

## **CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**COUNCIL CHAMBER, WALSALL COUNCIL HOUSE**

**TUESDAY 23 NOVEMBER 2021 at 6.00 p.m.**

### **Committee Members Present:**

Councillor A. Hicken (Chair)  
Councillor F. Mazhar  
Councillor H. Bashir  
Councillor G. Flint  
Councillor A. Hussain  
Councillor P. Kaur  
Councillor K. Murphy  
Councillor A. Nawaz  
Councillor A. Nazir  
Councillor L. Rattigan  
Councillor C. Statham

### **Portfolio Holder**

Councillor T. Wilson

### **Officers**

Colleen Male Director - Children's Social Work  
Andrea Potts Director - Early Help and Partnerships  
Tanya Collier – Lead Accountant  
Helena Kucharczyk – Head of Performance Improvement and Quality  
Zoe Morgan – Head of Support and Protection  
Phil Rutherford – Strategic Lead for Youth Justice Services  
Nikki Gough – Democratic Services Officer

16/21 **Apologies**

There were no apologies received for the duration of this meeting.

17/21 **Substitutions**

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

18/21 **Declarations of Interest and party whip**

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

19/21 **Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)**

There were no items to be considered in private session.

20/21 **Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> October 2021 were considered by the Committee.

**Resolved**

**The minutes of the previous meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> October 2021 were agreed as a true and accurate record.**

21/21 **Draft Revenue Budget and Draft Capital Programme 2022/23 – 2025/26**

The Director stated that the draft revenue budget, as reported to Cabinet on 20 October 2021, included the latest medium term financial outlook for the four year period from 2022/23 to 2025/26. It also outlined the draft revenue budget for 2022/23 to 2025/26 (this included savings proposals for consultation), draft capital programme for 2022/23 to 2025/26, and set out the process and timescale for setting a legally balanced budget for 2022/23. It was noted that this report provided an extract which related to the remit of the Committee, and feedback from Members on this report would be provided to Cabinet in December.

Members were informed that appendix 1 and 2 detailed the level of savings for 2022/23. Within this the Director confirmed that the proposal 'P1', would be delivered in 2022/23.

The areas outlined in appendix one had already been considered by the Committee previously. From a Childrens social care perspective, all areas proposed were green. However it was noted that 'Ref 45' Grandparents plus was amber due to delays within the court and CAFCASS system. The Committee were assured that these delays were in the process of being resolved.

Officers described proposals for 2023/24 and it was noted that the proposal relating to Early Help, and the savings would equated to 30 redundancies and a third of the budget. The Committee were informed that a change to statutory nature and requirements of Local Authorities in the delivery of early help. Due to this uncertainty the saving had been delayed to 2023/24, work was underway to mitigate the impact of this saving and work with partners to strengthen the early help platform.

A Member questioned 'OP11' and the impact of recruitment and retention of foster carers. Officers confirmed that this saving aimed to avoid foster care disruption, through the provision of a foster care support team. Savings would be achieved by the avoidance of the use of residential care (prevention of placement breakdown).

In response to a query from a Member, Officers confirmed that the Daisy project was a 12 month pilot which worked with parents at risk of multiple children removed from the family. The aim of the project was to break cycles and the need for children to be removed from families, where this could not be achieved a plan for an unborn child could be made early on in the process to avoid costly foster placements. The Portfolio Holder stated that savings were as a result of investments which created efficiencies and produced better outcomes.

A Member questioned 'OP9' turning point, and asked for further information on investment. The aim of this project was to prevent older children coming into care and residential homes, this was achieved through an intensive work with children and families. The proposal relating to 'troubled families' created £1m funding from government, due to uncertainty with this funding this was included as a contingency within the budget.

A Member asked for further information on how savings were identified in relation to 'Grandparents Plus'. Officers confirmed that identification of children would could be transferred from LAC to special guardianship. There was potential for further growth in these areas, however there were external factors which affected this proposal.

#### **Resolved (Unanimous)**

**That the Committee considered and noted the draft revenue budget proposals attached that related to the remit of this committee as shown in Appendices 1 and 2, and that feedback would be presented to Cabinet on 15 December 2021.**

22/21

#### **Corporate financial performance – quarter 2 financial monitoring position for 2021/22**

The Lead Accountant presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). Members were informed that the report provided the

budget monitoring position for Period 5 2021/22. For services under the remit of this committee the forecast revenue position was net nil as at Period 5, after net use of reserves of £3.65m (the reasons for the use of reserves was provided at table 1). Further detail on the use of reserves was provided, and revenue risks – as detailed in table 4 of the report. The total capital programme budget for the services under the remit of the committee is £269k and this was expected to be fully spent.

**Resolved:**

**To note the revenue and capital forecast for the financial year end 2021/22 for the services under the remit of the committee.**

23/21

**Children’s Services Performance and Benchmarking for children in need**

The Head of Performance Improvement and Quality presented the report (annexed) and highlighted the salient points. The report presented the performance and benchmarking data in relation to children in need, including child protection for 2020-21, compared to national, regional and statistical neighbours.

Officers described high levels of deprivation in the Borough, with Walsall being the 19<sup>th</sup> most deprived Local Authority in country in relation to deprivation affecting children. Despite this, children in need and subject to a plan, were reducing, most recently dropping 9%.

Through pandemic there was not a dip in referrals received, the service generally continued to receive referrals despite the pandemic. Audits were carried out and the outcomes of these indicated that decision making in MASH was accurate. The Authorities performance was weaker than statistic neighbours for ‘repeat referrals’, and children who were referred tended to be more complex – work being done was helping to reduce this. It was noted that there were a higher number of referrals for domestic violence in comparison to statistical neighbours, although this had started to reduce. Further analysis was being carried out to understand this further.

A Member clarified that contacts to children’s social care had not dipped during lockdown and questioned where referrals were received from. Officers confirmed that this was the case and during the pandemic the police made the most referrals. A Member asked for further details on work done with Partners to ensure that referrals were appropriate. Officers stated that work was done with schools – in particular designated safeguarding leads. The Director stated that, as a pilot local authority, schools would receive supervision from a social worker to support them in managing referrals, this work would then be evaluated. It was noted that the Authority had a good relationship with schools. A

Member asked for clarification in relation to the timeliness of referrals, Officers confirmed that MASH considered referrals within 48 hours, although decisions were often made within 24 hours. Officers also confirmed that Partner response was good and timely.

Clarification was sought in relation to return home interviews, and Officers stated that every child was offered a return home interview however not all accepted it.

### **Resolved**

**That the Children's Services Performance and Benchmarking report be noted.**

**24/21**

### **Children's Services Performance and Benchmarking – deprivation analysis**

The Head of Performance Improvement and Quality presented the report (annexed) and highlighted the salient points. The report presented the performance and benchmarking data in relation to deprivation analysis. This analysis outlined levels of deprivation by the four locality areas across Walsall. The demographic make-up of different areas had been combined with deprivation data to provide an overview of deprivation and need across the borough.

Officers provided a description of the characteristics of each locality with central and western areas typically much more deprived than eastern areas, although pockets of deprivation existed even in the more affluent parts of the borough. The 2019, Index of Multiple Deprivation ranked Walsall as the 25th most deprived English local authority (out of 317), placing Walsall within the most deprived 10% of districts in the country.

A Member questioned if health outcomes indicated similar trends across the borough, and the impact of deprivation on infant mortality. It was suggested that this would fall within the Public Health remit and acknowledged that deprivation impacted all services within the Authority.

A Member questioned if money was being spent in the areas that needed it the most. Officers responded to state that budgets were based on locality models and allocation of staff and resource/capacity was allocated to ensure they were in the areas that needed it the most. It was stressed that Children's Services were focused on improving deprivation and improving outcomes for children, however this needed to be addressed through a whole system approach. The Portfolio Holder stated that budgets were not allocated to specific areas but to those children who needed it. A Member stated that children growing up in the East and North of the Borough would have different outcomes and challenged what was being done to improve this and ensure that children had the same opportunities. Officers and the Portfolio Holder responded to state that deprivation was a Council wide and a Partner responsibility, and stressed that resources followed demand.

Officers were asked for further clarity on locality differences in relation to

children subject of child protection plans. Officers stated that the differences were often due to larger sibling groups.

### **Resolved**

**That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the analysis on the impact of deprivation on children's needs and the impact that deprivation can have on the needs of children and demand within children's services.**

**25/21**

### **Overview of Missing Children Performance and Data**

The Head of Performance Improvement and Quality presented the report (annexed) and highlighted the salient points. The report presented the performance and benchmarking data in relation to overview of missing children performance and data. This had been taken to the Committee as a result of the indicator within the 'measure of success' flagging as red. It was noted that when the target had been re-evaluated it was identified that it had been set using data during the lockdown period, during this time the number of children missing was significantly reduced.

Members were informed that each child reported as missing was offered a return home interview, and this information was considered at a multi-agency triage meeting.

### **Resolved**

**That the Overview of Missing children performance and data report was noted**

**26/21**

### **Safeguarding children with disabilities**

The Head of Support and Protection presented the report (annexed) and highlighted the salient points. The report presented the performance and benchmarking data in relation to safeguarding children with disabilities. The Team currently supported 149 children and their families, 125 children were supported under section 17 (those with a child in need plan), 22 children were in the care of the local authority and 2 of these were on child protection plans. Referrals were received for all children aged 0 -18 with a diagnosed disability requiring significant support. The Team worked closely with Partners, and was co-located at the Goscote hub. A review of the service had been completed as part of a themed audit, and from that work streams had followed this, this included transition to adult services. Feedback from the themed audit was described, and many positive points were raised.

A Member questioned why the cut off point for the service was 18 years for this cohort of children, the Head of Support and Protection stated that this was why the transition support was important, and work was ongoing to ensure that this was commenced early. Further challenge was provided around transition, and if this was cross border.

A discussion was held around support for parents, and officers confirmed that support provided was a whole family approach – in particular for siblings. Feedback indicated that families felt supported. In addition the team worked closely with schools, and partnership working was good.

The Committee discussed staffing challenges within the team, and Members questioned if this had impacted children and families. Officers confirmed that the service continued to be provided, and during the pandemic work had been carried out differently to meet their needs.

### **Resolved**

**That the Safeguarding children with disabilities be noted.**

27/21

### **Youth Justice – First Time Entrants**

The Strategic Lead for Youth Justice introduced the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). Context to the service was provided, alongside a description of key performance indicators. The focus on the report was in response to the performance indicator 'Reducing the number of young people entering the justice system for the first time'. Data was for the period April 2020 – March 2021, and this covered lockdown periods. A first time entrant was a young person between the age of 10 and 17 years old that received their first substantive outcome (receive a caution or conviction). Since 2014, the latest published data (2020) indicated a 50% reduction in Walsall in the number of first time entrants. The spike in 2019 was understood, and the service was back on track in 2020.

Members were assured that since May 2021 there had been a steady reduction in numbers entering the system, and performance had stabilised. It was important that the correct benchmark target was identified to demonstrate adequate performance for this indicator.

The work, alongside Partners, that was ongoing to reduce the number of first time entrants was described. Partnership working had improved and this would assist with the performance of this indicator.

A Member questioned how much gang related crime featured in Walsall, and the Committee were informed that there was activity to tackle criminal exploitation. The Youth Justice Team were part of the exploitation hub, the offer for young people at risk of this was strong.

In response to a query, Officers described the relationship with schools as good, and often a significant number of referrals were provided by schools for young people at risk of committing criminal activity. The criteria for these referrals was robustly monitored, and data was reviewed regularly. Further to this, the importance of the 'Think Family' approach was detailed, and the complex needs within families for children at risk of offending.

**Resolved**

**That the Youth Justice – First Time Entrants report was noted.**

28/21

**Areas of Focus**

The Clerk described amendments made to the draft work programme.

**Resolved**

**The areas of focus and forward plans were noted.**

The date of the next meeting was 31 January 2021, 6pm.

**Termination of Meeting**

The meeting terminated at 8 p.m.

Signed .....

Date .....