

17 September 2015

9. REPORTS OF CABINET MEMBERS WITH RESPONSIBILITY - CONTINUED

(a) REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR ENVIRONMENT

Previously circulated

(b) REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Introduction

63. I am pleased to present to Council my first report as Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families.

64. I would like to take this opportunity to recognise the tremendous service and commitment my predecessor, Cllr Mrs Eyre gave to championing young people's causes in the county over the last decade. I'm certain Cllr Mrs Eyre's unstinting commitment improved the outcomes for our young people and their families.

65. Huge challenges face Children's Services across the country and Worcestershire is not immune from those challenges. We have seen improvement and good levels of performance in some areas of the service and we still have challenges to meet in others, but I have consistently seen a service that is committed and up for the task of continuing to transform the services we deliver to improve the outcomes for our young people and their families.

Education and Skills

66. This has been a positive year in terms of outcomes for learners in Worcestershire. Our schools continue to improve, and we currently have a higher proportion of good and outstanding schools in the county than anywhere else in the Midlands. Despite a dip in GCSE performance in 2014 – which was less than the national average drop in performance – our results for Year 11 students are above national and statistical neighbour average figures. 2015 figures are as yet provisional, but show a pleasing increase of approximately 2% on last year that should keep us clear of national and statistical neighbour comparators, meaning that nearly 2/3 of students attained the benchmark of attaining at least five good GCSE grades. There has been progress made by disadvantaged pupils at GCSE level, but due to the rate of progress overall here by all students combined, there has not been a significant reduction in gaps in attainment. We have maintained the highest proportion of good and outstanding schools in the Midlands, the figure currently being at 88%.

67. At 'A' level, in 2014 83.9% of students attained 3 A*-E grade passes. Results for 2015 are as yet provisional, and over one half of students take their examinations in places other than schools – principally colleges. Initial indications are that results will be in line with those from 2014.

68. Key Stage 2 results at the end of primary school remain one of our key challenges. Outcomes vary across the county, and while there are many contributory factors it remains the case that Key Stage 2 outcomes are better in primary schools overall than they are in middle schools.

69. In 2014 64.1% of Worcestershire children attained the benchmark of Level 4+ in reading, writing and mathematics, 2.9% below the national figure. While the Worcestershire attainment figure has improved slightly in 2015 to 64.9%, it is likely that when all figures are verified we will remain below the national average.

70. Our other key area of challenge is the gaps in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and their peers. This is principally pupils eligible for pupil premium, and those children Looked After by the Council. The gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers in Worcestershire remains greater than for many of our statistical neighbours, and the national average. This will continue to be a focus for our service.

71. From 1 October the direct delivery of the Council's education services will be through Babcock Training Ltd with the strategic commissioner role retained within the Council. This recognises the changing role of the Council and schools and will enable schools to continue to be effectively supported in their leadership of improvement whilst reducing costs. We are working closely with Babcock to ensure a smooth transition and that performance in the initial year is maintained as we continue to work to further improve educational outcomes for all learners. The education service retained by the Council as strategic commissioners will monitor and evaluate the performance of Babcock against a number of key performance indicators which have been constructed to ensure a continued focus on improving educational outcomes for all. This includes working with Babcock and schools to ensure there is sufficient focus on meeting the needs of vulnerable learners and closing the attainment gaps between them and their peers.

72. Not all services are to be commissioned. The Council will retain a central core with direct responsibility for all aspects of school organisation, principally ensuring the provision of quality places for all learners in tax payer funded schools. The retained core will also contain the post of Virtual School Headteacher, who will also have responsibility for all vulnerable learners. There will also be a small team of commissioning experts. Special Educational Needs services will be transferred to Babcock, but at a date as yet to be decided in the light of the nature and extent of current reforms. The education service will continue to deliver its responsibilities with a 46% lower budget than in 2013/14.

73. The service continues to provide good value for money and successfully provide places for the growing number of young people and complexity of provision within the county. We are already commissioning extra places in schools in many parts of the county. However, we will face an ongoing challenge regarding the balance of provision in areas where schools decide to change their age range, in order to ensure that there are neither too many nor too few places in any location. The impact of age range change discussions is expected to continue in areas where we have three tier education, and we will continue to work with schools as they lead discussions regarding possible structural changes.

74. September 2014 saw the introduction of reforms for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities which are intended to make the provision of services for pupils with SEND more targeted, timely, and give greater ownership to young people and parents. Our SEND local offer is up and running and has been validated by the Department of Education. We have recently been used as best practice by our pathfinder authority, Solihull. Our transition plans from Statements to Education Health and Care plans is in line with local and national average. The next stage is to further improve our timeliness regarding these plans, and the effectiveness of provision for pupils throughout the county. It is important that as we develop this work we also consider how the provision of SEN transport supports the reform agenda, e.g., through direct travel payments and independent travel training for young people.

75. This year has seen the expansion of our education services to incorporate aspects of the Open for Business agenda and the Business, Investment and Skills team. We have successfully implemented the first round of the Connecting Schools and Business programme, with for example our work experience website 'Worcestershire Skills Central' being used widely as a model of good practice. We are strengthening our links with businesses and are on track to make a formal proposal to the DfE to open a University Technical College (UTC) in Worcestershire to enhance and broaden education provision 14-19. This would see the construction of a 14-19 facility for approximately 600 14-19 year olds that would focus on engineering, a key shortage area for the county.

76. The skills agenda presents exciting opportunities and challenges for the future. We need further to broaden the offer to our 14-19 learners, mindful of requirements under Raising the Participation Age for all learners to now be in some form of education, employment and training until they are 18. We need to pursue the UTC, and link this to other possible initiatives such as studio schools to ensure there is a sufficient range of educational provision in the county to meet the future needs of the local economy. We will further explore how the transition between children's and adult education can be managed to provide lifelong learning opportunities for our residents.

77. Funding allocations for schools, early years and high needs provision continues to be a pressure in Worcestershire. In 2015-16 the County Council received an increase of 2.1% (£6.2m) into the Schools Block Dedicated Schools Grant as a share of the additional £390m allocated by the Department for Education (DfE) to the '*least fairly funded local areas*'. This has been confirmed to continue into 2016-17. The DfE have assured local authorities that all their reforms to date are leading towards a new National Fair Funding Formula (NFFF) but this is not likely to impact until 2017/18 at the earliest. Even with this additional funding, Worcestershire remains a low funded LA. Out of 151 LAs, Worcestershire is still ranked at 123 lowest funded for schools and at 148 for Early Years. We continue to lobby government for a fair share of the national allocation both as a Council and as part of the f40 group who represent the lowest funded councils in the country.

78. The low level of funding is not the only financial impact our schools are seeing with the DSG being allocated on a "flat cash" basis with no increases for inflation over the last 5 years. Reductions in post 16 funding and the amount of Education Services Grant allocated, alongside the effects of pay inflation and National Insurance and pension contributions and non-pay areas such as curriculum changes and examination fees have also contributed to financial pressure for the majority of our schools.

Early Help and Prevention

79. Addressing the causes of problems rather than the symptoms by strengthening help to families at an early stage remains a key priority for the Council and the service. Worcestershire's existing Early Help Strategy was approved back in 2011 and has underpinned the development of an 'early help offer' across Worcestershire. The development of this 'offer' predominately focused on Worcestershire County Council's responsibilities and resources and has driven the commissioning of six 0-19 early help service arrangements, one for each District area.

80. In August 2015 all six of our 0-19 Early Help Providers have been operating for a year. Since the first district started back in August 2013, the 0-19 Early Help Providers have supported 3,979 children/families with an early help assessment and plan with 84% of families registering an improvement in their circumstances post intervention. This equates to 65% of the total number of Early Help Assessments (6,118) completed since August 2013. We also continue to have 82% of our Children's Centres judged by Ofsted to be good or outstanding and have seen an improvement in the number of young people moving successfully into education, employment and/or training.

81. The recent Safeguarding Peer Review concluded that greater clarity is required on the difference between the Worcestershire-wide Early Help Strategy and the council-commissioned early help services and reinforced that identifying and meeting the needs of children, young people and families can only successfully be achieved with our partners taking a full role. Work is ongoing to refresh the Early Help Strategy as part of a broader, more inclusive, approach to prevention and demand management.

82. The service has worked collaboratively with NHS England to successfully co-commission Health visiting services and a new Family Nurse Partnership (FNP) service for Worcestershire. FNP is an intensive structured home visiting programme for first time young mums, aged 19 years or under. A specially trained family nurse visits the young mum regularly, from the early stages of pregnancy until their child is two. The FNP programme is underpinned by an internationally-recognised robust evidence base, which has demonstrated it improved health, social and educational outcomes in the short, medium and long term, while also providing positive economic returns. The Worcestershire FNP is funded to support 100 teenage first time mothers. Family nurses have been recruited and trained and referrals for eligible young women have commenced. Nationally, Health Visiting services have been expanded and transformed. Worcestershire has received 20% growth accompanied by a move from a GP attached to a resident community based service and has been aligned with early help provision. In October 2015, the responsibility for commissioning these services transfers to the Local Authority (Public Health) from NHS England providing greater opportunity for join up and integration with other 0-19 services.

83. In May 2015 the first phase of the national Troubled Families Programme concluded. We have responded to this national programme with our Stronger Families Programme. In May 2015 we had demonstrable evidence that, through the intervention provided, outcomes for 833 families had improved (e.g. children were now attending school, reduced crime and adult is in work). This represents 93% of the target of 900 families. In a recent letter from Louise Casey (Director General of Phase 1 of Troubled Families) to the Chief Executive she commended our Stronger Families Service for all of their hard work.

84. However, the demand on children's services social care continues to rise despite an early help offer being in place. We are still seeing too few children entering the social care system without having the benefit of support at an early stage. The Public Health led Early Help Needs Assessments also highlighted consistently stubborn poor outcomes around school readiness for the under 5s as well as a high prevalence of emotional health and wellbeing needs and speech and language issues. Outcomes are poorest in areas of significant disadvantage and the estimated need for prevention and early intervention is projected to increase. Through a close working relationship between Public Health and Children's Services an all age prevention policy is being developed. This will have a focus on children and families nested at the heart of it.

85. The administration continues to believe that targeted early help will significantly improve the outcomes for our young people. Targeted and appropriate support to the families that need our help, delivered collaboratively by all of our public sector partners will dramatically improve the life chances of those young people that would otherwise been disadvantaged and help this council to reduce the ever increasing cost pressures.

Children's Social Care - Assessment, Intervention and Children with Disabilities

86. Keeping our young people safe and where possible within a loving family environment remains a key priority for the Council and our partners.

87. The number of looked after children continues to rise, standing at 715 at the end of July (compared to 685 at the end of last year), and the number of children with Child Protection Plans also continues to rise standing at 462 at the end of July. The cost associated with these rising figures is the biggest single challenge to Children's Services and is a significant corporate issue.

88. We have made significant resources available to meet the dramatic raise of the cost of placements within social care but the increased financial burden is not sustainable into the medium term. Whilst the high numbers of children being supported by the Council shows we are actively working to keep our young people safe, long term placements are not always in the best interests of those young people so we must continue to strive to make our involvement early and effect to minimise the crisis intervention that is taking young people into care.

89. The Council has invested significant time and corporate resource to firstly understand the challenges that we face and to develop the solutions to overcome them.

90. The ongoing work to reform children's social care continues and whilst much has been undertaken since the Peer Review (April 2015) which built upon existing plans and strategies there remains a long journey ahead. Council should be reassured that one of the Peer Review findings was the "impressive level of self-awareness and openness" which should stand us in good stead when OFSTED undertake their Single Inspection of Children's Services and the Local Safeguarding Children's Board. The investment in quality assurance has resulted in knowing ourselves well and the Peer Review confirmed that our plans are generally the right ones and we are travelling in the right direction but needed to increase the momentum, particularly in relation to the quality and consistency of frontline social work practice.

91. The engagement of an experienced Strategic Lead for Improvement and Quality, Assistant Director for Provider Services and more recently Assistant Director for Safeguarding from August 2015 has enhanced the senior management capacity and brought in fresh external review and expertise to achieve the required pace of change referenced by the peer review.

92. The service has now successfully attracted permanent Team Managers and moved from a heavy reliance on agency workers. The targeted recruitment campaign to attract social workers has resulted in 85% of our qualified Social Work staff on permanent contracts; this is in stark contrast to some of our regional neighbours. We have a large cadre of newly qualified social workers, supported by a committed and experienced staff and management.

93. Whilst the service had a full redesign two years ago, ongoing reviews show that some of the aspirations have not yet been fully realised. In light of the peer review feedback work is underway to further allow the service to respond more flexibly to the emerging challenges and in particular the continued rising demand on the service.

94. Notwithstanding the strengths of the service, there remain a number of significant and ongoing challenges. The service has plans currently being implemented that concentrate on delivering the "Practice Improvement Plan" following the peer review, overseen by an internal improvement board led by the Chief Executive, along with myself and key senior leaders which provides the corporate support for a sustained focus on improving the quality of social work practice and service delivery, which ultimately will lead to better outcomes for children and young people and reduced placement cost. The Assessment and Intervention Service development includes the training, development and core "tools" for professionals to use as part of their work with children and families and how we further upskill and support what is a committed but immature skilled workforce. This will also help improve, at pace, the quality and consistency of front line Social Work practice where staff are managing complex cases and have competing demands. In order to ensure social workers have more time to work effectively with families we continue to work with corporate colleagues to develop business systems and processes that support quality practice and effective service delivery through appropriate use of technology.

95. Underpinned by the early help and prevention activity is the further development of the "Family Front Door", incorporating Multi Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH), District Access Panels and Early Help Hub to consolidate arrangements to improve the quality of response and signposting into other services earlier. It is expected that this will help to address the continuing high demand of contact and referrals into Children's Social Care, including the high volume that have not had an early help assessment or effective support at an earlier stage. Work continues on improving partnership working, particularly with the district and voluntary sector and through the revised Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) governance arrangements. Linked to the family front door project is the requirement to ensure partners are working more effectively through an early intervention and prevention model that identifies need and allows for a more timely response at the earliest opportunity, reducing and/or preventing the need for more specialist (and high cost) statutory intervention.

96. Ensuring the LSCB, through the chair is providing sufficient scrutiny across the whole system in line with "Working Together Guidance 2015". This is essential in

order to remove any tendency to be single agency focused particularly around early help services:

Local agencies should work together to put processes in place for the effective assessment of the needs of individual children who may benefit from early help services.

Children and families may need support from a wide range of local agencies. Where a child and family would benefit from coordinated support from more than one agency (e.g. education, health, housing, police) there should be an inter-agency assessment. These early help assessments, such as the Common Assessment Framework, should identify what help the child and family require to prevent needs escalating to a point where intervention would be needed via a statutory assessment under the Children Act 1989.

97. The service is a key partner in implementing the LSCB strategy to tackle Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) which was recently signed off by the board, endorsed by Cabinet and is for Council consideration today. As part of the delivery of a consistent response to CSE and children missing from home and care we will look at the development of a 'preventative service' to make sure that children are aware of the dangers and can better protect themselves. This is also a critical area for oversight through the Health and Wellbeing Board. At the recent development meeting of the Health and Wellbeing Board it was agreed that there would be a specific focus on children's issues on a quarterly basis – I would expect to see progress by all partners on tackling CSE as part of this.

Children's Social Care - Provider Services

98. This area encompasses the services which directly provide to children in the care of the Council. Included within this service grouping are: Fostering service; Adoption service; Children's residential care service; Specialist Support services – supervised contact, family support, health and well-being; and Post 16 Accommodation service. It works closely with other aspects of children's services in the development of a range of alternative and complementary options so that families can benefit from intervention which stops short of being Looked After and to better ensure that only those who really need it enter public care.

99. The pressure on placement availability and capacity, and subsequently the placement budget, has continued due to the rising numbers of children being taken into care. Investment of an additional £3.1m was allocated for 2015/16 however the current forecast is that this will be insufficient to meet the rising costs of children assessed as needing our care and support. Transformational plans, market management approaches and cost reduction activities are taking place as part of an overall medium term strategy to help mitigate the pressure of additional numbers.

100. Current work within provider services to address this includes plans to create and make operational a new Edge of Care service. The development of in-house fostering provision has helped to respond to increasing overall demand by producing a significant increase in the number of new foster carers being recruited. As at August 2015 there were carer households in assessment with 8 already approved since April 2015. In addition new development of support groups, buddy scheme and an improved reward offer to carers have been achieved. In-house fostering placements have increased from 132 in May to 160 in August 2015 with plans being implemented to provide 100 new in-house fostering placements by October 2017.

101. We have also invested £1m of capital funding to develop a new in-house service for 16+ Supported Living through direct delivery of support hours and a programme of property acquisition. The planned development of in-house residential provision has also been delivered with a new home registered in February 2015, a further new home registered in June 2015 and a variation to approval achieved to an existing home in August 2015 with plans to open a new residential home for EBD Short Breaks. Despite new Children's Homes Regulations and a stricter regime of inspection, all WCC homes have retained their Ofsted rating of Outstanding or Good, as well as providing good value for money against the private sector.

102. Adoption performance has been significantly improved over the past 12 months – average time from entering care to adoptive placement decreased from 614 days to 387 days within 2014-15. New legislation seeking the creation of regionalised approaches to adoption poses a challenge in relation to the nature and extent of possible collaborations. A conflict is apparent between Government pressure to increase the number and pace of adoptions and the reality of a decreasing number of Placement Orders being granted by the courts. We have worked on a sub-regional basis to new approaches to managing adoption and are using this knowledge to continue to develop a new collaborative model for the delivery of adoption services.

Financial Summary

103. The current year budget for Children's Services is c£77m (c24% of the council's net budget). Savings totalling £7m have been delivered over the last two years, and plans are in place to deliver £8m more over the next two years. There is also the expectation that additional savings will need to be identified to support the expected annual Council-wide savings of c£25m. Based on current plans, by 2017/18 early help will be operating with half the budget available 4 years ago, and learning and achievement will be delivered with 46% less.

104. Finances for 2015/16 remain challenging; with increasing demands being placed on budgets due to placement costs and numbers of Looked After children, and the corresponding impact this is having on caseloads for social workers. Funding for placements increased by £3.1m this year following the growth approved by Council in February, however the budget is currently forecasting a financial pressure of £5.8m. As part of developing the medium term plan, further investment is required to put the service in the best position to achieve the best outcomes for Worcestershire's most vulnerable children and young people.

105. Nationally, demand pressures within services for looked after children remains high with a significant number of local authorities experiencing increasing demand and financial pressure in this area. The average additional cost for one internal fostering placement is c£16,000, for one external fostering placement c£40,000, but this could rise to c£180,000 if a child needs an external residential placement for a whole year. The Council is continuing to develop its internal services and maximising the use of best value external providers to provide the right placement at the right time and at the right cost for each of its looked after children.

Conclusion

106. In summary, I believe Children Services is well placed to meet the many challenges that face our young people in the county. We have a strong and

committed staff group that wants to do their best for our young people. My challenge is to ensure that the directorate and the Council provide them with the tools and environment to do that.

107. The rising numbers and costs associated with social care remains a key priority for the directorate and the Council, and is receiving a huge amount of corporate support and attention.

108. Gail Quinton will be leaving the Council at the end of this month, having been successfully appointed to a more senior role at Coventry City Council. I would like to place on record my thanks to her, for her drive and leadership over the last six years, she has led a service through difficult times. She has overseen huge transformational change, increase in educational standards and huge financial savings. I wish her well in her new role.

109. Simon White has joined us as Interim Director. He has held a number of senior roles, most recently at Sandwell MBC. He is well placed to support us through to the appointment of a permanent replacement later in the year.

110. I would like to place on record my thanks to the Children Services Leadership Team and all the staff within Children Services. They do their roles in difficult circumstances, often having to engage with families at a time of extreme crisis. The challenges that remain are huge, and I believe with the right support they are able to meet them to give the best outcomes for our young people and the tax payers.

111. My report has highlighted some aspects of how Children's Services works with a range of partners, children, families and carers so Worcestershire's children and young people get the best possible start to lead successful and fulfilling lives.

John Champion

Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families