

SELECT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Wednesday 24th March, 2010 at 6.00 pm
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Councillor Vickers (Chairman)
Councillor Ms Boleyn (Vice Chairman)
Councillors Attwood, Mrs Coulter, Mrs Dunn, Mrs Greenaway, Hanif, Nottingham, Ms Partridge and Mrs Rogers; Mr Jones, Mrs Lees, Mrs Roe and Mrs Verdegem.

OFFICERS

Interim Director of Finance (as Lead Officer to the Committee) and Mr Sanders (Democratic Services, Directorate of Law, Property and Human Resources).

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (BY INVITATION)

Councillor Mrs Walker (Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services) and the Assistant Directors of Children's Services (Early Years, Youth and Education Services) and (Performance and Partnership)).

55 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of Councillor Crumpton and Mr Taylor and Reverend Wickens.

56 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

57 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the Meetings of the Committee held on 21st and 27th January 2010 be approved as correct records and signed.

58 **STANDARDS REPORT – PERFORMANCE DATA**

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted presenting the latest data available on the performance of schools in the Borough in relation to the following:-

- Early Years Foundation Stage
- Early Years Foundation Stage Ethnicity
- Key Stage 1 National Curriculum Assessment
- Key Stage 1 Ethnicity Assessment Data
- Key Stage 2 National Curriculum Assessment
- Key Stage 2 Ethnicity Data
- Key Stage 4 National Curriculum Data
- Key Stage 4 Ethnicity Assessment Data
- Key Stage 5
- Looked After Children Assessment Data Key Stages 1, 2 and 4
- Trends over time – Key Stages 1, 2 and 4

Tabulations showing Dudley's position in relation to its statistical and geographical neighbours in respect of different aspects of learning for the respective Key Stages were set out in the report.

In presenting the report, the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Early Years, Youth and Education Services) expanded on the situation in Dudley by Key Stage. In relation to the Early Years Foundation Stage, Dudley was improving and closing the gap on its statistical and geographical neighbours but, since its starting point had been made from a low base, substantial work still needed to be done in order to reach local and national averages. In relation to this phase of education, however, Dudley was currently 15th out of all authorities in terms of improvement.

In relation to Key Stage 1, the rate of progress was good, particularly in the areas of English and Mathematics, and in Key Stage 2, Dudley had now reached the national average for making a significant rate of progress and improvement. In Key Stage 4, since the figure of 5A* to C passes in English and Mathematics had become the key indicator, Dudley had improved and had reached the target successfully. The Assistant Director commented that, to some extent, Dudley and other authorities were being prejudiced by the frequent changes in targets by the Department of Children, Schools and Families.

ADJOURNMENT OF MEETING

At this juncture, owing to a fire alarm, the meeting adjourned at 6.20 p.m. and met on adjournment at 6.40 p.m.

STANDARDS REPORT – PERFORMANCE DATA (continued)

In relation to Key Stage 5, the Assistant Director indicated that statistical information on the outcomes in this regard would be provided in future reports when substantive information was available.

Following the presentation of the report, a question and answer session followed, in which reference to the following was included:-

- In response to a question advocating that the statistical information be provided by ward, the Assistant Director confirmed that, in future reports, it was proposed that the information would be provided by township.
- In relation to ethnicity targets, the Assistant Director confirmed that Asian pupils were low on attainment but that progress was being made to raise their attainment levels. In response to a supplementary question regarding the education of travelling children, whom were often taught at home, sometimes against the preference of the pupil, the Assistant Director explained some of the difficulties encountered but confirmed that Dudley complied with the legislative requirements to ensure that such pupils were safe and that their wellbeing was satisfactory. He also indicated that endeavours were being made to improve the service given.
- Regarding pupils being educated at home, the Assistant Director confirmed that parents had an entitlement to request this and that the provision of statistical information on the issue was not currently a statutory requirement.
- The Assistant Director confirmed that, in future reports, information on statemented pupils would be provided.
- In responding to a question on the reasons for the omission from the report of statistical information in respect of secondary schools, the Assistant Director indicated that all relevant information had been assimilated but that it had to be validated by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) before publication. Validation from the DCSF was currently awaited.

RESOLVED

1. That the information contained in the report, and the comments made and responses given, as indicated above, be noted.
2. That the Assistant Director arrange for statistical information regarding pupils with special educational needs to be circulated to the Committee.

61

LEARNING AND SKILLS COUNCIL TRANSFER BUDGET 2010/11 AND
LEARNING GRANT AND SPECIAL GRANT

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted, providing further information on the implications of the transfer of responsibility for funding for most 16-19 learning to local authorities with effect from 1st April 2010, with particular reference made to the requirement for local authorities to start paying providers of 16-19 learning from mid April and to manage providers' financial performance against this funding. The report also included reference to the Learning and Skills Council Transfer Budget allocated to the Local Authority for 2010/11.

A letter from the Director of the Young People's Participation and Attainment Group of the Department for Children, Schools and Families to Directors of Children's Services, indicating the methodology of the calculation of the 2010/11 budget allocation for each local authority and the method of payment proposed, was appended to the report now submitted.

In the discussion, reference was made to the staff to transfer to the Council from the Learning and Skills Council, the funding for whom was met via the Area Based Grant. Details in relation to the grant were set out in paragraph 11 of the report. It was noted that the staff would be based at Ward House.

RESOLVED

1. That the detail on the transfer of Learning and Skills Council responsibility for funding for most of 16-19 Learning to the Local Authority, be noted.
2. That the Learning and Skills Transfer Budget allocated to the Local Authority, as set out in the report now submitted, be noted.

62

REPORT ON DUDLEY'S SCHOOLS OFSTED OUTCOMES APRIL 2009 TO
MARCH 2010

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted presenting the latest analysis of the performance of Dudley schools in Ofsted inspections over the period from April, 2009 to March 2010.

The inspections carried out over the period by Ofsted had been made under three different frameworks with the expectations of Ofsted having increased incrementally each time. In presenting the report, the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Early Years, Youth and Education Services) therefore cautioned that valid and robust comparisons between inspections were difficult to make.

The report set out the outcomes for all schools inspected in Dudley through the period but did not include thematic or subject inspections, nor the outcomes of HMI monitoring reports for schools judged to require a "Notice to Improve" or "Special Measures".

The report noted that schools whose performance had been graded as satisfactory or inadequate for pupil achievement or safeguarding would have a reduced overall effectiveness judgement. Schools judged to be inadequate on safeguarding would automatically be placed in a "Notice to Improve" or "Special Measures" category.

In relation to primary schools, one school had been judged to require "Special Measures" and one to require a "Notice to Improve". The school in special measures had since received HMI monitoring visits and the latest report had judged the school to be making satisfactory progress against all key issues. Both schools were being monitored by the Local Authority, who had judged progress to be satisfactory.

Only two secondary schools had been inspected over the period, one of which had been judged to require special measures and the other to require a notice to improve. The school in special measures would close on 31st August, 2010 and was currently being supported by the Local Authority and Black Country Challenge. The progress of the school with the notice to improve was being monitored and would shortly be subject to a formal local authority monitoring visit.

In relation to special schools and pupil referral units, only one inspection report had been carried out and this had been judged to be good.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

MULTI SKILLS PLAYGROUND INITIATIVE

A report of the Director of Children's Services on this initiative was submitted.

Details of the scheme, which involved the instalment of playground markings used for physical activities and games outdoors and the training arrangements made for both school staff and out-of-hours learning providers, were made in the report.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

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PROGRESS ON CHILDREN'S SERVICES – KEY DEVELOPMENTS

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted advising the Committee of current major issues within Children's Services, as follows:

(a) Pensnett School of Technology

Reference was made to the current position with regard to Pensnett School of Technology, a decision on which to close the school with effect from 31st August 2010 had been made by the Cabinet at its meeting held on 17th March 2010. The implications of closure were discussed, in relation to which the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Early Years, Youth and Education Services) indicated that, further to consultations with the Head Teachers of secondary schools in the area, agreement had been reached to admit pupils over Published Admission Numbers for years 7 and 8. Discussions had started on the transitional arrangements. Pupils in the current years 9 and 10 would remain on site at the Pensnett School premises. Work had begun within Children's Services regarding staffing issues.

In response to a question, the Assistant Director was optimistic that the majority of the pupils in years 7 and 8 displaced from the Pensnett School would be accommodated at schools of their first preference. He indicated further that it was proposed that the relocation of pupils would have been completed by the beginning of May. In relation to pupils in years 9 and 10, the Assistant Director confirmed that work was being undertaken to maximise the availability of all option entitlements for the pupils remaining at Pensnett School.

The non-elected representative for the secondary school sector referred to the commitment of the staff who would remain at Pensnett School and drew attention to the issue of their continued employment, once the school had been closed. The point was made that this was an issue that might have to be addressed by the Committee in the future.

Reference was made for management arrangements for Pensnett School once it had become an Innovative Learning Centre, in response to which the Assistant Director described the concept of Learning Centres. In response to a further question, the Assistant Director explained the arrangements made for the governance and management of pupils remaining at Pensnett, in the absence of a Head Teacher on site.

(b) Building Schools for the Future

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The other major issue referred to in the report was that of the outcome of the Council's bid for funding under Building Schools for the Future. It was noted, with regret, that the bid had not been successful notwithstanding the positive feedback from the Department of Children, Schools and Families on the content and quality of the Council's submission. The Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services confirmed the commitment of the Council to progressing the schemes comprising the submission, as contained in Vision 2025, and to implementing them as and when capital finance was available.

RESOLVED

1. That the position regarding the Pensnett School be noted and that an update on the position with the school be made at the next meeting of the Committee, the report to include:-
 - The position with regard to staffing;
 - The position with regard to the transfer of pupils with particular reference to children with special or additional educational needs.
2. That the Committee place on record its disappointment that the Council's submission for Building Schools for the Future has been unsuccessful.

QUARTERLY CORPORATE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT

A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee was submitted under cover of which was set out the Corporate Performance Management Report in relation to the activities under the terms of reference of the Committee for the third quarter of 2009/10.

An accompanying report of the Director of Children's Services, containing contextual information regarding performance in particular areas of service was also submitted.

In the discussion, specific reference was made the following issues:-

- The percentage change in the rate of under 18 conceptions per 1000s for girls aged 15-17 years resident in the area for the current calendar year. The Assistant Director of Children's Services (Early Years, Youth and Education Services) indicated that the Council's performance for under 18 conceptions in the Borough was improving and closing the gap between Dudley and the national average but accepted that the rate of improvement had not been fast enough given the low base from which Dudley had started. While, nevertheless, the overall position was improving, the 15-17 year old age group, where performance had declined, was particularly problematic. Children's Services were aware of the issues and were taking measures aimed at improving the situation.
- In relation to the percentage point gap between pupils eligible for free school meals and their peers achieving the expected level at Key Stage 4 and the percentage point gap between pupils identified as having special educational needs and their peers achieving 5A* to C GCSE grades or equivalent, including English and Maths, the Assistant Director confirmed that the gap was being closed but that, owing to the low base from which the Directorate had had to start, the rate of improvement was not fast enough.

A Member suggested that a breakdown of performance by ward, in relation to school attendance issues, would have been helpful.

RESOLVED

1. That the report now submitted, and the contextual report, be received and noted.
2. That, in future, reports be configured on the basis of geographical statistical information.

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THANKS

This being the last meeting of the Committee in the current municipal year, the Chairman thanked Members and Officers for their support during the year and Members and Officers, in return, thanked the Chairman for his able Chairmanship.

The meeting ended at 8.00 pm

CHAIRMAN