

EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4 APRIL 2017 AT 6.00 PM AT THE COUNCIL HOUSE

Committee Members present	Councillor C. Towe (Chair) Councillor T. Jukes (Vice-Chair) Councillor D. Barker Councillor M. Follows Councillor N. Gultasib Councillor E. Hazell Councillor E. Russell Councillor M. Ward Councillor T. Wilson
Portfolio Holders present	Councillor A. Nawaz - Children's Services and Education
Non-elected voting Members Present	Ms M. Wollaston (Parent Governor) Ms T. Tunnell (Parent Governor)
Non-elected non-voting Members present	Ms R. Bragger (Primary Teacher Representative)
Officers present	Mr D. Haley - Executive Director (Children's Services) Ms D. Carter - Assistant Director (Children's Social Care) Mrs. L. Poole - Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) Mrs J. Sembi - Group Manager (Children's Services) Dr P. Fantom - Democratic Services Officer
In attendance	Mrs F. Done - Independent Chair of the Education Challenge Board and the SENDI Challenge Board Ms M. Hudson - Co-Chair and Young Person Representative of Corporate Parenting Board

31/17 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor A. Ditta and Mrs P. Welter.

32/17 PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION

The Chair informed the Committee that Councillor R. Burley had decided to step down from the position of Portfolio Holder for Children's Services and Education. Councillor A. Nawaz had been appointed to this position and was welcomed to his first meeting of the Committee in this capacity.

33/17 **SUBSTITUTIONS**

There were no substitutions.

34/17 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

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

35/17 **LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985 (AS AMENDED)**

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

36/17 **MINUTES**

Members considered the minutes of the special meeting held on 26 January 2017 and the meeting held on 16 February 2017.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meetings held on 26 January and 16 February 2017, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record, subject to the following amendments to Minutes 17/17 and 25/17:

Further to Minute 17/17, and the question concerning the effectiveness of partners in engaging with their workforces and local communities to raise awareness of and improve safeguarding against CSE, the Chair had enquired about the 72 hour interview process in situations when parents and/or children did not engage with the process. The Chair reiterated the need for stronger action by the partners to ensure that such children who were at risk were kept on the radar and action taken to protect them.

Further to Minute 17/17, a Member referred to the discussion concerning where CSE-related crimes occurred and where the victims were from. During the meeting it had been noted that there was the practice of offenders travelling to other areas of the country to commit CSE-related offences, and that this could involve children who lived in Walsall. It was reiterated that DCI Lambert had advised the Committee that (subject to consultation with other Constabularies) it was the location where the offence had occurred that determined which Police Force was responsible for arresting a suspected perpetrator, and that this was reflected in the crime statistics.

Further to Minute 25/17, a Member reminded the Committee of the discussion on school leadership and the means to address the performance of Head teachers in underperforming schools. It had been reported by the Head of Educational Standards and School Improvement that procedures were in place to challenge and ensure that in such cases the Head teachers were offered support and held to account when performance was below the required standard. Furthermore, it was confirmed that there had been occasions when underperforming Head teachers had been removed from their posts.

37/17 UPDATE FROM THE EDUCATION CHALLENGE BOARD AND THE SENDI CHALLENGE BOARD

The Committee considered a report [annexed] which provided an update on the work and progress of the Education Challenge Board and the Special Educational Needs, Disability and Inclusion (SENDI) Challenge Board.

The Chair welcomed Frances Done, the Independent Chair of both the Education Challenge Board and the SENDI Challenge Board, who addressed the Committee. She explained the wider education improvement agenda, what was being done to implement the actions of the Walsall School Improvement Strategy and noted that Walsall had made improvements and was making expected progress. There were still areas that required further work, however, and she referred to the review of current performance and current action plans. Reference was made to the scorecard summary, the necessity of having to change some of the targets for achievement and whether the target date to achieve the national average was 2018 or 2019. The Independent Chair commented that what was to be achieved was ambitious and to achieve some of the targets by 2018 would be extremely challenging.

This timescale was queried by the Chair and the Executive Director (Children's Services) provided clarification on this matter, stating that it was the Authority's objective to reach the national average of schools judged good or better by 2018. He added that at the February 2017 Education Challenge Board meeting, there had been a review of the validated results and the opportunity was taken to review the targets based on what the data was indicating. It was noted that the change of target was for isolated measures and the direction set out in the School Improvement Strategy was being maintained.

Members expressed disappointment that the target date might have been put back to 2019 and requested assurance that the target for attaining the average did not move to 2020/21. Rather than making progression towards reaching the national average position, the view was expressed by Members that the Authority should be aiming to exceed this.

A question from a Member regarding how Walsall compared with other West Midlands local authorities was raised. The Independent Chair gave the response that as a general question this required examination of specific information concerning the attainment gaps in comparable authorities and how success measures were used and data interrogated to drive and support improvement. This would be quite variable. Walsall had improved more than expected in some areas but less so in others, and whilst school and pupil performance was improving it was not doing so at a fast enough rate, relative to other schools nationally, meaning that Walsall's schools performance improvement had not been rapid enough to close the gap with the national average.

The Independent Chair made reference to the section of her report that dealt with school performance (page 36 refers). This demonstrated the improvement in performance for schools judged good or outstanding by Ofsted since December 2013. By March 2017, in Walsall this had risen to 81.4 per cent, although this remained below the national average of 89.5 per cent. This was encouraging but it

was noted that in order to exceed the national average, seven primary schools would have to improve to a rating of good or outstanding.

The Executive Director (Children's Services) drew the Committee's attention to the Success Measures Scorecard [annexed] and offered reassurance that the intention was for the Council to have achieved its target of reaching the national average by 2018 and to have exceeded it by 2019. The Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) pointed out that whilst there had been changes to both the curricula and SATS, there had been improvements by Walsall relative to the other West Midlands local authorities; however, there had also been changes to the Ofsted outcomes. Work was being carried out with 13 other local authorities in the region and would continue to drive improvement.

A Member sought the Independent Chair's views on the situation where a school had been downgraded from a rating of good to one of requiring improvement in terms of the causes of this and what could be done about it. The Independent Chair responded by referring to the arrangements within the Authority, stating that there was a constant review of what action could be taken to create improvements in individual schools, but acknowledging that the Education Challenge Board tended not to focus on individual cases. She stated that with school leadership driving improvement, there was a concentration on leadership at all levels in Walsall's schools in order for them to deliver results. Furthermore, there was also a focus on the support given to Newly Qualified Teachers in Walsall to ensure that they were able to successfully develop their careers within their chosen school.

The Independent Chair recognised the high level of commitment to their localities by people in the West Midlands and stated that she was encouraged by the progress made over the last three years, including improvements in the relationships with schools. She reiterated that the role of both of the Challenge Boards remained to monitor and challenge in order to make improvements.

The hard work of teachers in Walsall was noted by the Committee and a Member acknowledged that frustration was being felt by teachers due to changes to both the curriculum and assessment. He also felt that funding changes were having a more pronounced impact in economically-deprived areas than in other areas of the country.

Reference having been made to the national funding formula by the Chair, the Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) informed the Committee that this was having a negative impact on schools in economically disadvantaged areas when compared with schools in larger rural areas. This was due to the number of pupils in a school and tended to benefit rural schools that would otherwise be underfunded. Also to be factored in were the changes to funding for grammar school places and a reduction in nursery school funding. The impact of this was detrimental to local schools and in some cases had led to redundancies.

A question was raised by a Member in relation to the raising of achievement given the increase in children with special educational needs. The Independent Chair referred to the establishment of the SENDI Challenge Board and that aspect of her report that dealt with the Board's progress. The Independent Chair stated that there were groups of children who were not making the improvements in performance

required for the gap to be closed. She explained how areas of concern were dealt with, including through the involvement of parents and carers, both at the individual level and the strategic level.

This point was expanded upon to reiterate the focus of the Challenge Board's strategy and priorities. This work was being undertaken in conjunction with Children's Services, Adult Services, the Care Commissioning Group and other providers to make the required changes happen. She stated that there was much good work being done in Walsall, but gave the example of the early identification of special or additional needs via early years' provision and locality working which helped to ensure that children with special educational needs were supported within mainstream schools. However, she remained confident that Walsall was getting to grips with such matters.

Responding to a question from the Chair, the Independent Chair indicated that while she felt clarity about the direction of joined-up working in Walsall, there was a way to go before the service could be just delivered because there were some arrangements that still needed to be put in place. The Chair added that it was a priority for the Council to get children with special educational needs into education and he asked about the action plan for this. The Independent Chair referred to SENDI 2020, which had ambitious targets but she stressed that it also required good school leadership and partnership arrangements. The biggest gain would be to bring together in mainstream schools the delivery of services needed by every child with special educational needs.

A Member enquired about exclusions for primary and secondary schools. The Independent Chair referred to discussions on the Fair Access Protocol and pointed out that in some cases exclusions occurred in cases where special educational needs had not been identified in the children concerned. It was, however, possible for these needs to be identified much earlier and work on this was being undertaken.

A reference was made by a Member to improvement of the ARPs, although it was noted that there were still a lot of challenges and a view from some parents that children were still being overlooked and parents had to fight hard for them to get their needs met. However, she stated that it was a positive and encouraging step that a new parent carer forum had been established in Walsall.

With reference to the conclusions made in the Independent Chair's report, Members expressed agreement with the comment that there was strong commitment and enthusiasm on the part of those involved within the Council and within schools in driving and supporting improvement. Note was also taken of the comment that resources were increasingly stretched and Members sought assurance from the Executive Director (Children's Services) that the Council would be able to make progress in achieving the targets. The Executive Director (Children's Services) responded by stating that two additional funding streams had been ring-fenced and would enable capacity to be given to the completion of EHCPs. It was acknowledged that there had been problems with respect to the staffing in two areas; however, it was indicated by the Executive Director that this was being addressed via the recruitment of new staff and that what was required was being done.

The Chair drew the discussion to a close by stating that whilst everyone wanted to get this to work, he was concerned about the gap between Walsall schools' performance and the national average. He felt that efforts should be redoubled to ensure that this gap was closed. The Independent Chair referred to the revision of targets and the need for longer term targets to be added. She emphasised that the actual main focus an overall ambition had not changed and it remained to meet the national average in 2018 and to exceed it in 2019.

The Chair thanked the Independent Chair for her report and it was confirmed that she would again report to the Committee in the autumn of 2017.

Resolved:

That the report of the Independent Chair of the Education Challenge Board and the SENDI Challenge Board be noted.

38/17 FEEDBACK FROM MEMBERS THAT UNDERTOOK VISITS TO WALSALL CHILDREN'S HOMES

Members provided feedback after visiting the Bluebells, Lichfield Road, Redruth Road and Spindle Tree children's homes.

The visit to Spindle Tree had raised some issues, although it was believed that appropriate steps had been taken to address them with this being a one-off experience. The other Members made positive reports and identified particular aspects of their visits that had impressed them. Members were complimentary about the staff at each of the homes stating that they provided good care for the children.

Further to a question from Members regarding children being brought back into the Borough, the Assistant Director (Children's Social Care) confirmed that 230 children were being cared for outside of the Borough and there were 35 children placed at a distance, i.e. they were beyond 20 miles of their home address. As a part of the Looked After Children reduction plan and its associated tracking work, she reported that it was a key priority to bring these children back safely within the Borough.

Resolved:

That the feedback from Members be received.

39/17 FEEDBACK FROM MEMBERS APPOINTED TO ENGAGE WITH NEW BELONGINGS AND COUNCIL-4-KIDS

A Member provided feedback on her engagement with Council-4-Kids and explained to the Committee the positive nature of this group's activities and the educational and training courses being undertaken. Arising from her visit, she intended to enquire whether any Council Members had themselves been Looked After Children and would, in the first instance, be emailing the Leaders of the respective political groups to seek their support for this.

Other Members indicated that they were due to meet with either New Belongings or Council-4-Kids and would convey their feedback to the Committee during the forthcoming municipal year.

Resolved:

That the feedback from Members be received.

40/17 CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

The Committee considered a report [annexed] that provided an update on the activity and operation of the Corporate Parenting Board and the Assistant Director (Children's Social Care) enlarged on the key areas of progress that had been made over the past year.

Further to a question from the Chair, it was confirmed by the Group Manager (Children's Services) that the number of Looked After Children in Walsall was currently 645. This number had risen due to the recent admission of some large sibling groups that were at risk of significant harm. The Executive Director (Children's Services) indicated that although 150 children had been discharged from the Authority's care over the last year, the net number had continued to rise. He confirmed that the over spend was still circa £2m and that the budget for this area for 2016/17 was £14m and that there had been additional investment of £2.5m.

The Vice-Chair, who is the current Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board, had invited Marie Hudson, the current Co-Chair and Young Person Representative on the Board, to attend the Committee's meeting and to respond to a number of questions that would be of interest to Members. The questions, together with Marie's responses, were as follows:

- Which of the pledges to Looked After Children are the most important?
Response: Don't judge care leavers on their past; believe in their future.
- Do you feel staff and members are responsive to respect training?
Response: There was really good feedback to the questionnaire, showing that they understood it more.
- Why is it important to have young people on the Board?
Response: So that young people can get their views across and tell you the best way for you to help us.
- How well does the Board involve young people and what can be done better?
Response: The work is really good, as are the activities.

In response to a question from a Member regarding the Board's membership and levels of attendance, the Assistant Director (Children's Social Care) emphasised that there was real commitment from Board members and partners, that attendance at meetings was being tracked and had shown improvement since Councillor Jukes had chaired the meeting. There was also a question regarding a vacant post and it was

confirmed that this was for the position of Team Manager – Transition Leaving Care, which would be recruited to in the coming weeks, with agency cover being provided in the interim. It was also noted that steps had been taken to recruit to a newly created position of Assistant Team Manager and that an appointment had just been made.

With reference to the pledges to all Looked After Children and things to do, Members raised several questions in respect of the impact of funding cuts on youth clubs and the importance of treating passport applications as a priority, especially where the children lived in a long-term placement. The Assistant Director (Children's Social Care) highlighted the importance of ensuring that young people had access to a range of good leisure activities to improve wellbeing and social skills and noted that facilitating passport applications was a priority for social workers. During discussion, the Chair encouraged consideration of the activities at Forest Arts that helped young people to build confidence, and the Executive Director (Children's Services) also mentioned similar activities at the Aldridge Airport Outdoor Centre.

The Chair enquired about the use of the Pupil Premium to support those Looked After Children who were working below their expected levels of educational attainment. On average, the Premium was an allocation of £600 per child and Members were concerned that this should be beneficial to the children concerned. The Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) anticipated that a report on this would be prepared for presentation to a future meeting of the Committee.

Further to a comment from the Chair on the pledge to Care Leavers and what else could be done, the Vice-Chair mentioned the commitments that had been proposed by portfolio holders and directors. These included a 25 per cent reduction in Council Tax for Care Leavers up to the age of 25 years, and a reduction in Council Tax for foster carers.

The Vice-Chair expressed her thanks to all members of the Corporate Parenting Board for the time and commitment they had given to it.

Resolved:

1. That the contents of the report be noted and that the current activity of the Corporate Parenting Board be supported.
2. That a report on the use of the Pupil Premium in relation to Looked After Children be presented to a meeting of the Committee in the forthcoming municipal year.

41/17 LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS

The Committee considered a report [annexed] that gave an update on the current position having regard to Looked After Children and Care Leavers in Walsall.

In addition to expanding on the report for the benefit of Members, the Group Manager (Children's Services) explained that she was leading a project which aimed to safely reduce the number of Looked After Children in the Borough.

The Chair sought clarification about the role of the Public Law Outline (PLO) Panel. The Assistant Director (Children's Social Care) explained that there were two routes by which children were taken into local authority care. This was via the Children's Act, with s.20 being the voluntary route, intended as a temporary arrangement with no transfer of parental responsibility, and there were a small number of such cases in Walsall; the other route being in accordance with legal proceedings under s.31, where there was the right to remove a child or children without parental consent in cases where there was a concern about the care of that child or children. The PLO Panel was concerned with the processes by which these two routes operated.

A Member enquired about the 9 children who had ceased to be looked after as they were either sentenced to custody or not remanded (section 1.11 refers). The Group Manager (Children's Services) stated that when a young person was remanded, they immediately acquired Looked After Child status and a robust support plan was then put in place for this period. There was a further question regarding the 37 young people who ceased to be Looked After Children at age 18 and it was noted that the Council had a responsibility to support such young adults up to the age of 21 years currently, but this was to be extended to 25 years with effect from autumn 2017.

A Member asked about the new duties under the Keep on Caring review. The Group Manager (Children's Services) reported that there had been a meeting with care leavers and that there were discussions with how they could be involved through New Belongings and the steps being put in place regarding accommodation and support. There was a commitment to ensure that young people fed into the review.

In response to questions concerning the role of personal advisers, the Assistant Director (Children's Social Care) clarified the duties of the Personal Advisers. Although they were not social workers, the two roles were often complementary, and there were occasions when both a social worker and a personal adviser would work with a young person. In accordance with the DfE's updated 2015 guidance, personal advisers were recruited from a range of backgrounds to provide valuable advocacy and support, bringing additionality to the Care Leaver process by assisting young people in matters such as money management and the opening of bank accounts. It was confirmed that currently there were no male personal advisers and whilst none were former care leavers, one of the assistant personal advisers had been a care leaver. In terms of out of hours support, there was an emergency duty service and the provision of a 24-7 service was currently under consideration. The Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) pointed out that personal advisers also undertook work relating to youth employment, training and apprenticeships.

The Chair asked about the delivery of the aforementioned project and its resources, with the Group Manager (Children's Services) anticipating that the project would be delivered within six months. The Assistant Director (Children's Social Care) reported on an initial engagement session with partners earlier in the day focussing on the delivery of a range of initiatives for Personal Advisers for which the Group Manager (Children's Services) would also have responsibility. The Executive Director (Children's Services) reported that officers working on the transformation programme, which had a work stream dedicated to reducing the number of Looked After Children, had made a number of pledges. Champions across the service had been designated and would need support, including from the Corporate Parenting Board.

A Member raised the question of the support given to Care Leavers with disabilities. The Group Manager (Children's Services) stated that support was provided to the age of 25, and when care needs were complex the role of Personal Adviser became more advocacy-orientated and undertaken in conjunction with Adult Services.

Further to a question from a Member on the young homelessness team, there was a request for a briefing note to be circulated to the Committee. The Chair suggested that this to be added as an item to the work programme for the next municipal year.

Resolved

1. That the contents of the report be noted and that the next steps regarding further developments for the work of the Looked After Children and Care Leaver Service be endorsed.
2. That an item on the young homelessness team be added to the work programme for the forthcoming municipal year.

42/17 QUESTION FROM A MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC

The Chair invited a member of the public who had attended the meeting as an observer to raise questions regarding a local school. It was agreed that as the school was in his ward, the Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) should liaise directly with Councillor T. Wilson and the member of the public on this matter.

43/17 UPDATE FROM THE CHILD POVERTY WORKING GROUP

The Committee considered a report [annexed] that provided an update on the work of the working group. As the Working Group's Lead Member, Councillor E. Hazell presented the report and made reference to the varied and vast nature of the issue of child poverty. As a consequence of this, no single department of the Council held a specific remit to tackle child poverty, but notwithstanding that a lot of work was being done by the Authority in relation to it.

During discussion of the report, Members highlighted the complexity and scale of the issue, both nationally and within the Borough, with poverty afflicting many working households and the benefits system often impeding efforts to take people out of poverty. The work of the Council's Welfare Rights Team was highlighted in the report and it was confirmed that during 2015/16 this team had helped Walsall people to gain collectively £14,695,763.82 in additional income. The value of this being more than monetary, Members appreciated its wider importance to the Borough.

Further to a question from a Member on the action plan, it was noted that the report contained a number of recommendations for the Cabinet. The necessity of ensuring that these recommendations were complementary to the Council's Corporate Strategy was also emphasised by the Committee and was acknowledged by the Portfolio Holder for Education and Children's Services. He also referred to examples of anti-poverty strategies being pursued in other countries. A further

recommendation was that the Black Country Food Bank be invited to a future meeting to provide feedback on the outcomes of its service delivery.

Resolved:

1. That the report of the Child Poverty Working Group be endorsed and referred to the Cabinet for consideration;
2. That the Black Country Food Bank be invited to a meeting of the Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee during the forthcoming municipal year.

44/17 WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLANS

Members considered the Work Programme and the Forward Plans of the Council and the Black Country Executive Joint Committee. These would be updated for the first meeting of the forthcoming municipal year.

Resolved:

That the Work Programme and the Forward Plans be noted.

45/17 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting would be approved by the Council in May 2017.

The Chair closed the meeting by thanking the Members of the Committee and the officers for their work and support during the 2016/17 municipal year.

The meeting terminated at 8.43 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....