

## **SELECT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

Thursday, 22<sup>nd</sup> June, 2006, at 6.00 p.m.

### **PRESENT:-**

Councillor Nottingham (Chairman)  
Councillor Ms Boleyn (Vice Chairman)  
Councillors Ahmed, Mrs Coulter, Johnston, Ms Partridge, Rogers, Simms, A Turner, C Wilson, and Wright; Mr Smith; Mr Hatton, Reverend Wickens; Mr Taylor; Mr Lynch, Ms Verdegam; Ms Bradley and Mrs Simms

### **OFFICERS**

The Director of Finance (as Lead Officer to the Committee), the Assistant Directors of Children's Services (Ms Porter, Ms Sharratt and Mr Wrigley), Mr Perrett (School Development Adviser, Directorate of Children's Services) and Mr. Sanders (Directorate of Law and Property)

#### **1                    INTRODUCTIONS AND WELCOME**

The Committee and the Officers present introduced themselves and the Chairman welcomed new members to the meeting.

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#### **2                    APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of Councillors Mrs Dunn and Mrs Pearce and the Director of Children's Services.

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#### **3                    DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct were received in respect of any matters to be considered at this meeting.

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## MINUTES

That the minutes of the meeting of the former Select Committee on Lifelong Learning held on 21 March 2006, be received.

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## SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was reported that Councillors Simms and Wright were serving as substitute members in place of Councillors Mrs Pearce and Mrs Dunn respectively, for this meeting of the Committee only.

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## TERMS OF REFERENCE AND RULES OF PROCEDURE FOR THE COMMITTEE AND ASSOCIATED MATTERS, INCLUDING THE WORK PROGRAMME AND WORKING GROUPS OF THE COMMITTEE FOR 2006/07

A report of the Lead Office to the Committee was submitted setting out the terms of reference and procedural rules in relation to the Committee and seeking consideration of the work programme proposed for 2006/07. The report also sought consideration of the Working Groups to be appointed in 2006/07. Reference was also made in the report to other bodies with which the Committee was associated that impacted on children's services.

Oral presentations were given by the Lead Officer to the Committee and the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Ms Porter) respectively, on the terms of reference and procedural machinery of the Select Committee, in which the work programme for the year and methodology for carrying it out was suggested. The functions of the Council under the Children Act, 2004 and associated regulations and guidance, for which the Committee was responsible for reviewing and scrutinising, were indicated.

In the latter presentation, the Assistant Director of Children's Services outlined the structure of each division of the Directorate of Children's Services. Details were given of the Council's duty to co-operate on particular issues and with partners and children, in accordance with Section 10 of the Children Act 2004, and to improve the wellbeing of children in the Council's area in relation to the five key outcomes of the Council Plan.

A question and answer session followed the presentations, in which certain issues were clarified, including the definition of a Children's Trust and the way in which it was anticipated children's centres would be monitored. In response to a question on whether the remit of the Committee was to scrutinise all matters within the five outcomes in the Council Plan in the work of the Directorate of Children's Services, the Lead Officer to the Committee indicated that this would not always be the case since certain issues would fall within the terms of reference of other Select Committees.

In response to a question regarding the scrutiny of Community Partnerships, the Lead Officer indicated that some such partnerships would be subject to scrutiny and that some others would not be but that the engagement of partners was an important issue, which required further consideration.

A proposed work programme for the Committee, drawn up by the Lead Officer, was circulated. In the discussion on the proposals, one member expressed the view that Community Cohesion should also be included. In response to a question on whether the Committee would monitor the needs of special needs children, the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Ms Porter) confirmed that a report would be submitted to the Committee on access to special needs provision and the outcomes.

On consideration of the appointment of working groups, as referred to in paragraph 8 of the report now submitted, the Lead Officer expressed the consideration that a number of time limited working groups would also be necessary, these to look at matters including processes for consultation on school closures; schools' funding; government Green Papers and White Papers as necessary and other short term subjects as they arose.

A note was circulated, for completion and return to Democratic Services, asking members to indicate the Working Groups on which subject areas they would prefer to serve.

#### RESOLVED

- (1) That the Terms of Reference, Rules of Procedure and Protocol relating to the Select Committee be received and noted, together with the associated information referred to in paragraph 6 of the report now submitted.
- (2) That the content of the presentations from the Lead Officer to the Committee and the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Ms Porter) respectively, on the proposed work programme and the role of children's services in Dudley, be received.

- (3) That the work programme for the Committee for 2006/07 comprise the following, together with other issues that may emerge:

**Summer 2006** Transforming Secondary Education

Primary Schools Review - Proposals

**Autumn 2006** Joint Area Review report

Children's Services – one year on

Looked-after Children – improving outcomes

Care Away From Home – managing the process

Teenage Pregnancy

Information sharing (from the Joint Area Review (JAR))

Special Educational Needs Strategy (JAR)

Remodelling the children's workforce

**Spring 2007** Outcomes for children and young people 2006 (JAR)

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (JAR)

Health Promoting Schools and Provisions

Obesity Strategy (JAR)

14 – 19 Education and Training (JAR)

- (4) That the following standing Working Groups be appointed in 2006/07 for the purposes indicated and that the Lead Officer to the Committee, in consultation with the Chairman, be authorised to determine the composition and membership of the Working Groups in the light of members' responses to the paper asking members to state the Working Groups on which they would prefer to serve:-

- Corporate Parenting – to scrutinise arrangements for discharging the Council’s corporate parenting responsibilities, including the “Out of Borough Placements” priority
- School Support – to ensure schools receive appropriate support and advice from the Council
- Health Issues – jointly with a Select Committee responsible for health issues, to discharge the Council’s statutory responsibility for health and scrutiny; and
- “Listening to Children and Young People” – a “very informal” group including children’s representation and the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services to meet across the Borough to engage with and consult young people.

(5) That it also be noted that it will be necessary to appoint the following, time limited, Working Groups to consider the issues below:

- Processes for consultation on school closures
- Schools funding
- Government Green Papers and White Papers as necessary.

A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee was submitted on the performance of the Council in relation to the activities relating to the terms of reference of the Committee for the fourth quarter of 2005/06.

Reference was made in the discussion to the sickness analysis in relation to the Directorate of Children’s Services regarding which it was confirmed that the figures included those of schools. In response to a question on what was being done to reduce sickness, the Assistant Director of Children’s Services (Ms Porter) stated that where there were specific health issues, these were dealt with at the time and that, where staff returned to work after a lengthy or stress-related illness, return to work interviews were conducted.

In response to a question regarding the timescale to meet the target in respect of the Performance Indicator for Personal Education Plans for Looked After Children, the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Ms Sharratt) reported that the outturn at March 2006 had risen, in fact, to 71%, only 6.5% below the target figure. Performance against target fluctuated because children continually entered and left the system.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the report be received and noted.
- (2) That a report back to a future meeting be made giving further details in respect of the sickness analysis for the Directorate of Children's Services.

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8                      DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE REVIEW OF THE 2005/06 YEAR

The draft annual report of the former Select Committee on Lifelong Learning for the 2005/06 municipal year was submitted.

RESOLVED

That the report be approved for submission to the Council.

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9                      QUESTIONS UNDER COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 11.8

It was reported that no questions under Council Procedure Rule 11.8 had been received.

In relation to this item, the content of the Council Procedure Rule was clarified. In a brief discussion that followed, a question was asked on whether the Committee would have the opportunity to discuss the Council's proposals in relation to Cradley High School in response to which the Lead Officer confirmed that the consultation process in relation to school proposals would be included in the work programme.

The meeting ended at 7:45 pm

CHAIRMAN

