

Meeting of the Council – 16th July, 2012

Annual Report of the Children’s Services Scrutiny Committee for 2011/12

Purpose of the Report

1. To submit the Annual Report of the Children’s Services Scrutiny Committee for 2011/12.

Background

2. Article 6 of the Council's constitution requires that Scrutiny Committees report annually to the full Council on the work carried out over the previous municipal year making both recommendations for key areas of future work and any amended working methods, if appropriate, for the forthcoming year.
3. The Scrutiny Committee is particularly concerned to ensure that their work focused specifically on the five outcomes in "Every Child matters", namely:
 - Be healthy
 - Stay safe
 - Enjoy and achieve
 - Make a positive contribution
 - Achieve economic well-being

and the following key national objectives:

- Improving outcomes for looked after children
- Reducing teenage pregnancies
- Improving education standards

4. During 2011/12, the Committee noted positive developments such as the re-design of the corporate parenting approach as well as the outcome of the OFSTED Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children. Evidence was provided to the Committee through a themed approach. A number of visitors to the Committee were in attendance during the year and this was arranged with the intention of promoting open-ness and transparency. This gave Members opportunity to increase awareness and expertise on issues relating to children and young people in the Borough. Specifically, items included in the planned work programme for the Committee in 2011/12 were as follows:-

Contact Referral and Assessment Arrangements for Children in Need

5. A report was submitted and noted on the practice, process and legal framework for the assessment of children in need. Detailed information regarding the nature of assessments; child in need plans; specific data around activity levels relating to children in need referrals, initial assessments and core assessments; information in relation to the types of services which are available within the Council and partner agencies to support children in need; the latest OfSTED inspection report and a flowchart of the process after the initial assessment had taken place and family support information were all appended to the report submitted.

Child Poverty

6. The report summarised the key points from the guidance in the Child Poverty Act, 2010 and indicated the key performance measures in respect of poverty for children, the national target on the subject and the current situation in Dudley. Actions being taken by the Council to meet the above target, the key areas of focus of the Council and its partners aimed at mitigating poverty, and the Council's involvement in issues of wealth and jobs creation were contained in the report.

Gypsy Roma Traveller Service

7. The report summarised the composition of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Service operated by the Directorate of Children's Services. It also outlined details in relation to a database maintained by the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Service which detailed the numbers of children attending various schools, those of pre-school age, those whom were home tutored and those who did not appear on roll. Details in relation to educational attainment levels were set out in the report together with attendance figures. An explanation as to how the various agencies involved with gypsy, roma and traveller children inter-related was provided. The report also referred to training measures and to safeguarding issues.

Children's Centres in Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council

8. A report was submitted and noted in relation to the purpose of Children's Centres Service delivery, the legal framework under which they are delivered and the plans for their further development. The report explained the background to the development of Children's Centres in Dudley and how they support the communities in which they are sited. The report contained details of the aims of Children's Centres which is to identify and reach and help the families in the greatest need of support by providing a range of both universal and targeted services in partnership with both statutory and voluntary agencies. The manner of operation of Children's Centres, the number of children that each contained, the activities offered, the delivery of services and the evaluation of services offered were all contained in the report. Details of the staffing, the recruitment of volunteers and the funding obtained for Children's Centres were also indicated.

Time for Two's Project

9. The report contained information in relation to the Project for two year olds which was supported and delivered by the Directorate of Children's Services, Childcare Strategy Team. It was noted that the Project involved the provision of support for parents as well as early education to ensure that disadvantaged two year olds could fully benefit from the programme. The features of the Project including the provision of support for parents as well as early years education together with the range of support offered to parents was outlined in the report. Details of the pilot of the Project and the provision of a legal entitlement to 15 hours of free early education for every disadvantaged 2 year old from 2013 were outlined in the report.

Care Proceedings

10. A report was submitted and noted in relation to the legal processes undertaken by the Council in relation to the protection and safeguarding of children in need. The number of children who were looked after in Dudley and subject to Care Orders was noted together with the actions available to the Council and the Police in relation to Care Proceedings. Details of the recommendations in relation to the time frame in which Child Protection Cases should be dealt with following the Family Justice Review commissioned by the Government in February, 2010 were referred to in the report.

Corporate Parenting

11. The report referred to the Council's responsibilities in relation to corporate parenting for children in care and also sought consideration of the Corporate Parenting Strategy. Details of the Corporate Parenting Board and the former Corporate Parenting Committee which had been established to support young people looked after by the Authority were contained in the report, together with details of the new Terms of Reference and composition of the Board. The Annual report for Looked After Children, providing information on the outcomes for Looked After Children and the activities that had taken place with partner agencies and the Council to support

and improve performance was appended to the report, together with details of the Dudley Pledge for Looked after Children which had been informed and developed by children themselves and in particular the Children in Care Council, a regular forum where children and young people can meet with elected Members and Senior Members of the Council to influence future support and the provision of services.

Annual Report for Complaints, Comments and Compliments for Children's Social Care Services 1st April, 2010 to 31st March, 2011

12. In accordance with statutory requirements, the Annual Report on Social Care Compliments and Complaints for the above period was submitted, accepted by the Committee and approved for publication.

Referrals to Local Authority Children's Social Care where there are concerns about a Child's Safety or Welfare

13. A report was submitted and noted containing an overview of the processes involved when a referral was made to Social Care, which raised concerns about a child's safety or welfare. The report focused on situations where concerns had been raised that a child might be suffering or was likely to suffer significant harm but where the threshold for care proceedings had not been met, and through assessment, it had been judged that children could remain with their birth families but with the support of a Child Protection Plan. The report set out the obligations of the local authority and its partner agencies under Section 47 of the Children Act, 1989 and the activities undertaken in connection with children in this category. The review process on when consideration was given as to whether or not a child should continue to be the subject of a Child Protection Plan was also contained in the report.

Standards Report – Performance Data

14. The report was received and noted on the performance of schools in the Borough providing the latest data available in relation to the Early Years Foundation Stage, Early Years Foundation Stage Ethnicity data, 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 Ethnicity Assessment Data, Key Stage 5, Looked After Children Assessment Data – Key Stages 1,2 and 4 and Trends Over Time – Key Stages 1,2 and 4.

OFSTED Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services

15. A report was submitted and noted on the outcome of the OFSTED inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Services in Dudley, which had taken place between 28th November and 9th December, 2011. It was noted that Action Plans had been formulated in response to the recommendations referred to in the Inspection report. It was noted further that those inspection judgements which had been measured as being outstanding or good would continue to be monitored. The Action Plans that were submitted and considered related to the particular area for improvement,

actions required, the current position statement, the agencies involved and key personnel. The action that was being taken and the progress to date on the issue of the sufficiency of the capacity of the Independent Reviewing Officer to enable the full implementation of quality assurance responsibilities, including data collation and report to relevant bodies was outlined and noted.

The Education Act 2011 and Its Impact for Dudley

16. A report was submitted and noted in relation to the changes to education and its provision in Dudley that resulted from the provisions of the Education Act 2011. The report outlined the changes in the way state funded education will be organised and managed and also the Council's statutory responsibilities in this regard. The proposed changes were referred to in the report. Details of the most significant areas that the Council would need to address in its assessment of the impact of the changes and its review of future service provision were indicated.

Schools OFSTED Outcomes

17. The report contained the latest analysis on the performance of Dudley Schools in OFSTED inspections.

Fostering Service

18. In addition to the above reports a further report was submitted and noted setting out key information on the Fostering Service in Dudley, detailing developments in the service further to the previous OFSTED Inspection in 2009. The five actions identified as being required and the ten other recommendations made were referred to and the report confirmed that the five issues required to be made had all been actioned and completed with and the ten recommendations were being acted upon. The report set out the range of fostering provision currently undertaken in Dudley, setting out the governance arrangements together with the numbers of fostering placements and carers. Details of the collaborative work relating to fostering being carried out across the four Black Country Boroughs were indicated.

Former Pensnett School of Technology

19. An oral update was provided and noted on the progress of students at the Pensnett Education Campus. Attainment levels of Key Stage 4 pupils were referred to and the fact that mathematics appeared to be the subject in which pupils were having greater difficulty with.
20. The Committee's Work Programme for the 2011/12 municipal year also included the following reports and information only items:-
 - Quarterly Corporate Performance Management;
 - Contextual information on performance in certain areas of the service were submitted when requested in relation to certain matters raised regarding the Quarterly Corporate Performance Management Report.
 - Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure of the Committee and Associated Matters including the Work Programme for the Committee for 2011/12;
 - Draft Annual Report for the Review of the 2010/11 Year;

- Revenue Budget Strategy 2012/13;
- Equality and Diversity Action Plan 2010/11;
- Update on the Council's Capital Strategy.

21. The annual report was considered by the Scrutiny Committee on 21st June, 2012. Reference was made to the succinct presentation of the report, which does not entirely reflect the depth and diverse range of issues dealt with by the Children's Services Directorate during the year. The Committee paid tribute to the commitment of Members and Officers in dealing with issues affecting Children's Services and requested that this be reflected in future reports.
22. The Committee also referred to the importance of the role of elected Members in relation to Corporate Parenting. It was requested that more information be circulated to Members to promote this role. The Acting Director of Children's Services was asked to liaise with the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services with a view to circulating a leaflet/newsletter to all Members of the Council on the duties and responsibilities in connection with Corporate Parenting.

Finance

23. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report at this stage.

Law

24. The requirement for the Scrutiny Committee to make an annual report to the Council is contained in article 6 of the Constitution.
25. The relevant statutory provisions regarding the Council's Constitution are contained in part to the Local Government Act 2000, together with regulations or orders and guidance issued by the Secretary of State.

Equality Impact

26. The Committee has taken equality issues into account while scrutinising the areas of work described above, particularly in relation to the engagement of potentially disenfranchised groups with frontline services.
27. The Committee takes account of the views of children and young people in all its deliberations.

Recommendation

28. That the annual report of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee for 2011/12, as set out above, be noted.

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Chair of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee