

SELECT COMMITTEE ON LIFELONG LEARNING

Thursday, 16th June, 2005 at 6.00 pm in Committee Room 2
at the Council House, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Councillor Mrs Ridley (Chairman)
Councillors Boys, Mrs Coulter, Hart, Johnston, Rahman, Rogers, Ryder, Simms and Wright; Mrs Capell, Mr Hatton and Mr Smith; Mr Guest; Mrs Hewitt-Clarkson, Mrs Roe; Mr Nottingham and Mrs Simms.

OFFICERS

The Director of Finance (Lead Officer to the Committee), Director of Education and Lifelong Learning, The Assistant Directors of Education (Community Education) and (School Effectiveness), and Mr Sanders (Directorate of Law and Property).

1 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 12th April 2005, be approved as a correct record and signed.

2 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

A declaration of personal interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, was made by Councillor Mrs Coulter in respect of Agenda item no 10 (Developments in Behaviour and Attendance) in view of her membership of the Management Committee of the Pupil Referral Unit.

A declaration of personal interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, was made by Councillor Mrs Ridley in respect of Agenda item no 7 (Youth Service Plan 2005/06) in view of her membership of the Management Committee of Coseley Youth Centre and her Governorship of The Coseley School.

3 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of Councillors Mrs Dunn and Mrs Pearce.

SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was reported that Councillor Simms was serving in place of Councillor Mrs Pearce for this meeting of the Committee only.

TERMS OF REFERENCE AND RULES OF PROCEDURE APPLICABLE TO THE COMMITTEE AND ASSOCIATED MATTERS

A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee was submitted setting out the terms of reference and procedure rules applicable to the Committee. The report also summarised the functions of the Dudley School Organisation Committee and the Dudley Schools Forum, both of which bodies had powers relating to the provision of education in the Borough.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure of the Committee and the Scrutiny Protocol, as referred to in the report now submitted and appendices 1-3 thereto, be received and noted.
 - (2) That the functions of the Dudley School Organisation Committee and the Dudley Schools Forum, as summarised in paragraph 2.5 of the report now submitted, be noted, together with the representation of the Council on those bodies.
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OUTLINE WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2005/06

A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee was submitted seeking consideration of the work programme for the Committee for the 2005/06 municipal year.

Issues considered by the Lead Officer to require the Committee's attention in the light of the significant structural and operational changes necessary, in consequence of the Children Act, 2004, were set out in paragraph 2.5 of the report. Specific reference was also made to the impending review of Primary School places, consultation on which had started, in connection with which it was proposed that a Working Group should be established to consider the detailed proposals.

The report also contained a request from the Chairman that the date of the September meeting be changed from that of 22nd to that of 7th.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the implications for the operation and structure of Council Services arising from the Government White Paper "Every Child Matters", from which the main provisions of the Children Act, 2004 have emerged, be noted.
 - (2) That the outline work programme recommended in paragraph 2.5 of the report now submitted be approved, subject to further consideration of the implications of the Children Act, 2004.
 - (3) That a time limited Working Group be established to consider the review of primary school places.
 - (4) That the date of the meeting scheduled for the 22nd September, 2005 be changed to that of 7th September, 2005.
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YOUTH SERVICE PLAN 2005/2006

A report of the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning was submitted on the draft Youth Service Plan for 2005/06.

The Department for Education and Skills, through the Government Office for the West Midlands, required that all Youth Services developed a three year plan, with an annual review. The draft Plan, which was being consulted on until 9th August 2005, was attached to the report now submitted. It was proposed that, after the conclusion of the consultation period, the Plan, adjusted where necessary, would be published.

It was indicated in the report that the draft Plan had been constructed in the context of the Dudley Community Plan, the Council Plan and the Directorate of Education and Lifelong Learning Strategic Plan. In future years it would be fully incorporated into the Children and Young People's Strategic Plan for the Borough. The draft had been developed with staff teams and partners in order to meet national and local targets in a range of settings, including Youth Centres, detached work, project work and related activities. The draft presented detailed information about the Youth Service, its current operations and future ambitions.

In the discussion on this issue, the Assistant Director of Education (Community Education) confirmed that young people would continue to be engaged in policy making on the Plan, as it emerged, through the Children and Young People Partnership. A discussion also ensued on the type and condition of the buildings in which Youth Centres were situated, in connection with which it was acknowledged that, in a number of cases, substantial refurbishment work was necessary. Measures proposed to address this work were discussed, including the utilisation of extended schools for youth provision and a rolling programme of improvement work to buildings over a three year period.

RESOLVED

That the report be received and the draft Youth Service Plan for 2005/06 be noted.

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A NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH SCHOOLS

A presentation on the Department for Education and Skills initiative "A New Relationship with Schools" was given by the Assistant Director of Education (School Effectiveness).

The presentation was supplemented by a report of the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning on the issue.

The intentions of the initiative were set out in paragraph 2 of the report. Practical changes were under way and indicated in paragraph 8, these involving the alignment of three year budgets for schools with a three year plan; shorter, sharper inspections aimed at giving schools a clearer idea of whether they were pursuing the right policies for raising pupil attainment; better information for parents through a school profile, and more frequent inspections; challenge and support for school Heads from high quality, professional, nationally accredited School Improvement Partners; a single 'conversation' between each school and a School Improvement Partner about the school's priorities for improvement and more weight placed on the school's self evaluation as a starting point for planning, inspection and the "single conversation". The main features of the changes were referred to in the presentation and set out in paragraph 9 of the report.

Key implementation dates, starting from before September 2005 and continuing until September 2007, were included under the initiative and these were indicated in paragraph 10 of the report.

In the discussion that ensued, the initiative and the proposals contained therein were broadly welcomed. In concurring with this view, the teacher representatives present made the point that training on the key aspects would be important. They also made the point that with inspections, most teachers liked to be seen by the inspection team, and expressed the hope that inspections undertaken in the revised manner would continue to take note of teaching. Some concerns were expressed by the teacher representatives about the additional pressures on head teachers and deputy head teachers' time that might result from the changes, particularly in the smaller primary schools where such staff were obliged to teach.

RESOLVED

That the presentation, and the report now submitted, on this issue be noted.

STANDARDS IN EDUCATION - KEY STAGE 3 RESULTS

A report of the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning was submitted setting out the latest information available on the performance of schools in the Borough in Key Stage 3 in relation to National Curriculum assessment data, authenticity assessment data and looked after children assessment data.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

DEVELOPMENTS IN BEHAVIOUR AND ATTENDANCE

A report of the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning was submitted containing an update on current activity relating to behaviour and attendance.

The report emphasised the priority given to this issue nationally and locally and outlined the agencies within the Council and outside with responsibility in this field. The report also summarised the current behaviour and attendance strategy and referred to initiatives being undertaken to further the strategy. These included a review of pupil referral units that had been carried out, the introduction of a framework for intervention, schools being targeted through the Behaviour Improvement Programme, the participation of the Council in the pilot scheme of the DES "KS2 - Behaviour and Attendance", being reported to schools; in year transfers, permanent exclusions and attendance and work being undertaken currently within the relevant Council Directorates on the development of a Dudley Attendance Strategy.

In the discussion on the issue, in response to a question, the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning confirmed that the Education Welfare Service was now fully staffed but that the division was affected by staff absence through long term sickness. The service had had benefit, however, of the advice of a DfES Consultant on how best to take the service forward and the Director agreed to submit a report to a future meeting on this issue.

In response to a further question, the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning outlined the measures taken and the difficulties concerned in finding places at alternative schools for pupils with behavioural difficulties, particularly those who had been permanently excluded. He indicated further that proposals were being drawn up for a protocol on the issue to be agreed with secondary head teachers and that these were at an advanced stage.

On being asked a question in relation to the position with children looked after by the Council, the Director confirmed that there were a disproportionately high number of pupils in this category with behavioural problems. Where children had such problems, schools made extreme endeavours to avoid permanent exclusion but there sometimes became a point at which there was little alternative.

In response to a question from one member, the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning agreed to report in full to a future meeting on attendance figures in relation to ethnicity.

RESOLVED

That the report, and the comments made, be noted.

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THE EDUCATION OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

A report of the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning was submitted indicating the activities in place to support the Education of Looked After Children in Dudley.

The report indicated that there were approximately 470 children who were looked after by the Council at any one time, of which 347 currently were of statutory school age. The report also confirmed the information given by the Director on consideration of the previous item that this group of young children were often particularly vulnerable because of instability in care or school environment, absence, special educational needs, or lack of parenting support and interest in their educational achievement.

References were made in the report to the CSCI inspection of children's services carried out in 2004 in which the needs of looked after children and their low levels of educational attainment had been highlighted and a new action plan for dealing with them required. The draft action plan in this connection was appended to the report now submitted.

The report also summarised the divisions of responsibility within the Council for dealing with looked after children, indicated reporting routes, confirmed the placement of looked after children as the top priority in the admissions criteria for Dudley MBC, as an admissions authority, and referred to financial support for such children being made available to schools from the Standards Fund Vulnerable Children Grant. In relation to raising attainment, reference was made to the institution of an academic mentoring programme aimed at providing additional support for identified children in Key Stage 4 capable of achieving 5 A* - C grades at GCSE with support. The report indicated the nature of such support and also confirmed that academic mentoring was now in place to support

looked after children in years 10 and 11 through their examination preparation and to support links into the adult world of work or further training opportunities. The report also expressed the view that it was essential to promoting the continued success and development of Looked After Children by celebrating their successes.

New developments in this field included the secondment to the DfES of the Manager of the Education Support Service for a 20 day placement as the Regional Looked After Children Network Facilitator; consultations being undertaken currently by the DfES on improving the educational achievement of Looked After Children, the resulting statutory guidance in respect of which would place a duty on the Director and Cabinet Member for Children's Services to ensure positive outcomes for the educational achievement of such children; and this area of work being a key focus for the Joint Area Review of Children's Services to be carried out in March 2006.

In the discussion on this item, the secondary teacher representative confirmed that the initiatives referred to in paragraphs 12 and 14 of the report now submitted were making a tremendous difference at her school in raising achievement levels and aspirations.

In emphasising his support for the celebration of achievements by Looked After Children, the representative of the Archdiocese of Birmingham confirmed that the Archdiocese also placed Looked After Children as their top admissions priority and requested that information regarding achievements be referred to the Committee. The Chairman confirmed that this issue would be treated as a regular item on the agenda. Another member drew attention to the need for all relevant agencies within the Council and outside to work together in improving attainment levels.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the report, and the comments made, be noted.
- (2) That reports on this issue be made to the Committee on a regular basis.
- (3) That the draft action plan, as now submitted, be supported.

A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee was submitted containing extracts from the Quarterly Corporate Performance Report for the fourth quarter of 2004/05, in so far as it related to the areas of responsibility for this Committee.

Particular reference was made in the discussion to key performance indicator KPI06, relating to the percentage of statements of special educational need issued by the authority in a financial year and prepared within 18 weeks, for which a target of 87% had been set. Compliance with the target had lapsed to a low of 28% at one stage but had risen to 71% in January and 92% in February/March giving an overall performance of 83%, following the appointment and training of new educational psychologists.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

The meeting ended at 8.20 pm

CHAIRMAN