

Select Committee on Children's Services – 24th March 2010

Report of the Director of Children's Services

Directorate of Children's Services – Contextual Information regarding Performance in the Following Areas:-

- 1. Prosecutions for non school attendance within 14 days of receipt of instruction**
- 2. Percentage of assessments of social care referrals carried out within 14 days of referral**
- 3. Percentage of looked after children cases reviewed within time limits**
- 4. Rate of Teenage Conception**
- 5. Percentage of 16-18 year olds not in education, employment or training**
- 6. Persistent absence in secondary schools**

Purpose of Report

1. To inform members of the committee about specific performance measures, and factors affecting performance measures, in a small number of specific areas highlighted in the quarterly reporting process. To inform members of actions being taken and which are planned, to improve performance.

Background

2. The Directorate of Children's Services reports regularly to Select Committee on issues where we are performing below target in order to help members understand why this is the case, and what the Directorate of Children's Services and the Children's Trust is doing to improve. This report is based upon the performance measures within our Directorate Strategic Plan. In some cases performance measures have not changed since last time as they are based upon data that is only reported annually e.g. examination results.
3. It should be remembered that these matters are reported in the overall context of Children's Services having been judged as good in the 2009 Comprehensive Area Assessment.

1. Prosecutions for non school attendance within 14 days of receipt of instruction

During November and December 2009 there were significant increases in workloads and tight deadlines to be met. Colleagues in our Legal team report that there were competing demands to prioritise their workloads. Managers in both Directorates will monitor this area closely in order to anticipate and avoid similar difficulties in the future. However workload pressures on our legal team are mounting.

2. Percentage of assessments of social care referrals carried out within 7 days of referral

Over the past two years there has been a 95% increase in referrals to Children's Social Care. In order to address the issues we have taken the following actions:

- Diverted resources to appoint a Domestic Abuse Senior Practitioner to screen referrals in consultation with the police
- Accelerate progress of the Common Assessment Framework and have exceeded our targets for supporting children at an earlier stage
- We are appointing a private foster care social worker to deal with this specific area of work
- Revised the structure of Family Support Services to ensure that we have a comprehensive range of support and parenting options available to families

It is intended that the impact of these approaches will divert referrals to appropriate early intervention to reduce pressures on Social Care and therefore improve performance against this indicator.

3. Percentage of looked after children cases reviewed within time limits

An improvement in relation to quarter 2 has been made, but the increased numbers of looked after children continue to pose a major challenge. We are improving the effectiveness of our common assessment processes to safely reduce the number of referrals. Partners within the Children's Trust are working with us to safely reduce LAC numbers and we are in the process of trying to identify additional human resources to help complete reviews within time limits.

4. Rate of Teenage Conception (Rate per 1000 girls)

Since the publication of the quarter 3 report we have received new provisional data which shows that our performance in this area has improved significantly. The West Midlands has gone from being third worst to the third best performing region in terms of overall rate of decline since the baseline, and for the first time has a rate of reduction that is better than the England average. Dudley is now the region's second best performer with an overall reduction of 20.1%.

5. Percentage of 16-18 year olds not in education, employment or training

Overall rates of participation in education, employment and training have improved considerably in recent years in Dudley. Our performance is better than the national average and the average for metropolitan councils in 2008. We are in the best 25% of areas nationally and the best 5% of metropolitan councils. This is very positive given the current economic climate and the fact that numerous training places have been lost in occupational areas such as construction and engineering. However it still looks as though we are unlikely to meet this very challenging target. Extensive work is being undertaken to address this area of performance e.g. development of a more attractive and relevant curriculum offer by schools and colleges that equips young people with the skills to succeed post 16, intensive work with young people at risk of becoming NEET in order to ensure that they do enter and remain in positive post 16 destinations, development of a wider and more attractive range of post 16 placements which are better equipped to retain young people's interests and motivation.

The proportion of young people leaving care aged 16 who are in education, training or employment at 19 has improved from an average of 41% to over 61%, but this is still well short of our target of 80%. A high proportion of those who are motivated to be involved in positive activities do so. Colleagues in our Connexions Service and other partners are working with looked after children to improve self confidence and motivation in order to ensure that more of them are determined to find a positive destination and to remain within it. We continue to seek a wide range of varied placements so that there is an attractive destination for everyone.

Our performance in terms of the percentage of young offenders in education, employment or training is very close to our stretch target. This is very encouraging as it represents a considerable achievement with a very challenging group of young people.

6. Percentage of pupils persistently absent in secondary schools maintained by the LA.

The figure of 10.44% is of concern. It is based upon data for September to mid October when absences are often high due to the proportion of families taking children on holiday in term time. Data for the end of the spring term 2010 will provide

a more accurate indication as to whether we are on track to meet the target but at this point this seems unlikely. We continue to work with targeted schools and those families who are the source of persistent absence to improve attendance and discourage the take up of term time holidays. Performance across schools is inconsistent and we are constantly supporting and challenging the schools with the highest levels of absence to adopt the best practice that is evident elsewhere.

Finance

4. Our action plans concerning improvements in these areas are based upon existing budgets. Children's Social Care has been successful in gaining growth via the 2010/11 Budget Strategy to assist with front line pressures and increasing referrals.

Law

5. The main pieces of legislation governing these aspects of our work are the Children Act 2004 and the Education and Inspections Act of 2006.

Equality Impact

6. OfSTED judges that Dudley's Services for all children and young people are good but agrees with our self assessment that the progress of children in care and those with learning difficulties/disabilities should continue to be seen as priorities for improvement.

Recommendation

7. That the report be noted by the committee.



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List of Background Papers