

DUDLEY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH

HALESOWEN AREA COMMITTEE

18 JUNE 2003

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES

**PROGRESS OF ELECTED MEMBER VISITS TO SOCIAL SERVICES
ESTABLISHMENTS APRIL 2002 - MARCH 2003**

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1. To inform Members as to the nominations, visits, comments and responses with regard to Member visits to Social Services residential establishments.
- 1.2. To identify issues arising from the rota visits and seek Members views.

2.0. BACKGROUND

- 2.1. Each Area Committee nominates five Elected Members who are willing to undertake rota visits to Social Services establishments. The purpose of the visits is to provide Members with the opportunity to review the residential and day care service delivery within the Authority as well as to fulfil their role as Corporate Parents of Looked After Children.
- 2.2. Members visit in pairs and have chosen in the past to select their own partners for visits and to visit without officers in attendance.
- 2.3. Members are invited to undertake training in the role of Corporate Parent and are provided with the attached, revised form for reporting purposes. (Appendix 1). This form is due for revision, and will be presented for comment to Members at the next training event.
- 2.4. The rota process and delivery of training is managed within the Policy & Review Unit of the Directorate of Social Services. To date, pairs of Members have been provided with details of three establishments within Direct Care (Adult) and Children and Families Divisions and asked to visit and return reports during an identified three month period.
- 2.5. Training was provided on 24 July 2002 and attended by sixteen Members. (Appendix 2). Members made suggestions to improve the process for visiting and reporting which have been adopted. In particular, Members are now routinely provided with information from the previous Member visit to each establishment. Copies of their comments are sent to the relevant Assistant Director for a response. Member comments and Assistant Director response are circulated to the Lead Member, the Chair of Good Health Select Committee and retained in the Members Library.

- 2.6. The Assistant Director Children & Families has suggested that the rotas of Members visits be incorporated into the Senior Manager Section 33 (Children Act 1989 regulations) visits to Childrens Establishments. This would result in the provision of an annual plan of visits to establishments, an example of which is attached as Appendix 3. Members would be requested to visit the childrens establishments in the specific month identified, rather than at any time of their choosing during a three month period, as at present. The rota for visits to Adult Establishments can be more flexible, with Members informed which are to be visited in each quarter of the year and left to arrange contact at their own convenience.
- 2.7. As well as providing valuable information about the quality of service, Members visits provide staff in the establishments with an opportunity to talk directly with Councillors. This is very much appreciated.
- 2.8. The nomination of Members by Area Committees to undertake those visits is a relatively recent development. Whilst there have been some operational difficulties – for example identifying Member ‘pairs’, availability for training, completion of CRB(Criminal Record Bureau) checks, the visits appear to be working well and the feedback forms completed and returned with detail and care.
- 2.9. Members have requested further information in response to their comments. As well as information about comments on previous visits, Members will in future be routinely provided with the response to previous comments made by the Assistant Director. This should enable an improvement to the review purpose of these visits.
- 2.10. A record of visits made by Members, with a brief summary of their comments and Assistant Director response is attached as Appendix 4.
- 2.11. Nominations of Members reported to Committee Services as at February 2002, who had been nominated to carry out visits to Social Services establishments, is attached as Appendix 5.
- 2.12. Members will not be asked to undertake visits, regardless of nomination or training, unless they have received clearance from the Criminal Records Bureau. There remains difficulty in overcoming the backlog of requests to the CRB and accordingly some Members will experience a delay in confirmation of rota visit requests.

3.0. PROPOSALS

- 3.1. That Members note and comment on the information contained in this report.
- 3.2. That Members make further nominations from Committee for participation in the Social Services Rota Visits for the year 2003-2004.

4.0. FINANCE

4.1. There are no immediate financial implications from this report.

5.0. LAW

5.1. The arrangements for visits meet some of the relevant requirements of the Children Act 1989 as well as the National Assistance Act 1948.

6.0. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

6.1. The visits to establishments are intended to assist officers in ensuring that services are delivered in a fair and service user focused manner.

7.0. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1. That Members act on the proposals contained in paragraph 3.0.

Linda Warren
Director of Social Services

Contact Officer:
Sue Dalley (ext 3068)
Improvements and Complaints Manager
Business Services Division