

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 21st June, 2012 at 6.00pm
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Councillor S Turner (Chair)
Councillor Boleyn (Vice-Chair)
Councillors Arshad, Mrs Billingham, Bills, Casey, J Jones, Marrey, Miller, Mrs Simms and Mrs Walker; Mrs Ward, Mrs Verdegem, Mrs Coulter and Mr Ridley.

OFFICERS

Assistant Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services (Policy, Performance and Resources) – Lead Officer to the Committee; Acting Director of Children's Services, Assistant Directors of Children's Services (Children and Families) and (Quality and Partnership), Head of Youth Service, Targeted and Service Improvements Manager, Head of Service (Safeguarding and Review Unit) and the Democratic Services Manager.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Detective Chief Inspector R Jones (West Midlands Police – Public Protection Unit), S Marshall (Health Provider for Children's Services) and P Owens (Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children - NHS, Dudley); Representatives of the Dudley Youth Service and young people/users of the Youth Service attended for the relevant agenda items.

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of Councillor Attwood, Mr Songole and Reverend Wickens and the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services (Councillor Crumpton).

2 SUBSTITUTE MEMBER

It was reported that Councillor Miller was serving in place of Councillor Attwood for this meeting of the Committee only.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mrs Walker declared a personal interest in Minute No. 8 below in view of her grandson attending one of the young peoples' clubs referred to in the report.

Councillor Mrs Simms declared a personal interest in Minute No. 9 below in view of her employment with Barnardos.

4 MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 22nd March, 2012 be approved as a correct record and signed.

5 WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2012/13

The Committee considered a report of the Lead Officer on the work programme for the 2012/13 municipal year.

Reference was made to the forthcoming review of the Council's Scrutiny Committees and the need for the work programme to be flexible to take account of business arising during the year. A view was expressed that Scrutiny Committees should focus on particular topics, scrutinise these in detail and formulate reports/recommendations in a similar way to the operation of Parliamentary Select Committees.

The Chair indicated that the review would aim to increase the overall effectiveness of the scrutiny process whilst recognising the requirements for Members to consider certain reports. Work programmes needed to be flexible enough to respond to changing circumstances. The Chair also requested that the Committee's work programme be amended to include an item on School Exam results later in the year.

RESOLVED

That, subject to the inclusion of an agenda item on School Exam results in the autumn of 2012, the draft work programme of the Committee for 2012/13 be approved.

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR 2011/12

The annual report of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee for 2011/12 was submitted and considered.

Reference was made to the succinct presentation of the report, which it was considered did not entirely reflect the depth and diverse range of issues dealt with by the Children's Services Directorate during the year. The Committee paid tribute to the commitment of Members and Officers in dealing with issues affecting Children's Services and requested that this be reflected in future reports.

The Committee also referred to the importance of the role of elected Members in relation to Corporate Parenting. It was requested that more information be circulated to Members to promote this role.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the annual report of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee be noted and referred to the Council.
- (2) That the full range of activities dealt with by the Directorate of Children's Services Directorate be more fully reflected in future reports on the work of this Scrutiny Committee.
- (3) That the Acting Director of Children's Services liaise with the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services with a view to circulating a leaflet/newsletter to all Members of the Council on the duties and responsibilities in connection with Corporate Parenting.

UPDATE ON THE YOUTH SERVICE

The Committee considered a report of the Acting Director of Children's Services on Dudley Youth Service, including information on the structure of the service and key priorities for 2012/13 onwards.

The following priorities were being pursued by the Youth Service taking account of the views of young people in the ongoing development of the range of services offered:-

- Work with vulnerable and targeted young people
- Active and suitably resourced youth centres contributing to local communities
- Young people actively involved in decision making, service design and quality assurance
- Young-leaders working with peers and the local community
- Secure a wide range of activities to improve the wellbeing of young people
- Local capacity building including the management of risk and workforce development opportunities.

The Committee thanked officers for the presentation of a concise and comprehensive report. Reference was made to the lack of media activity identified in Appendix 2 on the provision of positive activities for young people across the five Area Committee geographical locations. It was noted, however, that in connection with Dudley Grid for Learning, many schools operated 'after school' clubs and media activities were also offered by Dudley College and voluntary organisations.

The Committee noted that 7,772 young people (29.97% of the borough's youth population) had accessed some form of activity provided by the Youth Service in 2011/12. Members supported the continued promotion of the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme and various other initiatives to actively engage with the youth population. The Head of the Youth Service referred to the availability of Detached Workers in some areas whose role was to reach out to young people who were not engaged in mainstream activities. Members with any particular issues in their wards were invited to discuss these with the Acting Director of Children's Services.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services be advised that this Committee supports the ongoing priorities that have been identified for the Youth Service.
- (2) That the Cabinet Member be briefed on the comments made by Members of the Committee including the need to give consideration to the provision of Detached Workers to pursue further outreach work in certain parts of the Borough.

The Committee considered a report of the Acting Director of Children's Services on the Dudley Youth Service provision for targeted and vulnerable young people and outlining key priorities for 2012 onwards.

The Youth Service had a focused staff team working with targeted groups. The groups being supported were disability, sexual health and teenage pregnancy, looked after children and young people and crime. The wider staff team also worked to improve the outcomes of targeted and vulnerable young people. The report identified examples of provision currently being delivered and developed by the Youth Service.

The Committee heard comments from representatives of the team in addition to young people who attended the clubs, service users and parent/carers. In particular, members of the “Fantastic Fun Club” for looked after children explained how a mixture of structured activities and peer support provided a valuable resource. The Committee also noted comments concerning a group for children with autism in Lower Gornal that had been established by users and their carers and which had grown successfully in recent years.

Members welcomed all the comments made and thanked everyone for their attendance and the direct feedback given and the experiences shared with the Committee.

Members noted comments made by young people concerning facilities that might be available but could not be used due to the lack of trained personnel (eg: a climbing wall). The Committee asked that consideration be given to encouraging schools to engage further with the Youth Service with a view to making such facilities available for use by the clubs concerned. The Acting Director of Children’s Services indicated that links were already in place with secondary schools and efforts to encourage engagement with the Youth Service would be pursued further.

Reference was also made to the possibility of encouraging voluntary sector organisations to set up additional groups and where possible this could be assisted by the provision of small capacity grants from the Council. Such activities would, however, need to take account of the availability of volunteers in certain parts of the Borough that might exclude disadvantaged groups.

The Committee also identified the need for further promotional work on the activities provided and the possibility of Members undertaking visits to Youth Clubs to raise the profile of the work undertaken by the Youth Service.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the report and information provided be noted.
- (2) That the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children’s Services be recommended to support the promotion of elected Member involvement in and visits to Youth Clubs.
- (3) That the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children’s Services be requested to consider the age ranges for service provision to ensure that young people are not excluded from attending clubs or undertaking activities which may be appropriate to them.

- (4) That the Acting Director of Children's Services be requested to continue efforts to encourage schools to engage with the Youth Service to make appropriate facilities available to users of the various Youth Clubs concerned and that these views be communicated to the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services.
- (5) That the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services be informed of the views of the Committee concerning the encouragement of voluntary sector organisations to set up additional groups, with assistance from small capacity grants where possible, subject to appropriate safeguards to ensure that disadvantaged groups are not excluded in certain parts of the Borough.
- (6) That the Acting Director of Children's Services be requested to ensure appropriate communication with Councillors, in particular the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services and the Members of this Scrutiny Committee, to promote the activities offered by the Youth Service.
- (7) That appropriate Councillors be included on the mailing lists for information from individual youth clubs where possible.

ACTION PLANS IN RESPONSE TO THE OFSTED INSPECTION OF SAFEGUARDING AND LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

The Committee considered a report of the Acting Director of Children's Services on the progress of work in connection with the Ofsted inspection of Safeguarding and Looked after children services that had taken place in 2011.

The Committee received four action plans to address specific issues in the inspection report relating to:

- Joint and agreed quality standards for safeguarding practice across the partnership and implementation of a joint quality assurance and performance framework underpinned by efficient information systems.
- Ensure MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) is fully operational and effective leadership is in place in order to meet the level of demand for such arrangements.
- Improve the consistency of recording and assessments.
- NHS to review the capacity of the specialist health services to looked after children and young people to ensure health support, including dental health care and annual health assessments, is accessible, timely and user-friendly.

The Committee welcomed G Tilby (Head of Service - Safeguarding and Review Unit), Detective Chief Inspector R Jones (West Midlands Police – Public Protection Unit), S Marshall (Health Provider for Children's Services) and P Owens (Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children - NHS, Dudley) who made representations to the Committee on issues in the action plans relating to their areas of responsibility.

The Acting Director of Children's Services emphasised that the actions set out in the detailed action plans were intended to build upon and strengthen work previously undertaken in Dudley. The focus was on developing areas that would have a positive impact and improve outcomes for local children and young people.

Reference was made to the need to submit an annual report on the results achieved. The Acting Director of Children's Services confirmed that further plans and progress information would be reported to the Committee in 2012/13.

In regard to the MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference), the Committee noted that this group had a key role in identifying and mitigating serious risks by strengthening multi agency working and information sharing in cases of domestic violence and associated child protection issues. The MARAC group had adopted a 'task and finish' approach to the development of risk management action plans, which had strengthened the co-ordinated approach taken by all the agencies involved.

In relation to the electronic recording system in Children's Social Care, the Committee noted the complexity of this ongoing work and the collaborative approach being taken by officers in conjunction with the supplier of the system.

In relation to issues associated with School Health Advisors, reference was made to the possibility of changing working conditions to ensure that such staff were 'on call' during the school holidays. Although the Advisors could be contacted during school holidays, the Committee was concerned that more robust arrangements should be in place on a 'year round' basis.

A business case was being developed for the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). The Committee emphasised the importance of fully representing the health and well being of children and young people in the context of health reforms and within the discussions of the Shadow Dudley Health and Wellbeing Board. The Acting Director of Children's Services reported that the CCG were represented on the Health and Wellbeing Board and representations would be made on this issue in the context of overall financial pressures. The Committee requested that the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services and the Chair and Vice-Chair be kept informed of developments.

The Acting Director of Children's Services and the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services had acknowledged the key role of Members in assisting with safeguarding matters and information was circulated on the contact telephone numbers to be used in any cases where child abuse was suspected.

RESOLVED

That subject to the comments of the Committee, as set out above, the action plans presented to the meeting be noted and that further action plans be submitted to future meetings during the 2012/13 municipal year.

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QUESTIONS UNDER COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 11.8

There were no questions asked under the provisions of Council Procedure Rule 11.8. The Lead Officer clarified that answers would be provided to questions asked at the meeting wherever possible and that written answers would be given should this be necessary or appropriate.

At the conclusion of the business, the Chair thanked all those present for their attendance and contributions to the discussions of the Scrutiny Committee.

The meeting ended at 7.55 pm

CHAIR