

Select Committee for Children's Services – 15 November 2007

Report of the Director of Children's Services

Children's Trust Update

Purpose of Report

1. To advise the Select Committee on developments within the Children's Trust.

Background

2. The Children Act 2004 requires that each local authority area has a Children's Trust in place by April 2008. In Dudley our Children and Young People's Partnership forms our Children's Trust. We now have an Executive Board in place and have configured our partnership working around three age groups of: Early Years (0-5); Children's Partnership (5-13); and Youth Partnership (13-19). The Children's Trust Executive Board has an independent Chair – Gill Cooper, with two Vice Chairs – John Freeman (DMBC) and Mark Cooke (Dudley PCT).
3. The framework for developing Children's Trust arrangements is set out in Appendix 1.
4. The Children's Trust is a 'commissioning' trust in that the Trust will commission, but not deliver, all areas of work which relate to improving outcomes for children, young people and their families.
5. 'Commissioning' is the process of making things happen by working with and through others. It is '*developing an overall picture of children's needs within an area and developing provision through public, private, voluntary and community providers to respond to those need*' (Green Paper, Every Child Matters and September 2005 DfES guidance).
6. Commissioning is the word used to describe '*the arrangements by which the people who make decisions about how to use public money locally relate to the agencies that provide services*' and how they '*work through others to implement agreed strategy*'.
7. 'Providers of services' include schools, hospitals, community health services, educational support teams, school improvement services, social services teams,

YOTs, Connexions, Children's Centres, ambulance services, police housing associations, voluntary agencies and business and more.

8. Commissioning children's services that will improve outcomes for children, young people and families is at the core of the Director of Children's Services (DCS) role. In order to improve outcomes providers will need to work in partnership and they will need to be involved in strategic commissioning decisions.
9. The Children's Trust developed and agreed its commissioning framework in May 2006, based on guidelines from the then DfES and ensuring the involvement of children and young people throughout the process.
10. The Commissioning Strategy is the Children and Young People's Plan which provides for the agreement of our priorities over a three year period. The Children and Young People's Plan is the subject of a further paper to this Committee.
11. We have now agreed and put in place a pooled budget arrangement to support the development and embedding of our integrated processes for information sharing and assessment. These are the Common Assessment Framework; Lead Professional; Contact Point; Information Sharing; and Children's Services Directory.
12. **Common Assessment and Lead Professional**
The common assessment is the process to be undertaken by all professionals with children, young people and their parent/carer where any additional unmet need is identified. A pre-assessment process is undertaken to ascertain if the unmet need requires more than one agency to be involved in meeting that need. Where an assessment has taken place and more agencies are required to support the family, a 'team around the child' meeting will be called. At this meeting an action plan is agreed detailing each agencies involvement in the future support needs of the child or young person and a Lead Professional appointed from within the meeting. This should be an individual whom the family can relate to and work with. Their role will be to ensure that the actions within the plan are met, and to 'hold the ring' with other agencies involvement with that child or young person.
13. **Contact Point**
This is the Child Index system, a database which contains a record of every child or young person in the borough. Basic information will be contained within Contact Point, but it will include whether a common assessment has been undertaken, if so who the lead professional is, and information about which agencies are working with them, including a note of the sensitive agencies such as drugs services and health services. It does not contain any detail of these assessments or working arrangements. What Contact Point will do is inform

professionals if others are already working with the child or young person, making communication of concerns and information sharing easier and quicker.

14. Information Sharing

The Children's Act provides for new guidance for information sharing and the circumstances in which information can be shared between agencies and professionals in the interests of the child or young person. Information sharing protocols have been developed and are currently being agreed across the Children's Trust and other partners working in the borough.

15. Children's Services Directory

This is a directory of all the services available to children, young people and their families in the borough, regionally and nationally. We currently have an web based directory delivered through a voluntary organisation – NYAS, which also supports one to one contact. The directory is accessible to professionals as well as children, young people and their families to support easier access to services they may require. The directory works in conjunction with the Children's Information Service for early years and child care requirements.

16. The Children's Trust is now working on its arrangements for integrated front line service delivery. This is how we will work together on the ground in a more integrated way to ensure the seamless delivery of services and will build on good practice within the borough where we have integrated working through multi-agency teams, such as within the Youth Offending Service; Children with Disabilities Service. Our framework for delivering this will be based upon locality teams and forums (partnerships) within the five Area Committee areas of the borough. A change for children project team is being set up to progress this across partners and we should have an action plan in place for January 2008 on how to take this forward.

Finance

17. The operation of the Children's Trust Executive Board is funded from within existing resources. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

Law

18. The Children Act 2004, in particular section 10, requires all children's services authorities to set up Children's Trust arrangements by April 2008.

Equality Impact

19. The Children and Young People's Plan is the strategic planning arrangements for the Children's Trust. It focuses on narrowing the gap for those groups and

neighbourhoods who may be disadvantaged as well as supporting improved outcomes for all.

20. The involvement of children and young people in all aspects of the Children's Trust work ensures that we meet the UN Convention of the Child requirements and the adoption of 'Hear by Right' standards underpins this.

Recommendation

21. It is recommended that the Committee considers the progress of the Children's Trust.



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List of Background Papers

Green Paper, Every Child Matters and September 2005 DfES guidance
Guidance on the duty to cooperate, DfES
Children Act 2004

Children's Trust Arrangements

