

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 23rd June, 2011 at 6.00 p.m.
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Councillor Mrs Dunn (Chairman)
Councillor Attwood (Vice-Chairman)
Councillors Miss Arshad, Mrs Billingham, Crumpton, Mrs Greenaway, Hanif, J Jones, Miller, Ms Partridge and P Woodall; Mr Duffield, Mr Taylor, Mr Tinsley, Mrs M Verdegem, and Reverend Wickens

OFFICERS

The Assistant Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services (Learning Disabilities and Mental Health) - Lead Officer to the Committee, the Acting Director of Children's Services, the Assistant Directors of Children's Services (Children and Families) and (Quality and Partnership), the Head of Assessment Services and Team Manager (Children's Specialist Services), and Miss K Fellows, (Directorate of Corporate Resources)

1. **INTRODUCTIONS AND OPENING REMARKS OF THE CHAIRMAN**

The Chairman thanked Councillor Vickers for his services to the Committee as former Chairman and Members and Officers introduced themselves.

2. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of Councillor S Turner, Mr Bruton and Mrs Lees.

3. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No member made a Declaration of Interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct.

4. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 23rd March, 2011 be approved as a correct record and signed.

5. TERMS OF REFERENCE AND RULES OF PROCEDURE OF THE COMMITTEE AND ASSOCIATED MATTERS INCLUDING THE WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE COMMITTEE FOR 2011/12.

A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee setting out the Terms of Reference and Procedure Rules applicable to the Committee and details of associated matters and consideration of the issues of the work programme and the appointment of Working Groups for 2011/12, was submitted.

Arising from the presentation of the report submitted Members asked questions and raised issues and the Acting Director of Children's Services responded stating that a report in relation to Corporate Parenting would be presented to the November meeting and consideration would be given to the request that Councillors Crumpton and Hanif wished to become Members of the Corporate Parenting Committee.

In responding to suggestions made by Councillor Crumpton, the Chairman confirmed that the Committee could make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services.

She also confirmed that the Revenue Budget Strategy Report could be considered further following the January meeting, should it become necessary to do so due to the uncertainty in relation to the budget at that stage.

The Chairman requested Members to advise her of any specific matters that they wished to scrutinise throughout the current municipal year, and to supply Officers with questions in relation to the reports submitted in advance of each meeting.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the Terms of Reference, Rules of Procedure and Protocol be noted.
- (2) That, subject to the inclusion of a report in relation to Corporate Parenting being submitted to the November meeting of the Committee, the Work Programme for 2011/12 be approved and that Members be requested to advise the Chairman of any additional issues that they consider should be included in the programme.
- (3) That no Working Groups be established for 2011/12 and that any substantive issues that arise be brought to the full Committee.

6 DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE REVIEW OF THE 2010/11 YEAR

A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee was submitted setting out the draft Annual Report to Council for the review of the 2010/11 year.

RESOLVED

That the Annual Report of the Select Committee for 2010/11 be received and noted and referred to Council

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CONTACT, REFERRAL AND ASSESSMENT ARRANGEMENTS FOR CHILDREN IN NEED.

A report of the Acting Director of Children's Services was submitted on the practice, process and legal framework for the assessment of Children's in need. Detailed information regarding the nature of assessments and child in need plans; specific data around activity levels relating to children in need referrals, initial assessments and core assessments; information on the types of services which are available in the Council and partner agencies to support children in need; the latest OfSTED inspection report; a flowchart of the process after the initial assessment has taken place and family support information were Appended to the report submitted.

In introducing the report, the Acting Director of Children's Services stated that Members would be taken through a journey of a child in need who required help and support, how assessments were carried out, how referrals were made and the services and partner agencies support that were available.

She also stated that the above was a key area of work for Children's Services and should Members wish to raise any questions throughout the presentation, they were urged to do so.

The Assistant Director of Children's Services, (Children and Families) defined a child in need and referred to the services that they could access through the Council. She confirmed that the service was inspected by OfSTED advising of the pressures that the directorate faced due to the increase in the number of referrals.

She also referred to the Appendices to the report submitted, stating that these referred to the terminology in relation to a "child in need", the process following a referral, frequently asked questions, activity data in relation to the number of referrals, the partner agencies and services that could be provided following a referral and the flow chart which set out the different routes that would be taken following a referral and assessment.

The Head of Assessment Services gave a verbal presentation in relation to the part of the report that related to initial referral and assessments, making specific reference to the specific guidance and the regulations, the framework to be followed, the three access points within the Dudley Borough and the teams involved in dealing with referrals.

She also referred to the referral and assessment process, advising that the completion of the initial assessment period had been extended to ten working days, that the core assessment was more complex and had to be completed within thirty five working days, which could result in a "child in need plan" and "the work that was required to be undertaken with multi agency plan".

Reference was made to Appendix 5, which provided a flow chart of timescales involved for initial assessment, planning and intervention.

Following the presentation of the part of the report that related to initial referrals Members asked questions, made observations and comments and responses were provided as follows:-

The Head of Assessment Services indicated that should Members have concerns in relation to a particular family they should contact Children's Social Care Services.

The Assistant Director of Children's Services, (Children and Families) advised that a twenty four hour service, seven days each week was operated and if there were concerns in relation to a particular family it would be helpful if the parent(s) consent could be obtained in relation to making the referral.

The Acting Director of Children's Services referred to two documents in relation to the service which would be forwarded to Members which explained the procedure in relation to referrals, indicating that should Members have any comments in relation to the documents, they should advise her of these.

The Head of Assessment Services advised that there was a small percentage of re-referrals made to the Service.

She also advised that parents could refer themselves to the service and Duty Officers would provide them with assistance and advice and could intervene in relation to helping to refer on to other services for example housing, should they be experiencing housing difficulties.

It was reported that the contact details for the service were advertised on the Council's website and also published in the telephone directory.

The Acting Director of Children's Services also advised that the above included the out of hours telephone number.

The Head of Assessment Services indicated that should Members continue to have concerns in relation to a family following referral, they should contact Children's Services accordingly.

A Member referred to difficulties in obtaining information from the service in relation to progress following referral, indicating that as a Member of the Council Councillors should be able to access such information. In responding the Acting Director of Children's Services stated that the position in relation to data protection issues would be examined further, however without a parent(s) consent certain information could not be provided.

The Head of Assessment Services reported that the Service had electronic information systems and recording in place and any new cases were checked for earlier intervention with the available duty Social Worker. Also when a referral was made lateral checks were undertaken together with

consultation with the standard universal services. The agencies contacted would vary dependant upon the circumstances of the case but would include professionals such as health advisors, schools and the general practitioner together with any other agency known to be in contact with the child and the family.

The Assistant Director of Children's Services advised that the service was constantly under review and there were quarterly data statistics in order that trends/areas and gaps could be identified and that service provision was currently under review.

She also advised that the duty officer would have access to previous history records and should there be sufficient evidence to intervene in relation to a child, permission of the Court could be sought to remove the child from a situation of potential risk.

The Head of Assessment Services reported that should a child with a child protection plan move out of the Dudley Borough area, the receiving authority would convene a receiving in child protection conference. With regard to a child in need there was regional protocol relating to notifications between authorities when children move as there was for children who were looked after.

She also advised that all needs of a child, including its religious needs would be considered.

That there was a statutory duty to safeguard a child and that would apply to any child regardless of schooling.

The Assistant Director of Children's Services reported that in relation to early intervention, referrals were received from Children's Centres, there was a Family Intervention Project and the voluntary sector was utilised by the Directorate such as Homestart who provided family support services for families.

She also indicated that in order to ascertain whether a child was at risk of significant harm an assessment was undertaken by utilising information from the police, schools, other family members, general practitioners and health visitors. However, should there have been incidents of physical abuse intervention would take place upon an expedient basis.

The Team Manager provided details in relation to her role, making specific reference to the Duty and Assessment Team, indicating that contacts are checked each morning and divided between Team workers. Examples of referrals were outlined.

She also stated that checks would be made each day in relation to referrals from the emergency out of hours duty team, indicating that planned appointments for home visits would also be undertaken by the team.

It was reported that once an initial assessment had been completed a core assessment might be required for the provision of services for the child in need, there might also be child protection issues and safeguarding issues that required addressing.

She stated that as part of the initial assessment, should a parent consent a child could be spoken to alone for example in a school setting with a teacher present.

The range of referrals received from the out of hours team were outlined, advising that duty workers could sign post parents to other services and offer advice.

She also reported that child protection referrals were prioritised.

The procedure in relation to Section 47 cases was outlined. Particular reference was made to the difficulty with assessments in cases of neglect. Information in relation to safeguarding, agreements that could be entered into with perpetrators and the need for emergency protection and care orders was also provided.

She indicated that a duty manager's role involved managing workers' caseloads, attending meetings, chairing strategy meetings, dealing with staff recruitment, scrutinising reports of Social Workers, Care Plans and statements.

Arising from the above presentation the Assistant Director of Children's Services, (Children and Families), the Head of Assessment Services and Team Manager responded to Members questions as follows:-

- Staff supervision was extremely important with cases allocated based upon level of skill, existing cases and the number of complex cases allocated to staff;
- That work hours were monitored in order to ensure that members of staff did not continually work long hours each day;
- Caseloads were monitored, with each worker having approximately twenty five cases allocated to them, however the number of allocations depended upon the complexity of cases;
- In relation to training parenting training had been provided to practitioners.

Members thanked officers for the presentation indicating that the information contained in the report and as reported on during the Meeting had been extremely informative.

The Acting Director of Children's Services requested Members to notify her of any feedback following the above presentation.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the information contained in the report, and Appendices to the report, submitted and as reported on at the meeting on processes and procedures for assessment and decision making for children in need, be noted.
- (2) That the Acting Director of Children's Services be requested to circulate to Members the leaflet entitled "Right Service, Right Time, Right Place", a paper currently being consulted on and which would in due course be published on the website.

The meeting ended at 7.45 p.m.

CHAIRMAN