

CHILDRENS SERVICES SCRUTINY AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

Tuesday 26th June 2018 at 6 p.m.

Conference Room 2, Council House, Walsall

Committee Members Present

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

Portfolio Holders Present

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

Officers Present

Debbie Carter – Assistant Director (Children's Social Care and Safeguarding)
Andrea Potts - Assistant Director (Early Help and Commissioning Safeguarding)

1/18 Apologies

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

2/18 Substitutions

There were no substitutions related to this meeting.

3/18 Declarations of Interest

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

4/18 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)

There were no items to be considered in private session.

5/18 Children's services in Walsall

The Assistant Director (Children's Social Care and Safeguarding) presented on the children's services directorate. The structure of the 'Early Help and Commissioning Team' and the 'Safeguarding and Social Care Team' was described. The areas covered by the Children's Services Scrutiny and Overview Committee were discussed along with issues that scrutiny may wish to consider.

In response to a comment on the progress of establishing a regional adoption agency (RAA) a Member asked if it was linked to the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA). Officers confirmed that the RAA was not linked to the WMCA however there was clear guidance on the outcomes that the RAA should achieve. Officers confirmed the West Midlands Combined Authority was involved in future possibilities for regional youth justice arrangements.

Resolved

The presentation was noted.

6/18 Ofsted inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers.

The report provided a progress update against the Ofsted Improvement Plan and its associated 12 recommendations, the committee were informed that progress continued to be made in respect of all actions.

In relation to recommendation 7, the Committee were made aware that internal staff had been used to deliver training on the court process however timescales had slipped. The next stage of this improvement process was to audit the impact of the training to identify impact and outcomes.

The work of the previous working group was discussed, and committee members were informed that the group had conducted a deep dive into two recommendations of the Ofsted improvement plan.

A discussion on the progress of the Ofsted action plan ensued, with the following advice given; -

- Members were advised that progress on recommendation 1 was good. The threshold of need document had been completed as per the action plan.
- Domestic violence triage was working well.
- The number of inappropriate referrals to the MASH had reduced.
- A recent staff survey provided positive feedback indicating that staff felt supported.
- Although there was still work to carry out in relation to recommendation 3, it was an improving picture.
- 77% of Looked after Children had a Personal Education Plan (PEP), and work was ongoing to improve this number. It was also a feature of the Corporate Parenting Boards health work stream.
- The format of pathway plans had been revised to be more user friendly.

A Member challenged how Children's Services were ensuring the quality of the EHCP plans, the Assistant Director (Children's Social Care and Safeguarding) stated that the responsibility for this lay with the SEND Team and required Health and Social Care contributions. This was a separate area of work not covered by the current Ofsted action plan.

The Committee were advised that there had been a campaign to promote awareness of private fostering which had been live since April 2018; however it was likely that there were still cases of private fostering not identified. Private fostering was described as a care arrangement, outside of the family, for a child under the age of 16. There was a duty for this to be reported so that the Local Authority could confirm if arrangements were safe for the child.

The Committee heard that there was a national shortage of foster carers which was being addressed through a revised marketing strategy which included revised fees and allowances. In addition to this the 'Mocking Bird' model was being introduced which created a community of carers to improve support to foster parents and stability of placements. Members were informed that this will be launched on 16th July 2018, the final strand of this would be the improvement of training opportunities and a specialist scheme for adolescents. The initial feedback was positive.

Resolved

That the report was noted.

7/18 Corporate financial performance - quarter 4 pre audit outturn position for 2017/18

The Senior Finance Officer informed the Committee that the pre-audit revenue outturn for 2017/18 for Children's Services based on the financial performance for the financial year 2017/18 was revenue overspend of £1.457m and £0.190m revenue carry forwards had been requested to Cabinet for approval. If approved, the pre-audit revenue outturn for Children's Services would be £1.647m. For services under the remit of this committee the pre-audit revenue overspend is £1.367m.

A Member asked for the plan to mitigate the financial overspends. Officers reassured the committee that there were plans to mitigate the financial overspend and committed to return to the Committee should this change.

Officers suggested that the committee may wish to receive the Children's Services transformation programme and the 'plan on a page' which contained both qualitative and quantitative measures for success.

Resolved

That the 'plan on a page' would be circulated to elected members and taken to committee as part of the appropriate work programme item.

8/18 Areas of focus 2018/19

The Committee considered the report (annexed) and the wide range of potential issues within their remit. The Portfolio Holder for Children’s Health and Well-Being suggested that the committee considered the transformation plan for children’s services.

Committee Members agreed that the Ofsted Working Group should continue and it was suggested that recommendations 7 and 9 should be considered. Another Member suggested that youth justice was also added to the work programme. It was acknowledged that the suggested items needed to be prioritised to ensure that the committee achieved desired outcomes.

The Committee considered the issue of co-opted members and it was agreed that expert witnesses would be invited for specific items.

Resolved

The following items are added to the work programme;

- Children’s Services Performance Scorecard
- Demand Management and Looked After Children
- Exploitation (to include missing children)
- Children’s Services Transformation programme
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health
- Statutory reports – annual complaints report, report of Corporate Parenting Board, report of Walsall Safeguarding Children Board.
- Member reports on visits to children’s homes, new belongings and council4kids.
- Youth Justice
- Financial Monitoring
- Ofsted Working Group on recommendations 7 and 9.

9/18 Forward Plan

The forward plan was noted.

The date of the next meeting was agreed as 25th September 2018.

There being no further business the meeting terminated at 7.55 p.m.

Signed:

Date: