

Select Committee on Children's Services – 25 March 2009

Report of the Interim Director of Children's Services

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

1. **Attainment of looked after children**
2. **Proportion of care leavers who are not engaged in employment, education or training**
3. **Overall Percentage of 16-18 year olds not in education, employment or training**
4. **Number of young people (16-19 yrs) with learning difficulties and disabilities who are not engaged in education, employment or training**
5. **Proportion of supervised juveniles (young offenders) in full time education, employment or training**
6. **Adoptions of looked after children**
7. **Attendance in primary and secondary schools**

Purpose of Report

1. To inform members of the committee about performance measures, and factors affecting performance measures, in specific areas highlighted in the quarterly reporting process.

Background

2. A number of performance issues relating to trends in data have been allocated a red triangle (indicators are performing below target) in recent quarterly reports. 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 about these matters, we have prepared this report. It is anticipated that further reports will be provided at future meetings.
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 2008 Annual Performance Assessment.

4. **Contextual information regarding performance**

4.1 **Proportion of looked after children gaining 1+ A* - G grades at GCSE or equivalent**

| | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 | Target 2008/09 |
|---------------------------|-------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Dudley | 63% (17/27) | 55.9% (19/34) | 45.7% (16/35) | 72% |
| Statistical Neighbours | 53.3% | 48.9% | 52.8% | |
| National Average | 53% | 55.1% | 57.3% | |

(Figures in brackets indicate the actual number of young people achieving as a fraction of the relevant cohort size)

Annual Performance Assessment interpretation of Dudley performance - acceptable

Each year the cohort of relevant looked after children fluctuates in size but is relatively small. By Year 11 some of these young people have experienced very significant disruption in their lives and this seriously undermines their education performance. Some fail to attend school and some do not sit any GCSE qualifications.

Our virtual school for children in care provides support for all of these young people and works with schools to ensure that they remain engaged in their studies and are properly supported by their carers as far as educational activity is concerned.

Since April 2008 we have been investing heavily (£250,000) in the provision of private tuition for looked after children to improve their attainment. This is part of a government initiative and the funding is being provided by HSBC. This is a long term investment because many of the children taking part are in primary schools and key stage 3 and so the impact of the project on GCSE scores is not yet known.

4.2 **Proportion of care leavers who are not engaged in employment, education or training (Proportion of care leavers who were looked after in their 17th year who were engaged in education, employment or training aged 19, expressed as a ratio of total Dudley population of 19 yr olds who were involved in education, employment or training)**

| | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 | Target 2008/09 |
|---------------------------|---------|---------|---------|-------------------|
| Dudley | 0.7 | 0.62 | 0.57 | 0.91 |
| Statistical Neighbours | 0.71 | 0.73 | 0.65 | |
| National Average | 0.76 | 0.76 | 0.78 | |

Annual Performance Assessment interpretation of Dudley performance – acceptable

Factors in relation to educational attendance and attainment (cited above) are highly relevant to this area too. In addition many young people in care find it very hard to make the transition from school to post 16 education for social as well as academic reasons.

In recognition of our declining performance in this area the members of the Board of the Children and Young People's Trust, which contains all the major public sector employers in Dudley, has agreed to regard looked after children in Y11 as a priority group for employment, training and extended work experience opportunities when they leave school.

Looked after children are being targeted for extra support from our Connexions Service in order to help them find positive destinations on leaving school, and our Employer Engagement Team in our 14-19 office is working with employers to find appropriate placements. Some of the young people in question are amongst the most challenging individuals that we work with and they will need considerable support once found a placement, to remain within that setting.

Also European Social Fund projects are becoming more targeted to support specific vulnerable groups. A programme is currently being developed called Tackling NEET which is specifically targeting care leavers. Both Dudley College and Stourbridge College are providing programmes supporting care leavers to achieve qualifications and work experience.

We have a NEET Steering Group in place which is also making each of the vulnerable groups a priority particularly care leavers.

4.3 **Overall Percentage of 16-18 year olds not in education, employment or training**

| | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 | Target 2008/09 |
|------------------------|---------|---------|---------|----------------|
| Dudley | 8.4% | 6.4% | 5.6% | 4.6% |
| Statistical Neighbours | 8.5% | 8.3% | 7.5% | |
| National Average | 8.2% | 7.7% | 6.7% | |

Rates of participation in education, employment and training have improved considerably in recent years in Dudley. Our performance last year was better than the national average. We have an action plan to secure further improvement and recently the Cabinet Performance Management Sub Committee agreed to invest an extra £12,000 with our Connexions Service to enable more work to be done to identify and trace individual young people who are not engaged in education, employment and training.

4.4 **Number of young people (16-19 yrs) with learning difficulties and disabilities who are not engaged in education, employment or training**

| | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 | Target 2008/09 |
|------------------------|-------------|-------------|------------|----------------|
| Dudley | 14.2% (226) | 10.8% (209) | 8.4% (161) | 144 |
| Statistical Neighbours | 18.0% | 17.9% | 16.3% | |
| National Average | 15.7% | 15.1% | 13.7% | |

Our current performance is significantly better than the national average. We do not have the funds to provide sufficient post 16 places for all young people with severe learning difficulties. In addition many young people with LDD find the transition from school to college very hard. It is impossible to provide the levels of support that are available in schools in the post 16 sector. Nonetheless colleges are very aware of this issue and are working to improve their provision and retention rates.

4.5 **Proportion of supervised juveniles (young offenders) in full time education, employment or training**

| | July – Sep 2007 | Oct – Dec 2007 | Jan – Mar 2008 | Apr – Jun 2008 | Target 2008/09 |
|------------------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Dudley | 66.7% | 73.4% | 70.2% | 70.9% | 79% |
| Statistical Neighbours | 70.8% | 71% | 71% | | |
| National Average | 70.7% | 72.9% | 72.5% | | |

Young Offenders are a priority group within our Targeted Youth Support Plan. Our Youth Offending Service (YOS) treat young offenders who are in danger of becoming NEET as a priority. There are monthly meetings attended by YOS staff, Connexions Personal Advisers and others to analyse data and to discuss action plans for individual “hard to engage” cases. Systems are in place with Connexions to support any young person who has completed their order and is still NEET. Advice and Guidance is offered to all NEET young people. A weekly job club has been developed specifically for young offenders. This has enabled some of the obstacles, which prevent engagement to be addressed. Post 16 providers meet young people face to face in order to support them into provision. The National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders has just been awarded a contract to specifically run a small programme targeting young offenders in Dudley. Also other programmes such as Kickstart Life are currently supporting this group.

4.6 **Adoptions of looked after children (Number of looked after children adopted during the year as a percentage of the total number of looked after children who have been in care for 6 months or more)**

| | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 | Target 2008/09 |
|---------------------------|----------|----------|----------|-------------------|
| Dudley | 4.9 (20) | 6.8 (27) | 5.4 (24) | 6.8% |
| Statistical Neighbours | 7.8 | 8.0 | 9.0 | |
| National Average | 7.6 | 8.3 | 8.8 | |

(Figure in brackets indicates number of children)

Annual Performance Assessment interpretation of Dudley performance – “Ask questions about performance”. During the 2008 APA questions were asked by inspectors about this matter and our performance received no adverse comment in the final report.

Adoption is an option for a relatively small number of children. The indicator is affected by the fact that the numbers of looked after children is rising in Dudley. We do not have large numbers of looked after children drifting in care for whom adoption is the plan but no placement has been found. For example in 2007/08 twenty three children were judged to be suitable for adoption and twenty (87%) were placed.

Factors within our action plan which will have an impact and improve performance are

- (a) work underway to safely reduce the number of looked after children

- (b) increased use of special guardianships which will count as adoptions
- (c) improved tracking of cases that are in the adoption process so as to identify problems at an earlier stage and intervene if appropriate

4.7 **Attendance/Absence in secondary schools**

| | 2004/05 | 2005/06 | 2006/07 |
|------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Dudley | 92.26 | 91.94 | 92.22 |
| Statistical Neighbours | 92.03 | 91.97 | 92.93 |
| National Average | 92.20 | 92.09 | 92.31 |

4.8 **Attendance in primary schools**

| | 2004/05 | 2005/06 | 2006/07 |
|------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Dudley | 94.41 | 93.93 | 94.5 |
| Statistical Neighbours | 94.75 | 94.48 | 94.98 |
| National Average | 94.58 | 94.25 | 94.83 |

No APA interpretation is offered of this data.

This indicator is frequently reported using absence, as opposed to attendance data.

In quarter 3 the percentage of half days missed in secondary schools was 7.3%.
2008/09 target – 7.18

In quarter 3 the percentage of half days missed in primary schools was 5.2%.
2008/09 target – 5

Attendance in Dudley schools is broadly in line with the national average. Our efforts to improve attendance focus upon a minority of families and young people amongst whom there are high levels of persistent absence. Systems for checking absences and intervening where necessary have become much more sophisticated in schools in recent years, but there are inconsistencies in the way such systems are applied in different schools. We provide support and challenge to all schools to improve upon this position. In addition many schools still face problems caused by parents condoning short and/or extended absences for holidays and travel within term time.

Finance

5. Our action plans concerning improvements in these areas are based upon existing budgets.

Law

6. 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

7. 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

8. That the report be noted by the committee.



.....
Jane Porter
Interim Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Ian McGuff (Assistant Director Children's Services)
Telephone: 01384 814387
Email: ian.mcguiff@dudley.gov.uk

List of Background Papers

APA Performance letter