG
H. Matthews Street Teams
A. Potts - Assistant Director (Early Help and Commissioning Safeguarding)
D. Rhoden - Walsall Healthcare Trust
S. Rowe – Executive Director
I. Vanderheeren - Transformation Lead - Children's Services

10/18 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors B. Allen, and S. Neville.

11/18 Substitutions

There were no substitutions related to this meeting.

12/18 Declarations of Interest

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

13/18 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)

There were no items to be considered in private session.

14/18 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 26th June 2018 were approved as a true and accurate record.

15/18 Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

The Portfolio Holder stated that this issue was a priority for Children's Services and that the report provided an overview of work underway. The Committee were informed that as part of regional work on this subject, a Regional CSE co-ordinator and Implementation Officer were recruited in 2015. However, these posts had now been vacant for some time. This has meant that regional comparison data was not available.

A Member asked how the risk to a child was assessed and how were these addressed. Officers explained that a national screening tool was used. Officers explained that intervention would take place with the child through a range of partners and the police would deal with the adult perpetrator.

The Committee were informed that West Midlands Police would be adopting 'Police College' guidance on the classification of a 'missing person' in the near future and that this would open up access to a range of strategies to locate an individual. Currently, where a child was recognised as at risk from CSE they were always categorised as missing rather than absent. The Committee were also advised that if a child had been missing they were statutorily offered a return home interview. 'Street Teams' currently provided 'return home interviews' however this would be transferring to the Local Authority, to ensure alignment with the early help team to ensure early intervention to change patterns of behaviour.

In response to questions from the Committee, Officers explained that assertive outreach methods were used to build relationships with children. In addition, children were able to contact youth workers through mobile phones to ensure contact was maintained.

A member questioned the number of looked after children who had an identified vulnerability of CSE. The Head of Safeguarding stated that this would be circulated outside of the meeting. Members were urged to report any suspicious behaviour, in relation to CSE, to ensure that it was investigated.

The Portfolio Holder stated that the Council were committed to offering training to those who needed it. This had included taxi drivers, schools, hotels and the night time economy. In response to a query from a member, officers confirmed that young people were educated about CSE as part of Physical, Health, Social and Economic Education (PHSEE), which formed part of the curriculum. The Manager from Street Teams stated that 25,000 children, in schools, had been educated on this issue.

It was important that children who were at risk of CSE were identified in order that support and assistance could be provided and in that respect, the numbers were indicative that this was happening. The CSE assessment tools were described and Members were assured that the method was robust and had extra layers to ensure issues were identified.

Resolved that

- Scrutiny noted and supported the contents of the report and the current activity to protect Walsall children and young people from the risk of child sexual exploitation, to pursue perpetrators and to disrupt their activities, including through prosecution.

16/18 Right for Children Transformation Programme

Officers explained that this was an introduction of Children's Services 'Right for Children' Transformation programme and update on progress made to date. The transformation programme was informed by a needs assessment.

The needs assessment and learning from national good practice had led to the establishment of three distinct but interlinked work streams to drive the Right for Children transformation programme:

1. Prevention
2. Restorative Practice
3. Commissioning

These work streams are underpinned by four cross cutting themes:

- A. Culture
- B. Governance & structures
- C. Partnerships
- D. Finance.

A Member asked why demand for services had increased, and Officers responded to state that systems had been revised to improve the identification of children; in addition, there had been an increase in external factors such as poverty/austerity. The Executive Director stated that the transformation programme was critical to ensure that the right actions were being taken at the right time. This also meant that the Local Authority and its partners would work differently to ensure early intervention and ensure resources were used to the best effect.

The Executive Director explained that there was a national shortage of social workers and those existing social workers could transfer between local authority areas to achieve financial incentives. This issue was being considered by the Council.

Resolved

That the report be noted

17/18 Children's Services Performance 2017-18 Out-turn and Performance Framework

The Committee were informed that the report outlined the 2017-18 performance of Walsall Children's Services submitted as part of the Department for Education statutory returns. It also outlined the performance management framework that was being implemented within the directorate and available for reporting to the scrutiny committee.

The Performance Officer informed the Committee that in 2017-2018, there was a significant increase in demand for statutory services. Although there was a reduction in the number of initial contacts, there was a significant increase in referrals, assessments of need and more complex assessments such as child protection enquiries. There was also a large increase in the number of children becoming subject to child protection plans. However despite these pressures performance of the service remained good and in line with that of statutory neighbours and England averages.

The Executive Director stated that it was important to train staff, have focused outcomes, and Managers that supported supervision. In response to challenge from Members that there was duplication in the figures reported, the Committee were advised that figures required by the Department for Education were used to generate funding for Children's Services.

A Member queried if referrals from schools had stabilised, as referrals had previously been too high. The Executive Director stated that the relationship with schools had improved since the threshold guidance had been relaunched and it was hoped that the impact of this would continue to be seen.

Concern was expressed from a Member that more child protection referrals were not received from housing providers in response to increased poverty in the area. The Committee were informed that housing referrals were in line with national levels but the service would be working to ensure that training was provided to housing providers.

Resolved

That

1. The out-turn performance of Walsall's Children's Services was noted.
2. The development of the quality assurance and performance management framework including the level of performance reporting that the scrutiny committee will receive in the future was noted.

18/18 Work Programme 2018/19

The Committee's work programme for 2018/19 municipal year was considered.

Resolved

The Committee's work programme for 2018/19 municipal year was agreed.

19/18 Forward Plans

The forward plan of key decisions from Cabinet and the Black Country Executive Joint Committee were considered.

Resolved

The forward plan was noted.

The date of the next meeting was agreed as 8th November 2018.

There being no further business the meeting terminated at 7.35 p.m.

Signed:

Date: