



Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Meeting to be held on: **Thursday 3 November 2022 at 6.00 p.m.**

Meeting at: Walsall Council House.

Public access to meeting via: <http://www.WalsallCouncilWebcasts.com>

MEMBERSHIP:

Chair:	Councillor. Hicken
Vice Chair:	Councillor. Jukes
	Councillor. Garcha
	Councillor. Harrison
	Councillor. Horton
	Councillor. Kaur
	Councillor. Mazhar
	Councillor. Nasreen
	Councillor. Rattigan
	Councillor C. Statham
	Councillor. Waters

PORTFOLIO HOLDER: Councillor T. Wilson.

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Democratic Services, Council House, Lichfield Street, Walsall, WS1 1TW
Contact: Nikki Gough ☎ 01922 654767 E-mail: nikki.gough@walsall.gov.uk

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AGENDA

1.	Apologies To receive apologies for absence from Members of the Committee.	
2.	Substitutions To receive notice of any substitutions for a Member of the Committee for the duration of the meeting.	
3.	Declarations of interest and party whip To receive declarations of interest or the party whip from Members in respect of items on the agenda.	
4.	Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended) To agree that the public be excluded from the private session during consideration of the agenda items indicated for the reasons shown on the agenda (if applicable).	
5.	Minutes of the previous meeting To approve and sign the minutes of the meeting that took place on 27 th September, 2022.	<u>Enclosed</u>
<u>Scrutiny</u>		
6.	Quarter 2 Financial Monitoring Position for 2022/23 To note the revenue and capital forecast for the financial year end 2022/23.	<u>Enclosed</u>
7.	Social Worker Recruitment and Retention An overview of social worker staffing in Children's Social Care, and to note activity undertaken to support the recruitment and retention of social workers.	<u>Enclosed</u>
<u>Overview</u>		
8.	Recommendation Tracker To review progress with recommendations from previous meetings.	<u>Enclosed</u>
9.	Areas of Focus 2022/23 To agree the Committees Work Programme and review the Forward Plans for Walsall Council and the Black Country Executive Committee.	<u>Enclosed</u>
10.	Date of next meeting To note that the date of the next meeting will be 8 December 2022.	

The Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012

Specified pecuniary interests

The pecuniary interests which are specified for the purposes of Chapter 7 of Part 1 of the Localism Act 2011 are the interests specified in the second column of the following:

Subject	Prescribed description
Employment, office, trade, profession or vocation	Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain.
Sponsorship	<p>Any payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than from the relevant authority) made or provided within the relevant period in respect of any expenses incurred by a member in carrying out duties as a member, or towards the election expenses of a member.</p> <p>This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Regulations (Consolidation) Act 1992.</p>
Contracts	<p>Any contract which is made between the relevant person (or a body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest) and the relevant authority:</p> <p>(a) under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed; and</p> <p>(b) which has not been fully discharged.</p>
Land	Any beneficial interest in land which is within the area of the relevant authority.
Licences	Any licence (alone or jointly with others) to occupy land in the area of the relevant authority for a month or longer.
Corporate tenancies	<p>Any tenancy where (to a member's knowledge):</p> <p>(a) the landlord is the relevant authority;</p> <p>(b) the tenant is a body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest.</p>
Securities	<p>Any beneficial interest in securities of a body where:</p> <p>(a) that body (to a member's knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of the relevant authority; and</p> <p>(b) either:</p> <p>(i) the total nominal value of the securities</p>

	<p>exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or</p> <p>(ii) if the share capital of that body is more than one class, the total nominal value of the shares of any one class in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest exceeds one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class.</p>
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Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended)

Access to information: Exempt information

Part 1

Descriptions of exempt information: England

1. Information relating to any individual.
2. Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).
4. Information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the authority.
5. Information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings.
6. Information which reveals that the authority proposes:
 - (a) to give any enactment a notice under or by virtue of which requirements are imposed on a person; or
 - (b) to make an order or direction under any enactment.
7. Information relating to any action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime.
8. Information being disclosed during a meeting of a Scrutiny and Performance Panel when considering flood risk management functions which:
 - (a) Constitutes a trades secret;
 - (b) Its disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice the commercial interests of any person (including the risk management authority);

- (c) It was obtained by a risk management authority from any other person and its disclosure to the public by the risk management authority would constitute a breach of confidence actionable by that other person.

Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Conference Room 2, Walsall Council House

Tuesday 27 September 2022 at 6.00 p.m.

Committee Members Present

Councillor A. Hicken (Chair)
Councillors T. Jukes
Councillor A. Garcha
Councillor P. Kaur
Councillor Mazhar
Councillor Nasreen
Councillor L. Rattigan
Councillor Waters
Councillor Whitehouse
Councillor K Sears

Portfolio Holder

Councillor T Wilson

Officers

Julie Jones	-	Group Manager
Philip Rutherford	-	Strategic Lead Youth Justice Services
Isabel Vanderheeren	-	Director Early Help and Partnerships
Colleen Male	-	Director - Children's Social Work
Nikki Gough	-	Democratic Services Officer
Reena Farmah	-	Democratic Services Officer

10/22 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Harrison, Councillor C. Statham and Councillor Horton.

The Chair welcomed Members to the meeting and introductions were made.

11/22 Substitutions

Councillor Whitehouse substituted on behalf of Councillor L. Harrison and Councillor K. Sears substituted on the behalf of Councillor C. Statham for the duration of the meeting.

12/22 Declarations of interest and party whip

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

13/22 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)

There were no items to be considered in private session.

14/22 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 26 July 2022 were considered by the Committee.

Resolved

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 26 July 2022 be approved as a true and accurate record.

15/22 Early Help Strategy

A report was submitted to the Committee and a presentation made by the Early Help Group Manager [annexed].

The Early Help Group Manager spoke to the presentation and informed the Committee about Walsall's Early Help partnership and its aim to provide intervention with the right support to prevent the needs of vulnerable families from escalating to reduce the demand for statutory intervention. The Walsall Early Help partnership, was one where all organisations and services worked with and for children, young people and their families in a collective and coordinated way.

The Committee noted the levels of the early help offer including partners who delivered a range of interventions from signposting to local universal services, delivering single agency support through to more intensive support targeted at levels of need;

Level 1 Universal services (universal)
Level 2 Early Help (vulnerable)
Level 3 Partnership Early Help (complex)
Level 4 Children family assessment (acute).

The Committee was informed of the Partnership's responsibility for delivering the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities Supporting Families programme, launched in March 2021. The programme was aimed at providing targeted interventions for families with complex interconnected problems and was directly associated to the delivery of the partnership approach at level 3.

The Supporting Families programme had a number of priority areas. Where three or more needs were identified an assessment was conducted by the Early Help team to provide support via an agreed family support plan.

At this point in the meeting members were shown a video regarding the launch of the Early Help Partnership Strategy 2021-2024, which was overseen by an action plan associated with the strategy.

The Early Help Group Manager explained that the demand and needs of children, young people and families with complex needs were increasing following a review conducted in December 2021, these needs were regularly reviewed.

The Portfolio Holder stated that the success of the partnership was dependent upon partners working together. The Portfolio Holder highlighted that the service was non-statutory, however the Council endorsed the service due to its success and positive outcomes for families and young people in the borough. The Council had successfully secured additional funding to support the service.

A Member questioned how success was measured in this area. The Early Help Group Manager responded that its success was evident in the uptake and willingness of families to engage. Support provided since Covid-19 had given families confidence in the service and families had helped shape the service and set priorities. The Director of Early Help and Partnerships described the model of partnership working and links with WHG. Information, data and resource sharing was key across the partnerships. Early help worked closely with the youth justice team on prevention and provide support.

A Member commented that the use of the Locality Hubs was successful and asked whether the service was considering introducing more across Walsall. The Early Help Group Manager explained that Walsall was 1 of 75 local authorities that had been awarded funding for the hubs. The Portfolio Holder stated that prior to the hubs model services was delivered centrally, these had now been moved into the locality, which had helped improve relationships with partners. To further strengthen this training was provided to the partnership and mechanisms to improve communication had been developed.

A Member asked if families at level 1 and 2 were supported. The Early Help Group Manager explained that help was available at different levels, however it was when 3 or more needs were identified that a co-ordinator was allocated to help and support the family.

A Member queried the data for teenage pregnancy and national comparisons, it was questioned how the service was engaging on prevention with these individuals. The Early Help Group Manager explained that the teenage pregnancy team and the steering group had responsibility to reduce numbers of teenage pregnancies. Awareness training was delivered within schools using evidence informed programmes. A discussion took place regarding engagement being positive with secondary schools and families. The Portfolio Holder commented that teenage pregnancy had historically been an issue within the locality. He explained that the service engaged with key partners to address issues as Walsall was above the national average. The Director for Early Help and Partnerships commented that the service aimed to do more work to destigmatise asking for help. The accessibility of data and ease of use of websites was under review to improve accessibility and the sharing of key information about services with partners.

A Member asked whether the number of families requiring help had increased to due the cost of living pressures. The Early Help Group Manager confirmed that the number of families requiring support had been consistently increasing. Finance was one of the Presenting needs of families, the partnership work with the Department for Work and Pensions helped to support these families, finance was anticipated as being an issue for families as the cost of living continued to increase.

The Chair asked for clarity regarding targets and demand for supporting families, he asked whether the service could meet demand if they increased and whether targets were achievable. The Director of Early Help and Partnerships explained that the supporting family target was separate to demand. The supporting families target related to a Government programme which had its own associated targets and was based on data sharing.

A discussion took place at this point in the meeting regarding data accessibility and promoting communication about services. Suggestions were made from members that leaflets should be distributed via schools and colleges, which would be available in multiple languages in order to remove barriers. Members suggested for websites to be accessible and user friendly, including child friendly websites to increase awareness amongst families. The Early Help Group Manager explained that leaflets and websites were used to promote support available and acknowledged this was an area for improvement.

The Chair asked how early help volunteers were sourced and whether they had specific skills set to support families and what their role involved. The Early Help Group Manager explained that the volunteers were from various backgrounds; retired teachers, college students. The service held a profile of all the volunteers containing information of their background and skills, the profile was shown to families in order for them to decide which volunteer they wished to work with, depending on the family's needs. The volunteers' undertake training to support families.

Officers were asked what the biggest impact was on families as a result of Covid-19. The Early Help Group Manager answered; isolation, the decline of emotional health and wellbeing, increased anxiety / behavioural issues amongst teenagers.

The Committee agreed that the service should continue and be funded by the Local Authority. Members congratulated the Early Help Service for the successful service provided.

Resolved

- 1. That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee request that Cabinet continue to fund the Early Help Service.**
- 2. That the direction of travel for the Early Help Partnership be supported.**
- 3. That progress and achievements be noted.**

16/22 Youth Justice Annual Plan and Strategic Priorities

The Strategic Lead for Youth Justice Service spoke to the report (annexed). The Officer provided Members with an overview of the service explaining that the Walsall Youth Justice Service (YJS) was a statutory multi-agency service under Section 37 of the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act in partnership with the Local Authority, Walsall Children's Services, West Midlands Police, National Probation Service and Health [annexed].

Members noted that the service has three national key performance indicators:

- Reducing the number of young people entering the justice system for the first time.
- Reducing re-offending.
- Reducing the use of custodial disposals.

The Officer discussed with Members the Walsall Youth Justice Service Strategic Plan 2022 – 2025 [annexed], the key priorities were highlighted;

- Reducing serious youth violence.
- Responding to disproportionality.
- Transitions and resettlement.
- Identifying and responding to unmet need (health).
- Voice of our children.

A Member questioned what factors contributed to the high percentages for boys in the youth justice system and the impact of Covid-19 on this cohort. The Officer explained that this included a number of factors; a decrease in mental health, increase in anxiety and challenging home lives. The justice service was impacted by the pandemic and delayed proceedings.

The Officer informed Members that Covid-19 for some families' aggravated issues.

A Member shared examples of car crime and antisocial behaviour taking place in their constituency and asked what type of interventions would take place for these individuals. The Officer explained that the intervention and support depended on the child's need and each plan was bespoke, partners worked together to support these needs, it may not be necessarily about the behaviour portrayed at the time of the crimes, but to understand the events leading up to the crimes. Support could be provided from early help or social care colleagues depending on the needs.

A Member questioned if recruitment and retention was an issue for the service due to the challenging work environment. It was confirmed that recruitment and retention was an issue across the service. Colleagues across the West Midlands were experiencing similar issues with recruitment and retention of staff and this was not a Walsall specific issue, this was a key focus area within Children's Services.

A Member questioned the reasons behind trends relating to areas of deprivation and queried whether there were any other factors contributing to the high rates of anti-social behaviour. The Officer responded that over the years there has been a decline in good quality youth services.

A Member questioned whether the youth justice service worked with housing associations to share data about residents that were regularly cause issues. The Officer confirmed that the service didn't receive data from housing, as a regular issue, however the services work closely together on anti-social behaviour issues. The Director of Early Help and Partnerships explained the model of partnership working and links with WHG. Information, data and resources sharing was key across the partnerships. Early help worked closely with the youth justice to review prevention and provide support.

A Member questioned the process around the 'Trailblazer Devolution Deal'. The Officer confirmed that the details of the devolution offer were yet to be shared. An alternative to custody was always a more favourable option.

- 1. That the Youth Justice Annual Plan and Strategic Priorities be noted**
- 2. That a progress report be taken to a future meeting of the Committee.**

17/22 Recommendation Tracker

The Democratic Services Officer confirmed that the committee work program had been circulated. Members requested a progress report on the Youth Justice Service be heard at future a meeting.

Resolved

That the recommendation tracker be noted.

18/22 Areas of Focus 2022/23

Members noted the Committees work program and the forward plan for Walsall Council and the Black Country Executive Committee. Members were asked to e-mail Democratic Services with any additional areas of scrutiny that they considered should be included in the areas of focus.

Resolved

That the areas of focus be agreed for the municipal year 2022/23.

19/22 Date of next meeting

The date of the next meeting will be 3 November 2022 at 6:00p.m.

There being no further business this meeting was terminated at 7:45p.m

Signed:

Date:

DATE: 3 November 2022

**CORPORATE FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE – QUARTER 2 FINANCIAL MONITORING
POSITION FOR 2022/23**

Ward(s) All

Portfolio: Councillor Wilson – Children's and Health and Wellbeing

1. Aim

To provide the budget monitoring position for Period 5 2022/23. The Chair requested that this item be considered by the Committee.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To note the revenue and capital forecast for the financial year end 2022/23 for the services under the remit of the committee.

3. Report detail – know

- 3.1 The Q2 forecast outturn position for Children's Services, after the net use of reserves and directorate action plan is an overspend of £3.68m.
- 3.2 Regular reports are prepared during 2022/23 for both Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee. For services under the remit of this committee the forecast revenue position is an overspend of £3.28m as at Period 5, after net use of reserves of c. £2.34m (see below for further details). For completeness, the forecast revenue overspend for services under the remit of the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee is £0.40m. This gives a total forecast position of £3.68m for Children's Services directorate as at 31 August 2022.
- 3.3 Reasons for the current position are shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1- Explanation of over and underspends across services	
	£m
<p>£3.28m Children in Care Demand overspend (£5.30m prior to use of reserves and action plan):</p> <p>The total forecast for 2022/23 is £32.73m. This forecast is based on the current mix of children in care and the projected future demand for the remainder of the financial year. The current budget is £27.43m, therefore there is a forecasted overspend of £5.30m. Following the use of £2.02m of reserves (£1.03m Covid reserve, £0.24m corporate reserve for complex cases and the implementation of £0.75m children's wide action plan), the forecast overspend is £3.28m. This is made up of the following:</p>	3.28
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ £1.60m Ongoing impact of price increases from 2021/22 above approved budget; ○ £1.43m Ongoing impact of increases in placement costs and the number/mix of young people in care; ○ £1.00m placement moves to date as at end July 2022; ○ (£0.75m) implementation of Children's Wide action plan. <p>£0.35m (offset by reserves) unachieved savings relating to recruitment and retention of social workers due to continued reliance on experienced agency social workers.</p>	
Total	3.28

3.4 The forecast revenue position by service is shown in Table 2 below:

Table 2- Forecast Revenue Outturn 2022/23					
Service	Annual Budget	Year End Forecast	Planned (Use of)/ transfer to Reserves	Action Plan	Variance after Reserves & Action Plan
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Children's Wide, including mitigating action plan	0.74	0.76	(0.02)	0.00	0.00
Children and young people in care costs (see table 8 for breakdown)	27.35	32.72	(2.09)	0.00	3.28
Children's Social Care	21.16	21.55	(0.39)	0.00	0.00
Early Help & Commissioning Services*	3.93	3.77	0.16	0.00	0.00
Children's Services Total	53.18	58.80	(2.34)	0.00	3.28

3.5. Reserves

The total allocated reserves for Children's Services in 2022/23 are £5.64m of which (£2.99m) has been used or committed to date. It is also expected that £0.65m will be transferred to reserves to be utilised in future years. The use of reserves includes (£1.04m) Covid reserve, (£0.24m) complex cases reserve, (£0.30m) FDAC reserve, (£0.11m) safeguarding board reserve, (£0.60m) supporting families reserve & (£0.70m) other general reserves.

Table 3 below details the current net use of reverses included within the forecast.

Table 3 - Summary of use of reserves and transfer to reserves				
Reserve Details	Allocated reserve	Use of reserve	Transfer to reserve	Balance of reserve
	£m	£m	£m	£m
Children's Wide	0.24	(0.02)	0.00	0.23
Children and young people in care	1.73	(1.28)	0.00	0.45
Children's Social Care	2.21	(0.83)	0.13	1.51
Early Help & Commissioning Services	1.46	(0.86)	0.52	1.12
Total Reserves	5.64	(2.99)	0.65	3.31

3.6. Risks

For the services under the remit of this committee, there are a number of risks totalling **£6.78m** which have not been included within the above forecast. At this stage the risks are not certainties and as such are not included in the monitoring position. High risks of **£2.67m** are included in the corporate monitoring report to CMT. If the risks become certainties, they will need to be included in the forecast position as overspends unless alternative action can be identified to mitigate these costs. A summary of the risk assessment is included in Table 4 below.

Table 4 – Revenue Risks 2022/23				
Risk	Value £m	Ongoing £m	One Off £m	Actions to manage risk
High	2.67	2.67	0	Children's Services continue to identify possible in year mitigations and review budgets as part of Council's MTFO plan.
Medium	4.11	4.11	0	The amber risks will continue to be monitored and reviewed with the service on a monthly basis.
Low	1.83	1.83	0	Green risks are reviewed to ensure they do not progress to amber.
Total	8.61	8.61	0	

The main high risks (Red risk) that could negatively impact the current forecast position should it occur is detailed further in Table 5 below.

Table 5- High risks		
Service	Reason / explanation of risk	£m
Children and young people in care	Throughout the year some placements, mainly within fostering, break down due to various reasons and the child will move, usually to an external residential placement at a higher cost. Previously this has been managed with other placement moves	1.33

	to lower cost placements offsetting this cost increase. However, this reduction has been offset in year with the implementation of service transformation plans and achieved benefits. , Therefore, there is a risk that these placement moves could continue throughout the remainder of the financial year leading to a further increase in the current forecast spend for Children and young people in care. is based on trends seen in 2021/22 and the current average cost of an external residential placement.	
Children and young people in care	£1.34m amber savings where it is not certain these benefits are achievable. The service is currently working with finance to update and refresh the original benefits and identify mitigating actions where needed.	1.34
Total High Risks		2.67

3.7 Service Transformation Plan Benefits

Included within the budget for 2022/23 for services within the remit of this Committee are c. £5.46m of approved savings. Table 6 gives an early indication of the progress towards implementing these benefits:

Table 6: Delivery of 2021/22 approved savings – services within the remit of this Committee					
Saving	Total savings £m	Delivered (Blue) £m	To be delivered by 31/03/22 (Green) £m	Not fully guaranteed (Amber) £m	Not achieved (Red) £m
OP6 – Review of current establishment and reduction in the use of agency staff, following recruitment of permanent staff	0.748	0	0.398	0	0.350
OP7 – Mother and Baby Daisy Project	0.793	0	0.250	0.543	0
OP8 – Strengthening Families, Protecting Children. This is a cost avoidance scheme for future placement projections which will reduce future growth need.	0.457	0.063	0.076	0.318	0
OP9 – Adolescent service - Turning Point - reduce number of adolescents coming into care	0.760	0.200	0.560	0	0
OP10 – Family drugs and alcohol court	0.209	0	0.100	0.109	0
OP11 – Foster carer support to reduce placement disruption*	1.554	0.584	0.970	0	0
OP12 – Placement sufficiency – recruitment and retention	0.150	0.084	0.066	0	0
OP13 – Grandparents plus- build in for future years	0.076	0.057	0.019	0	0
OP29 – Children’s – To develop Power BI reports to create efficiencies	0.120	0.120	0	0	0
OP107 – Independent Living	0.374	0.007	0	0.367	0
OP3 – Development of locality partnership offer in Early Help and restructure of ‘change grow live’ following contract bought in house (implementation of restructure).	0.100	0.100	0	0	0
P1 – Change, Grow Live Contract- bringing service back in house	0.122	0.122	0	0	0
Total approved savings for services within remit of Committee	Page 463 of 31 5.463	1.337	2.439	1.337	0.350

*OP11 benefit target focuses on reduction in future placement disruption and breakdowns therefore preventing increased costs where children and young people move to residential placements. To support this, an investment of £267k has been allocated to the foster care support team in 2022/23 to fund additional staffing costs, training for staff and carers and to establish an out of hours support line.

Each benefit is “BRAG” categorised as follows:

- Blue (delivered);
- Green (on track to be delivered with no issues at year end of 2022/23);
- Amber (not guaranteed at this stage but no major issues expected, some management action needed to ensure delivery) or,
- Red - (at high risk of not being achieved either in part or in full and therefore a robust delivery plan is required);

3.8 Capital Summary

The total capital programme budget for the services under the remit of the committee is £1.34m and the forecast position projected is £1.34m for Quarter 2 (August) as detailed in Table 7 below:

Table 7- Capital Forecast 2022/23					
Service	Annual Budget £m	Actual Year to Date £m	Forecast £m	Year End Variance £m	Proposed c/fwd to 2023/24 £m
Council Funded					
Redesign of Children's Homes*	1.07	0.00	1.07	0.00	0.00
Refurbishment of homes to support Foster Carers	0.25	0.04	0.25	0.00	0.00
Children's Localities	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.00	0.00
Total	1.34	0.07	1.34	0.00	0.00

*The Redesign of Children's Homes will see two properties purchased in the current financial year and appropriate works carried out, to bring them into use.

CHILDREN IN CARE FINANCIAL MONITORING POSITION FOR QUARTER 2 AS AT AUGUST 2022

Overview

Local Authorities in England have a statutory responsibility for protecting the welfare of Children and delivering Children's Social Care. In more serious situations, Local Authorities may use their statutory powers to place children and young people in need on child protection plans or even take them into the care of the Local Authority.

Despite a challenging year due to placement sufficiency, Walsall's Social Care demand led pressures are in-line with the national picture and although costs continue to increase, extensive work has been undertaken to effectively manage demand.

This financial year the service has experienced on-going pressures surrounding placement sufficiency, which has been further compromised by changes in legislation. The new legislation, which came into force in September 2021 states that no child under the age of 16 should reside in a placement that is not Ofsted registered. This has resulted in a number of unregulated/unregistered placement providers exiting the market, which has subsequently reduced supply and heightened demand and the related costs. This has been compounded by a lack of sufficiency of foster placements locally and nationally.

Despite the heightened demand and subsequent costs the overall number of children entering care has reduced. This is due to extensive work undertaken to proactively manage the welfare of children within their family.

4.1 Children and Young People in Care of the Local Authority

It should be noted that the forecast position reported in year is calculated based on the number and mix of children and young people at a point in time and is adjusted for identified and anticipated moves. With regard to budget setting, this takes a similar approach and includes the number/mix for a full year plus an estimated cost increase. In line with the rise in average costs in prior years and the current mix of children, there was approved additional investment of £3.454m included in the budget for the financial year 2022/23

As part of the Proud Transformation Programme £4.372m of benefits have been identified specifically relating to children and young people in care for 2022/23 of which £0.995m has been achieved as at August 2022 and extensive work is underway in the service to meet this target. Had this not been achieved this would have increased further pressure onto the budget for 2022/23.

Between March 2022 and August 2022, Walsall has seen the number of Children and Young People directly in care reduce by 10, from 661 to 651. Walsall has seen a total net inflow/outflow of 50 C&YP entering care between April-Sept 2022, with 46 young people leaving care during the period.

Despite the overall number of children in care in Walsall decreasing and beginning to stabilise through the implementation of the services transformation plans, the overall costs relating to children in care have increased. This is partially due to the increases in the average placement costs, sufficiency of placements available and the mix of children in each placement type. The

number of children in higher cost placements has increased and children in lower cost placements has decreased.

The table below demonstrates External residential placement costs how the service now utilises a higher percentage of placements over £4k per week (75%) and how these average weekly costs have increased this financial year, with 24 placements (37%), costing on average £6.5k per week

Average Weekly Cost	19/20			20/21			21/22		
Under £4k	18	49%	3495	21	40%	3535	15	25%	3405
£4k - £5k	13	35%	4509	19	37%	4605	29	48%	4640
Over £5k	6	16%	5914	12	23%	5953	17	28%	6387
	37			52			61		

As at August 2022, the FY forecast of current placements is £32.73m this is based on the current mix of children in care and the projected future demand for the remainder of the financial year. The current budget is **£27.43m**, therefore there is a forecasted overspend of **£5.30m**. This forecast includes the use of £1.03m Covid reserve, £0.24m corporate reserve for complex cases and £0.75m children's wide action plan reducing the forecast position to £3.28m overspent.

Covid-19. Has placed additional pressure on the current budget These costs have arisen due to delays to court hearings and assessments; delays in YP leaving care; sufficiency in placements; and an increase in Personal Allowances. £1.04m has been approved to offset these rising costs from the covid reserve during 2022/23. It has been difficult to step down these young people due to the complexity of their needs and ongoing insufficient fostering placements. This figure is due to decrease over the next three financial years as these YP leave care.

Table 9 below shows the historical movement in young people numbers.

YOUNG PEOPLE NUMBERS 2016/17 TO 2021/22

Placement Group	Placement Type	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Internal Fostering	Internal Fostering	198	232	202	165	143	132
	Connected Care	130	109	107	126	119	119
Pre Adoption	Respite Care				1		0
	Pre Adoption	38	2	2	13	27	13
External Fostering	Independent Fostering Agency	159	186	176	233	236	261
	Temporary placement	0	0	0	0		0
	Other LA placements	0	1	0	0		0
External Residential	External Residential	37	33	32	37	53	59
	M&B Units	0	0	0	2	5	0
	Secure Units / Remands	5	2	1	6	3	2
Other	Supported Accommodation	11	13	29	12	20	29
	Independent Living				9	3	1
	Internal Residential	15	17	15	8	8	7
	Placed with Parents	58	48	43	59	54	38
	NHS / Health Trust	5	1	2	0	2	0
Young People in Care		656	644	609	671	673	661

2022/23			
Q1	Q2 (AUG)	Q3	Q4
131	127	0	0
118	121	0	0
1	0	0	0
17	17	0	0
244	230	0	0
0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0
64	65	0	0
4	2	0	0
2	4	0	0
27	26	0	0
1	2	0	0
6	6	0	0
40	50	0	0
1	1	0	0
656	651	0	0

Placement Group	Placement Type	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
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Non Young People in Care	Special Guardianship Order	138	174	191	234	303	332
	Custodian/ Residence Orders	37	50	42	34	34	30
	Staying Put		46	49	20	17	31
	Care Leavers				26	17	32
	Supported Accommodation (Non)	21	16	16	4	9	13
	Supported Accommodation - Section 17				4	6	3
	Independent Living (Non)				11	4	2
Total Non-Young People in Care		196	286	298	333	390	443

GRAND TOTAL	852	930	907	1004	1063	1104
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2022/23			
Q1	Q2 (AUG)	Q3	Q4

336	331	0	0
29	28	0	0
30	33	0	0
33	38	0	0
0	13	0	0
0	2	0	0
0	3	0	0
428	448	0	0

1084	1,099	0	0
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5. Financial information

- 5.1 The financial implications are as set out in the main body of this report. The council has a statutory responsibility to set a balanced budget and to ensure it has an adequate level of reserves. The council will take a medium-term policy led approach to all decisions on resource allocation.

6. Reducing Inequalities

- 6.1 Services consider and respond to equality issues in setting budgets and delivering services. Irrespective of budgetary pressures, the Council must fulfil equal opportunities obligations.

7. Decide

- 7.1 To approve the recommendations as set out in this report.

8. Respond

- 8.1 The Executive Director for Children's Services, with finance in support will be working with Directors and Heads of service to review the forecast, to continue to implement mitigating actions for any further forecast overspends and to consider these financial implications in line with the council's budget setting process.

9. Review

- 9.1 Regular monitoring reports are presented to Cabinet to inform them of the financial forecast for 2022/23, including an update on risks and impact on the budget for 2023/24 and beyond.

Background papers: Various financial working papers

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Sally Rowe
Executive Director, Children's Services

November 2022

Social Worker Recruitment and Retention

Ward(s): All wards

Portfolios: Councillor Wilson, Children's Services

1. Aim

The aim of this report is to provide an overview of social worker staffing in Children's Social Care, and to outline activity undertaken support the recruitment and retention of social workers.

2. Recommendations

A stable, permanent workforce is a priority in Children's Social Care, and provides the foundation for consistency and good practice that makes a difference for children and families. The work outlined in the detail of this report should continue in order to continue a positive trajectory in the recruitment and retention of social workers, especially given the sector-wide challenges noted.

3. Report detail – know

Context

- 3.1 Social worker recruitment and retention has been a key area of development for Walsall Children's Social Care, and the approach taken and progress made is outlined below. This progress was reflected in the Ofsted Inspection and report from last year, which observed the commitment within Walsall Council to supporting Children's Services, and the positive impact that steps taken has had on workforce stability and development. It was considered that this, in turn, provided a foundation for improvements in consistency and quality of practice for children, young people and families.
- 3.2 There are significant national and regional challenges in the retention of experienced social workers in frontline practice. National research by the Department for Education has shown the numbers of experienced social workers leaving has now reached a five-year high, with successive year on year increases in the percentages of experienced social workers who leave local authority roles, and indeed the profession entirely. 16% of experienced children and families social workers left local authority roles 2020 to 2021. This crisis, and its implications for

local authorities, both financially, and in the capacity to deliver the best services for children and families, has been recognised in the recent national Care Review for Children's Social Care services (MacAllister, 2022). These challenges have, in turn, had a significant impact on social worker recruitment, as there is a lack of candidates for experienced Social Worker roles and they have led to the agency social worker market becoming inflated. There is significant demand for experienced social workers, and agencies are able to offer social workers attractive rates of pay. As more experienced staff leave either the profession entirely, or to move to agencies, this leaves a gap in local authority staffing, which can require some local authorities with high vacancy rates to pay higher rates of pay for agency social workers. This challenge has been exacerbated by agencies making specific demands on pay and conditions for agency social workers, or creating 'project teams' of groups of agency staff that can struggling local authorities can be required to hire at significant cost.

- 3.3 Across national and regional network meetings attended by senior leaders and managers these challenges and themes are consistently reported. It appears within the West Midlands, Walsall Children's Services is one of the more stable local authorities in respect of social work staffing. Walsall is one of the local authorities in the West Midlands that has maintained a clear commitment to remaining within the regional memorandum of understanding which sets out agreed rates for agency social worker pay, and has not had to seek permissions to step outside of this arrangement as a number of local authorities have.
- 3.4 The above LGA research does also indicate there are sufficient numbers of newly qualified social workers joining the profession each year to replace those who leave. The challenge is that if too many experienced staff continue to leave, and are replaced only by newly qualified practitioners, this creates a significant knowledge and skills gap. In turn, this places significant pressure on those more experienced social workers who remain.
- 3.5 The national context frames the approach taken here with a robust focus on the retention of experienced social workers, and on training and developing newly qualified social workers – who will become the next generation of experienced social workers. This is about getting the right structures in place for future workforce stability. Each year, the service has taken on a large number of newly qualified social workers: the aim being that with the right conditions, support and progression and development opportunities, these social workers will remain with Walsall and we are able to build towards an increasingly permanent workforce. As this happens, we can reduce the numbers of agency social workers in a sustainable and measured way, which maintains the levels of experienced social workers needed to safely run services. The use of agency social workers then becomes more centred on covering for shorter-terms needs such as maternity and secondment opportunities, instead of vacant posts.

3.6 A range of measures have been used to promote retention in Children's Social Care, and these have been implemented through continued consultation and engagement with our workforce. These have included:

- The use of retention payments in key identified service areas
- The introduction of a new Senior Specialist Social Worker role as a progression opportunity for all Social Workers to support in retaining experienced Social Workers.
- Re-evaluation and regrading of Senior Practitioners, Social Work Assistant Team Managers and Consultant Social Workers to support the retention of experienced Social Workers in these key frontline roles.
- Our Supervision Framework and training for all managers and senior managers has been redesigned to embed a consistent approach to staff support and development. This is supported by a relaunched Practice Leadership Programme involving the whole management team.
- Together this work has helped to create a more defined social worker career pathway.
- There has been a focus on internal development and progression of staff so that people can see there are opportunities for them.
- We have a continued focus on social worker workloads.
- A new Workforce and Wellbeing Strategy for 2022 was developed and launched, with a positive and proactive focus on welfare and enhanced support and flexible working.
- This included securing grant funding for a trial, which means that Walsall is one of the first local authorities in the country to offer social workers clinical supervision.
- The Practice Development Hub has been restructured to offer greater training and support, especially for experienced staff.
- There is a cycle of communication and feedback with practitioners and managers to seek feedback and shape this thinking. This will lead to a revised Workforce and wellbeing Strategy for 2023.

3.7 There has been targeted approach to recruitment to ensure that there is a strong pipeline of good social workers joining Walsall. Measures to support this have included:

- Targeted over-recruitment in some areas and teams in order for a group of newly qualified social workers can grow and develop together, and to offer future investment in the workforce.
- The creation of robust recruitment processes, especially in recruiting newly qualified social workers.
- Investment in Practice Education (experienced social workers who take on students) to increase student numbers through the traditional university route, and a diversification of student entry routes. This has led to an increase in students appointed as newly qualified social workers who already know Walsall and are known by us.

- 3.8 There was some delay in the over-recruitment of newly qualified social workers in 2021 due to a need to bring in the right practitioners with sufficient skills and experience. Last year's recruitment cycle included many candidates with limited experience due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on learning opportunities. This has not been an issue this year. In this recruitment cycle so far, 30 newly qualified social workers have been appointed, of which 13 of whom are were students who have progressed or been recruited into permanent roles.

Impact

- 3.9 The impact of the work undertaken is reflected in data collected as part of national Social Worker Census, which shows as steady decrease in the use of agency data reporting as per the table below:

	2021	2020	2019	2018
Percentage of Agency Staff	9.52%	15.1%	19.1%	27.3%
Staff Turnover	16.9	15.8	26.7	30.4
Absence rate	2.1	2.1	3.7	3.3
Vacancy rate	7.2	13.3	26.0	27.6

- 3.10 The percentage of agency staff for this return was completed at a specific point when the numbers were particularly low, and these have risen somewhat across the year. This is due to the need to have experienced agency social workers to meet immediate service needs whilst the longer-term work set out here is undertaken.
- 3.11 There are currently 31 agency Social Workers in frontline practice and management roles across Children's Social Care. The breakdown of agency staff by service area is as follows:

Number	Service Area
Locality Family Safeguarding Teams	13
Locality Duty and Assessment Teams	6
Corporate Parenting	4
MASH	3
Fostering	2
Disabled Children's and Young Person's Team	2
Safeguarding and Review	1

Of the above staff, 5 are in management and Independent Reviewing Officer roles, and 26 are in frontline Social Worker and Senior or Advanced Practitioner roles. In respect of the reasons for agency usage, 18 agency staff are covering posts (7 covering secondments elsewhere in the service, 7 covering maternity leave and 3 covering sickness). 13 agency social workers are covering vacant posts.

- 3.12 A key indicator here is the vacancy rate, with targeted recruitment activity over the last four years having reduced the number of vacant posts that are either unfilled or filled by an agency social workers. Where agency social workers are currently retained against vacant posts, this is order to retain experienced staff in particular teams or to meet specific demands. This demonstrates the impact of recruitment activity to meet service needs, albeit noting the challenges above and that almost all social worker posts recruited to permanently this year have been filled by newly qualified social workers.
- 3.13 The key aim going forward is to retain social workers and for newer social workers to grow and develop in Walsall into experienced practitioners. Social worker turnover has reduced significantly, although there is no complacency around this, especially given the national and regional challenges outlined above. There will always be some level of turnover, as staff move for progression opportunities and for personal reasons, and at times this can be the right decision for individual staff and the service. What is important however is that wherever possible we are able to keep social workers who want to remain in practice, and that we are able to do so over a sustained period so we are not losing social workers two and three years into their careers.
- 3.14 Overall, this year 16 frontline social workers and managers have left Children's Social Care. There is no consistent pattern in exit questionnaires, interviews and conversations, except that social workers have left the local authority to go to an agency role. The other reasons included two staff retiring, two leaving due to ill health, one staff member being promoted in another local authority, and other individual reasons.
- 3.15 Overall, work to decrease the reliance on agency social workers in Walsall has had a significant impact over the preceding years, with the total agency staff spend in Children's Social Care reducing from £4,677,602 in 2018-19 to £2,409,464 in 2021-2022.
- 3.16 Work continues to reduce the spend on agency staff through a recruitment and retention transformation plan focusing on the work outlined here. The aim is that this will each year reduce the Central Agency Budget (the additional costs of agency staff over the underspends of unfilled posts within the staffing budget), as more permanent social workers are recruited and then staff working for the council. For the financial year 2021-22, the benefits sought were achieved.
- 3.17 This is because of the costs of over-recruiting newly qualified social worker recruitment to 'future-proof' the service with staff who become our future workforce, and as this happens there is a need to retain some experienced agency social workers to meet service needs. This work now will, however, support the service in moving closer to having a permanent settled workforce in future years, and continued transformation activity. The priority has to remain being able to deliver effective help and protection to children and families in Walsall, and so this work and staffing levels will continue to be reviewed as a priority.

Next Steps

- 3.18 The wellbeing of our workforce and support for practitioners doing complex and challenging work is a key area of focus. An updated Workforce and Wellbeing Strategy will be developed each year to set out this work and the practical things being done to support and develop our practitioners in Children's Social Care. This is a key service priority and this strategy is informed by a range of feedback and consultation processes. In addition to understanding why a staff member may chose to leave, a key focus for us is to understand why our social workers and other practitioners chose to stay.
- 3.19 In respect of further development work, the key identified areas are to further advance and develop the support systems around social workers to further improve working conditions and build on the positive reputation Walsall is developing. This includes:
- Further review of the practice and professional development support for newly qualified and experienced social workers.
 - Reviewing the Business Support offer social Workers can access.
 - To review Social Care Practitioner roles and career pathways to explore how these roles can best support social workers.
 - Continuing to embed the Family Safeguarding Model.
 - Specialist assessments and areas of work, and supporting social workers with clinical expertise and adult and child specialist practitioners.
 - Working with vulnerable adolescents and children and young people at risk of exploitation, to develop and refine the expertise and support for this work.

4. Financial information

Please see the detail of the report above.

5. Reducing Inequalities

Work continues, in consultation with staff, to ensure that recruitment reflects the diversity of the Children's Social Care workforce and communities that it serves, and that all staff feel able to develop and progress in WMBC. This will include analysis of staff data and consultation exercises to align with the work set out in this report.

6. Decide

To note the contents of this report and to support recommendations.

7. Respond

A further updating report on planned activity to support social worker recruitment and retention is being prepared for the Children's Services Directorate Management Team in November 2022, and feedback and recommendations from this report will be incorporated into this work.

8. Review

Social worker recruitment and retention is regularly reviewed and reported on to the Children's Services Directorate Management Team, with continued oversight and consideration of measures to continue to support recruitment and retention.

Background papers

[Children's social work workforce, Reporting Year 2021 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)

MacAlister, J. (2022) The Independent Review of Children's Social Care: Final Report
[Home - The Independent Review of Children's Social Care \(childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk\)](https://childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk)

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Committee Meeting Date	Agenda Item	Action/Recommendation	Officer responsible	Status	Target Completion Date	Notes
	Areas of Focus	The glossary and summary data in relation to children in care, starters and leavers to be shared with the committee via e-mail	Colleen Male	Complete		
		A work programme for the municipal year be produced containing agreed areas of focus, for agreement by the Committee.			26 September 2022	
27 September 2022	Areas of Focus	A progress report on the Youth Justice Service be heard at future a meeting.	Philip Rutherford	Date to be agreed by committee		Committee to agree date against the Work Programme 2022/23

Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2022/23

Committee Meeting date	27 September	3 November	8 December	30 January	13 March 2023	18 April 2023
Report Deadline	16 September	25 October	29 November	19 January	2 March	5 April
Budget setting process				Xx		
Locality Hubs and working			xx			
Early Help Strategy	xx					
Social Worker recruitment and retention		xx				
Financial Monitoring		Xx				
Private Fostering			xx			
Youth Justice priorities	xx					
Exploitation and Safeguarding Annual Report 2021/22						xx
Family Hubs – update and progress				xx		
Young Carers		To be agreed by the committee				
Children and Young people alliance		To be agreed by the committee				
Placement Sufficiency		To be agreed by the committee				

BLACK COUNTRY EXECUTIVE JOINT COMMITTEE – 19 October 2022

DECISIONS – Decisions set out below cannot be implemented until 5 clear working days after publication of this notice which is Thursday 27 October 2022

	Minute Number		Decision
2.	22/0017	Notes of Previous Meeting held on 27 July 2022	<p>It was resolved that:</p> <p>The notes of the meeting held on 27 July 2022 be confirmed as a true record.</p>
3.		Matters Arising from the notes of the previous meeting	None.
4.		Declarations of Interest	None.
5.		Local Government (Access to Information) Act.	No items for Private Session.
6.	22/0018	Growth Deal - Mill Lane Bridge GRIP 3 Study and Aldridge Line Aqueduct GRIP 3 Study Amendment to Grant Agreement	<p>It was resolved unanimously for the BCJC to :</p> <p>approve the Accountable Body for the Growth Deal (Walsall Council) to proceed to amending its internal Grant Agreement for the Mill Lane Bridge GRIP 3 Study & Aldridge Line Aqueduct GRIP 3 Study project, to reflect the reduction in match funding of £34,872.</p>
8	22/0019	Land and Property Investment Fund - Swan Lane, West Bromwich - Approval of Grant Agreement	<p>It was resolved unanimously for the BCJC to :</p> <p>approve the Accountable Body for the Land and Property Investment Fund (Walsall Council) to proceed to a Grant Agreement with GreenSquareAccord Limited, to the value of £3,175,134 to deliver the Land and Property Investment (LPIF) funded elements of the Swan Lane, West Bromwich project with delivery to commence in the 2022/23 financial year.</p>