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**Children's Services Scrutiny Committee – 15 September 2011**

**Report of the Acting Director of Children's Services**

**Children's Centres in Dudley Metropolitan Council**

**Purpose of Report**

1. To advise Children's Services Scrutiny Committee members of the purpose of Children's Centres service delivery, the legal framework under which they are delivered and the plans for their further development.

**Background**

2. The report is intended to explain the background to the development of Children's Centres in Dudley and to explain how they support the communities in which they are sited. The overall aim of Children's Centres is to identify, reach and help the families in greatest need of support. This should be achieved by providing a range of both universal and targeted services in partnership with both statutory and voluntary agencies. The Local Authority is the accountable body responsible for the delivery of Children's Centres provision.
3. In Dudley there are twenty Children's Centres, all of which are commissioned services. Five are commissioned through the voluntary organisation, Action for Children. These five are all stand alone centres. Of the other fifteen, fourteen are on school sites and one is on the site of a maintained nursery school. The governing bodies of these schools and nursery are commissioned to provide services laid down in a contract. However, the Children's Centres are a community resource and do not belong solely to the school on which they are sited.

**See Appendix 1, which accompanies the agenda and may also be viewed on the Committee Management Information System (CMIS), is for list of Children's Centres and Map of sites, together with contact details.**

4. The Centres were developed over a 6 year period, in 3 different Phases. Phase 1 centres were developed in the areas of greatest disadvantage, Phase 2 in areas with a mix of both disadvantaged and more advantaged areas and Phase 3 in the remaining areas of the borough.
5. By March 2010 central government expectation was that every child under five and their families should have access to Children's Centre provision. In Dudley we achieved full coverage across the borough by September 2009.

## **Reach area**

6. Each of our Children Centres has a defined 'reach area' which is made up of a cluster of 'super output areas' (SOAs) containing around 800 children under 5.
7. These areas are not intended to restrict access of parents and children to services. Parents are able to access services at a location which is most appropriate to their needs. However, priority is given to children and families living within the Reach area and also family support/outreach workers are allocated according to Reach.

## **Core Offer**

8. Up until March 2011, services offered within the centres were required to meet the nationally defined core offer for Children's Centres; this included holistic support for children and families for pre-birth to age 5.
9. The core offer included:
  - Access to early learning and childcare and support for a childminder network
  - Family support and parental outreach – information on parenting, drop ins and opportunities to access parenting support and family learning
  - Child and family health services – ante-natal and post-natal services and child health services linked to Health Trusts
  - Links with Jobcentre Plus
  - Support for parents and children to access a range of other services
10. There were different sets of core offer criteria which relate to centres and define the 'depth' of services delivered. These were related to whether a centre covers an area within the 30% most disadvantaged nationally and other areas (70% remaining areas).

**See Appendix 2, which accompanies the agenda and may also be viewed on the Committee Management Information System (CMIS), for details of the Core Offer services provided until March 2011**

11. The current government is to issue revised guidance to Local Authorities in September 2011. Early indications are a change from the core offer to core purpose including a re-focusing on the overall aim of Children's Centres. Broadly the aim is to identify, reach and help the families in greatest need of support with an emphasis on:
  - a. Child development and school readiness
  - b. Parenting aspirations and parenting skills
  - c. Child and family Health and life chances

**See Appendix 3, which accompanies the agenda and may also be viewed on the Committee Management Information System (CMIS), for the Consultation document regarding Core Purpose – Issued July 2011 by the Department for Education.**

### **Capital Build/Accommodation**

12. All centres offer some basic accommodation but do vary in size. The 3 initial Sure Start local programme buildings (Brierley Hill, Kates Hill and Sledmere and Butterfly) are the most extensive as their funding was the most generous. Phase 1 Centres generally offer additional accommodation in the form of full day care provision. Standard accommodation for all centres includes:
  - Defined entrance and reception area
  - Multi-purpose room (for training, meetings etc)
  - Interview room (with facilities for health staff and others to do 1:1 work)
  - Small office
  - Kitchen
13. **Facilities** at centres can be used by staff from a range of agencies, for delivery of services and activities. Some examples that already exist include:
  - Smoking cessation sessions
  - Baby clinics
  - National Child Birth Trust classes
  - Citizens Advice Bureau
  - Family Information Service – Information Champions

### **Service delivery**

14. Data analysis relating to the specific locality informs what services each Children's Centre should deliver. Some services have been developed to target particular needs and are recommended as good practice to centres.
15. These include:
  - Parenting Support - Family Links Nurturing Programme
  - Every Child a Talker programme
  - Time for Twos- the 2 year old childcare pilot
  - Playground markings – to support the Obesity Strategy
  - Jumping Beans – joint activity programme with Health
  - Healthy Start – Vitamin distribution
  - National Child birth Trust parenting programmes

**See Appendix 4, which accompanies the agenda and may also be viewed on the Committee Management Information System (CMIS) for an example of the newsletter/timetable of Children's Centre services.**

## Consultation

16. Every centre consults regularly with the children and families who access the centre and those who have not accessed services.
17. It is a requirement that an annual parental satisfaction survey is completed and the results of this together with ongoing consultation activity also informs what service delivery.

**See Appendix 5, which accompanies the agenda and may also be viewed on the Committee Management Information System (CMIS) for an example of the report from the parental satisfaction survey.**

## Volunteers

18. The recruitment of volunteers is of significant importance to the work of the Children's Centres.
19. A volunteer policy is in place and all centres have volunteers recruited to support the work undertaken. Some volunteers have gone on to do training and then progressed into employment due to increased confidence and self esteem. **(See Appendix 6, which accompanies the agenda and may also be viewed on the Committee Management Information System (CMIS) for a Case Study)**
20. A significant borough wide volunteer initiative is the breast feeding buddies project. 63 Breast feeding buddies have been recruited within the Children's Centres to support mothers. This scheme has been developed in conjunction with the PCT who provide training and support. Breast feeding rates in Dudley are low and Obesity levels are rising.

## Regulation

21. Children's Centres need to evaluate the impact of the services they are providing. They are currently performance managed in relation to their effectiveness in delivering outcomes for under 5's and their parents across the Every Child Matters outcomes. The Local Authority works to a Performance management cycle which includes a Self Evaluation framework and an annual conversation with each of the centres which in turn informs the business/action planning of the centres.

**See Appendix 7, which accompanies the agenda and may also be viewed on the Committee Management Information System (CMIS), for the Performance Management Timeline**

22. From April 2010 Children's Centres have been Ofsted inspected. In Dudley there have been 6 Ofsted inspections to date. Five of them were judged to be Good and one judged to be Satisfactory.
23. Ofsted is due to issue new Children's Centres Inspection guidance in September 2011 and again in April 2012 as the agenda changes. An example of a recent OfSTED report has

been included for reference. **(See Appendix 8, which accompanies the agenda and may also be viewed on the Committee Management Information System (CMIS))**

### **Funding/ Finance**

24. Each centre has been allocated a revenue budget funded from the Early Intervention Grant funding. This is based on a formula which takes account of the following:
- Core budget (related to the running costs of the building and core staff costs)
- and a variable amount depending on:
- Numbers of children in the 'reach area'
  - Level of disadvantage as indicated from selected factors in the Index for Multiple Deprivation
25. Dudley's funding formula has been replicated and used as an example of good practice in the audit office report (December 2009) submitted to the Scrutiny Committee reporting to Government.

### **Procurement Process – The Way Forward**

26. As explained above all of the Children's Centres are commissioned services. The original contracts issued to the centres came to an end on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011. Due to the changes in budget arrangements and the changing service expectations coming through from central government, it was not possible to enter into the procurement process to re-tender contracts in time to issue contracts from April 2011. Therefore, agreement was given to issue contracts to the existing providers for 2011/2012.
27. External legal advice has been sought to inform the decisions that need to be made about the procurement process moving forwards.
28. Following this advice, it is recommended that the Project Board of Vision 2025 steers the process and that cabinet makes the decision following recommendations through an Options Appraisal about the procurement route to be followed.
29. Due to the complexity of the process and the amount of time required to follow through the process, permission has been sought to issue further contracts for 2012/2013 to existing providers with a view to being in a position to issue new contracts in April 2013 having gone through the approved procurement process.

### **Law**

30. The provision of Children's Centres is a statutory requirement under The Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 Chapter 22. (Part 9, Clause 198, Page 118). Children Centres service delivery are also underpinned by law in the Childcare Act 2006, and more specifically the Early Years Outcomes Duty placed upon Local Authorities, along with the Primary Care Trust, Strategic Health Authorities and Jobcentre Plus. The duty is to improve all young children's outcomes aged from birth up to the August following their fifth

birthday, and reduce inequalities between them, through integrated early childhood services.

### **Equality Impact**

31. Children's Centres provide a range of services both universal and targeted. Access is available to every child under 5 and their family. However, needs are assessed and services are targeted at the most vulnerable. The needs of the local community are clearly identified through the service specification and centres are expected to deliver services to meet the specific local needs of their community.

### **Recommendations**

32. That Children's Services Scrutiny Committee receives, discuss and review the report relating to Children's Centres service delivery in Dudley.



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**Appendix 1** - List of Centres and Map

**Appendix 2** - Details of the Core Offer services provided until March 2011

**Appendix 3**– Core Purpose DfE

**Appendix 4** – Example of newsletter/timetable of Children's Centre services

**Appendix 5** – Example of report from parental satisfaction survey

**Appendix 6** – Case Study to include flowchart of intervention from initial referral and evaluation of the impact of the service

**Appendix 7** – Performance management timeline and data set – information submitted by one centre at quarterly performance management meeting

In addition to the above report one of the Children's Centres managers and a parent/volunteer will be in attendance.

Other background information to be provided:

Map of borough with centres highlighted

Centres newsletters

Photographs of centres and groups etc attending services at centres

Plan of Children's Centre

Leaflet demonstrating achievements

Example of Ofsted report