



Meeting of the Children's Services Select Committee

**Thursday 16th November 2023, at 6pm
In Committee Room 2, The Council House,
Priory Road, Dudley. DY1 1HF**

Agenda - Public Session (Meeting open to the public and press)

1. Apologies for absence
2. To report the appointment of any substitute members serving for this meeting of the Committee.
3. To receive any declarations of interest under the Members' Code of Conduct
4. To confirm and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 11th September 2023 (Pages 4 to 17)
5. Public Forum
6. Children's Services Committee Progress Tracker and Future Business (Pages 18 to 21)
7. Dudley Children's Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report (Pages 22 to 54)
8. Education Report (Pages 55 to 66)
9. Family Hubs and Start of Life Information and Update Report (Pages 67 to 74)



10. [Report of the Care Experienced Young Adults Accommodation \(Pages 75 to 80\)](#)
11. To consider any questions from Members to the Chair where two clear days' notice has been given to the Monitoring Officer (Council Procedure Rule 11.8).

Distribution:

Councillor K Lewis (Chair)

Councillor D Bevan (Vice-Chair)

Councillors C Bayton, R Collins, T Crumpton, P Lee, C Reid, S Ridney, D Stanley, C Sullivan and M Webb.

Invitee: Councillor R Buttery – Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Education.

Co-opted Members with voting rights on matters concerning education: -

R May – Archdiocese of Birmingham Education Service Representative

T Reid – Worcester Diocesan Board of Education Representative



Chief Executive

Dated: 8th November 2023

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Minutes of the Children's Services Select Committee

**Monday 11th September 2023 at 6.00 pm
In Committee Room 2, The Council House, Priory Road,
Dudley**

Present:

Councillor K Lewis (Chair)
Councillor D Bevan (Vice-Chair)
Councillors C Bayton, H Bills, R Collins, T Crumpton, P Lee, S Ridney, D Stanley, C Sullivan, and M Webb.

Officers:

M Abuaffan (Acting Director of Public Health), T Curran (Complaints Manager), K Graham (Service Director of Children's Social Care), S Thirlway (Service Director Education, SEND and Family Solutions) and K Buckle (Democratic Services Officer).

Also in attendance:

O Topping (Contractor Public Health Trainee)

11. **Welcome and Introductions**

The Chair welcomed Members and Officers to the meeting and all those present introduced themselves.

12. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors A Hughes and M Howard; R May and T Reid.



13. **Appointment of Substitute Members**

It was reported that Councillors H Bills and T Crumpton had been appointed to serve as substitute Members for Councillors M Howard and A Hughes respectively for this meeting of the Committee only.

14. **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor P Lee declared a pecuniary interest as he was engaged as a Dudley Foster Carer.

Councillor K Lewis declared a pecuniary interest as an Early Years Provider.

15. **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 19th July 2023, be confirmed as a correct record, and signed.

16. **Public Forum**

Although no issues were raised by the public under this agenda item, Councillor S Ridney requested an update in relation to reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) materials in schools.

In response the Service Director Education, SEND and Family Solutions confirmed that RAAC had been identified in one school in the borough and that was confined to the boiler area and had not resulted in any students being displaced.

In response to further queries raised by Councillor S Ridney, the Service Director Education, SEND and Family Solutions undertook to consult with the Council's Corporate Landlord Services in relation to schools building condition surveys and the regularity of those being carried out, and in relation to academies he was confident that the construction would not be of a lower standard than those in maintained schools.

Corporate Landlord Services would also be consulted on whether they held any condition surveys for academies.

Resolved

That the Service Director Education, SEND and Family Solutions be requested to consult with Corporate Landlord Services in relation to the regularity of school condition surveys and whether they hold surveys for academies.

17. Children's Services Committee Progress Tracker

The Chair referred to the progress tracker detailing the recommendations and actions from the previous meeting and requested Members to contact the Directorate of Children's Services should they wish to attend any facilities such as the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

There followed a detailed discussion in relation to Disclosing and Barring Service (DBS) checks with there being a consensus that all Elected Members should have an enhanced DBS check every three years and these should be carried out by the Local Authority.

The Service Director Children's Social Care suggested that it would be useful to invite J Branch, Assistant Director People and Inclusion to a future meeting to determine the position in relation to DBS checks as there were national guidelines outlining when enhanced DBS checks would be required. J Branch could also provide details of the criteria required.

The Chair referred to the future business for 2023/24 and a request was made for an item on how Child Friendly Dudley was progressing to be added to future business.

The Service Director Education, SEND and Family Solutions confirmed that he could feed back some of the narrative and provide an update on Child Friendly Dudley from the current lead, N Burrows and undertook to discuss the possible date that this could be considered at a future meeting with the Chair.

Resolved

- (1) That the information contained in the Children's Services Progress Tracker, be noted.

- (2) That the Democratic Services Officer be requested to invite J Branch to a future meeting of the Committee to determine the position in relation to DBS checks for Members and details of the criteria required.
 - (3) That the Service Director Education, SEND and Family Solutions be requested to discuss with the Chair the possible date of a future meeting to submit a report on Child Friendly Dudley.
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18. **Children's Social Care Complaints, Comments and Compliments Annual Report 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023**

Members considered a report of the Director of Children's Services on the Annual report for the period 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023.

It was noted that every Local Authority with a responsibility for Social Care Services was required to provide an annual report in relation to the operation of the complaints and representations procedures.

The statutory process was a three-stage process and for a complaint to be registered under that process certain criteria must be met as set out in the statutory guidance.

Corporate complaints were those that fall outside the statutory process. That was where the complainant would not meet the requirements to be considered under the statutory process. Those cases were registered and processed under the two-stage corporate process.

The Complaints Manager referred to the headlines contained in the report submitted including the number of complaints received across the 28 teams, and the comparative data for 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023 and the previous year reporting period.

It was noted that there had been a slight decrease in the number of statutory complaints upheld or partially upheld.

Details of Corporate complaints that fell outside the statutory process were referred to and the two-stage corporate process. The details of Corporate Complaints and the teams to which those complains related were contained in the report submitted.

It was noted that 22 comments had been received and one complaint had proceeded to stage three.

Details and numbers in relation to Ombudsman cases were noted.

It was reported that in relation to statutory timescales overall 49% of complaints were dealt with within those time scales.

Members also noted that 40 Special Educational Needs and Disability complaints had been received for the current reporting period, compared with 44 for the previous reporting period. 14 were upheld, 12 were not upheld and 14 were partially upheld.

- (a) Councillor C Crumpton although expressing his appreciation for the work of the complaints team referred to page 27 of the report submitted, advising that although the data stated that there had been a decrease in the number of statutory complaints more complaints had been received for the current reporting period than the last.

Councillor C Crumpton referred to page 33 of the report submitted referring to the chart and the number of complaints that had been upheld or partially upheld stating that the figures did not equate.

Page 37 of the report submitted was also referred to and it was stated that although the number of SEND complaints had decreased compared to the previous year, the report stated that complaints had increased. The chart below was also questioned as it was noted that only 28 had been upheld or partially upheld.

Concerns were raised in relation to the proportion of complaints that were either upheld or partially upheld, and the number of Ombudsman complaints that were upheld.

Delays in assessments were a point of further concern and there followed a request for an executive summary of the complaints received, the reasons why and any learning from those complaints and subsequent resolutions.

- (b) Councillor C Bayton supported Councillor T Crumpton's comments asking whether if the complaints received were similar to last year; was there a trend and how was that being addressed.

The Service Director Children's Social Care responded stating that this was a particular area for a statutory requirement to produce the report, however other formats for future reports could be considered and Members may wish to consider a learning report through the Centre for Professional Practice annually to facilitate discussions regarding complaints and practice.

Councillor C Bayton confirmed a learning report would be useful and requested that the report include case studies in order to support future learning and subsequent changes to services.

Resolved

- (1) That the Children's Services Complaints, Comments and Compliments Annual Report 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023, be approved.
- (2) That the Director for Children's Services be requested to submit annual reports on learning in relation to complaints through the Centre for Professional Practice.

19. **Quarterly Performance Report 2023/24 – Quarter 1 (1st April to 30th June 2023)**

The Service Director of Education, SEND and Family Solutions presented the report submitted referring to the five key indicators for Children's Services contained in the report, with two evidencing that services were travelling in the right direction and one continuing to be maintained.

In relation to the two indicators that were not travelling in the desired direction, in relation to 16 to 18 olds who were not in employment, education or training (NEET) numbers were increasing, however the number of young people formerly on returns was reducing and the increase in numbers was not unusual as young people moved from statutory school age and follow up action was taken to ascertain what the desired destinations were for that cohort of young people.

Those follow up enquiries in respect of NEET's would also identify where there was the need to target interventions to support young people into a positive destination.

Therefore, the current position of the key indicator was not unusual at the current stage in the academic year and that trajectory should start to change as the year progressed.

The Service Director Children's Social Care referred to the Performance Indicator in relation to the percentage of agency social workers reporting on the increase in employing agency social workers in view of the considerable challenge to fill vacancies.

The Local Authority had witnessed a reduction in the number of posts without a social worker from 24.2% in January 2023 to 12.6% in June 2023. That reduction had followed a period in which agency social workers did not wish to work for Dudley.

It was noted that the Director of Children's Services had taken the regional lead for recruitment and retention of social workers and had also taken the lead to hold authorities to account collectively across the region.

- (a) Councillor T Crumpton commented positively on the increase in Social Workers and enquired whether recruitment and retention allowance had resulted in the increase.

The same member referred to the large number of children who remained out of education due to the pandemic who were below the age of 16 and enquired about the numbers of those aged 16 to 18 who had failed to return to education following the pandemic who were now NEET.

The alternative provision provided by Juniper was referred to and it was stated that they had capacity to help with those children post 16 to access alternative provision.

In responding the Service Director Education, SEND and Family Solutions concurred that the pandemic had a significant impact on children struggling to re-engage with education and was a real phenomenon. This remained a national issue and there was increased focus on what was necessary to deal with school attendance issues.

The Department for Education (DfE) had determined that no further funding would be attached to additional requirements to deal with school attendance, and work was ongoing on how to engage with all schools and provide assurances that those schools were ensuring attendance support and guidance were provided to those children, and responding to families who required support.

In relation to alternative provision undertaking a holistic review would be undertaken as it was recognised that alternative provision should only be used for short periods of time to support children to re-engage with their schools. There was the need to ensure that the correct alternative provision estate was in place to re-engage children back into education.

- (b) Councillor C Bayton referred to the position with agency social workers, confirming that the verbal presentation had put the written commentary into context.

Resolved

That the information contained in the Quarterly Performance Report 2023/24 – Quarter 1 (1st April to 30th June 2023), be noted.

20. **Child Poverty**

The Committee considered a report providing a summary of child poverty in Dudley, and information on initiatives in Dudley to support families living in poverty.

The Acting Director of Public Health referred to the recommendations contained in the report submitted and the current Dudley picture. Families with a relative low income below 60% and those with an absolute low income of below that percentage rate were also referred to.

Members were referred to the ward map and it was noted that the dark areas contained on the map were those of the most deprived areas and the lightest areas were those areas that were the least deprived and it was also noted that St Thomas's ward was the most deprived in the borough.

The cost-of-living crisis in Wales was outlined with poverty being a longstanding issue with almost a third of children living in low-income households and it was estimated that 45% of households were experiencing fuel poverty.

The report highlighted three areas of good practice with targeted interventions being developed including Leeds City Council and Havering Council.

Dudley's Strategic Mitigating Poverty Group coordinated the system wide action to prevent and mitigate poverty and in relation to child poverty local coordination of national initiatives currently supported the following initiatives: -

- Free School Meals
- Holiday Activity and Food
- The Household support Fund
- The Black Country Food Bank
- The Brierley Hill Baby Bank
- Dudley Cost of Living Hubs

A Child Poverty Needs Assessment had been undertaken which focused on prevention.

The Family Hubs provided support for the start of life of a child, school readiness and reducing teenage pregnancy.

There was a focus on providing non-accredited employment skills, improving the possibility of obtaining employment for those engaging with those courses.

The three-point plan to mitigate poverty was outlined.

It was noted that the percentage of those living in poverty in each ward had been calculated from national data, from the census and any prevention work would take five to seven years to impact and provide long term sustainable results.

- (a) Councillor C Bayton asked whether much more granular information was generated.

The Acting Director of Public Health advised that to provide super outputs would require further consultation with the intelligence team to ascertain the possibility of obtaining that more detailed information, as that information could involve personal data.

- (b) Councillor D Stanley referred to the need to investigate how positively to deal with the high figures referred to in the report submitted and the need to target those individual wards. Concerns were expressed in relation to the high numbers of children living in low-income households in the St Thomas's ward and whether schools were consulted in relation to any concerns with families.

The Acting Director of Public Health agreed with the observations made above and advised that work had commenced in schools in relation to poverty proofing schools to provide mentoring skills and intervention. However, there was the need to ascertain the most appropriate way to approach those who were not adaptable to change, and an action plan was to be produced to focus on those high priority areas.

- (c) Councillor D Stanley expressed the need to address families' immediate problems.

The Acting Director of Public Health stated that the Needs Assessment would produce details of general trends in relation to immediate needs.

- (d) Councillor S Ridney expressed concerns in relation to the percentage of children living in low-income households in all wards in the borough and expressed the need to work with health and housing partners to provide more contextual information. Concerns were also expressed for those families that were just above the benefits threshold who were struggling financially.

In relation to Pupil Premium, it was stated that the Premium contained caveats as to what it could be utilised for and who could access it.

- (e) Councillor H Bills referred to a six-week uniform exchange programme that had taken place in her ward and expressed concerns in relation to the escalating number of families accessing the service during the current year as opposed to the previous year. She also expressed the need to work with schools to limit the cost of school uniforms and enter into more uniform exchange programmes.

Concerns were also raised that the Housing Support Fund was never available, with the funding being exhausted almost as soon as it was available.

The Acting Director of Public Health agreed with the comments and observations made and the need to influence and work with schools requiring a whole systems approach.

The Service Director for Education, SEND and Family Solutions agreed with the sentiment, however advised that schools could not be directed by the Local Authority, but assurances were provided that schools continued to be engaged with and that included school governors. Work was continuing on how schools were taking into account poverty and the impact that was having on families, with the response to child poverty involving a whole skills workforce, working with employers, colleges and universities providing a systemic and localised response.

- (f) Councillor T Crumpton welcomed the initiative in relation to the Brockmoor and Pensnett ward involving the Dudley Group of Hospitals NHS Trust to upskill people in that area, advising that some areas had an extremely low level of housing stock and there was the lack of communication with some wards. There was also a lack of youth workers.

The Acting Director for Public Health referred to the need to learn how to interact with communities which would result in an in-depth approach to influence communities. In the Lye area there was a desire to address community cohesion and tension in the first instance and to develop skills that would require proceeding through the equal opportunities process.

An evaluation would take place in relation to the Brockmoor and Pensnett and Brierley Hill Ward project.

- (g) Councillor D Stanley referred to previous work conducted by the St Thomas's Network which made a small impact on the local area and the Wheels-on-Wheels project for young people and the need to investigate past experiences and the impact those projects had.

Resolved

- (1) That the information contained in the report submitted on child poverty, be noted.
- (2) That the development of a system wide strategy be supported.
- (3) That the encouragement of system participation in the strategic mitigating poverty group be supported.

21. **Children's Services Phase Two Redesign.**

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted updating Members on the proposals put forward in relation to Children's Services Phase Two redesign.

The Service Director Education, SEND and Family Solutions presented the report submitted referring to the two-stage process of the Children's Services re-design with phase one being completed in June and subsequently going live in July 2023, which implemented the new safeguarding family arrangements.

Phase two concerned education, SEND and family solutions. A consultation had commenced with all staff on the morning of the committee and the report submitted would provide members with the opportunity to comment and reflect on the changes proposed across children's services, and the direction the services are continuing in relation to their improvement journey.

The re-design would provide the best possible outcomes for children and although it was acknowledged that there were financial pressures the re-design was not solely in relation to reducing staffing resources but to re-apply and ensure services were best positioned to provide positive outcomes for children and young people.

The focus on workforce planning and development assurances as contained in the report submitted were referred to.

It was stated that the education outcomes support was not purely regarding academic outcomes but to provide a broader approach to delivering services, with consideration taking place on how to amend and adapt some services. A review was also underway on how the Connexions service worked.

The review would also be reflective around attendance at school duties that were now in place.

In terms of services for SEND re-amalgamation with disability services would be implemented with one head of service.

In relation to re-issuing Education and Health Care Plans (EHCP's) more posts were to be created to better manage that capacity.

Also, by transitioning into SEND, children with disability services would provide more coherent management by transitioning that to the responsibility of the Service Director for Education, SEND and Family Solutions.

It was reported that Family Solutions would focus on the implementation and delivery through Family Hubs ensuring it was a community-based service. There would also be management of a high-quality youth service along with Family Hubs.

There would be no change to the Virtual School whilst continuing to respond to national changes.

Alongside the vision that 'the child would be at the heart of everything we do' that would continue to be developed along with the Child Friendly Dudley programme.

Changes were proposed in the volumes of roles in different areas with some staff being placed at risk of redundancy. Moving forward staff would continue to be supported either into other roles or in terms of re-deployment within the Local Authority.

There were 31 staff at risk of redundancy however it had become apparent that some would be assimilated into new roles.

It was reported that following the implementation of the phase one re-design only two members of staff were made redundant through their own choice and there was confidence that the implementation of phase two would see a similar outcome.

As part of the consultation there would be individual service meetings with staff placed at risk of redundancy. The consultation would run for 30 days until 11th October 2023 during which time staff could raise comments, questions, and queries. There was the aim to implement the new arrangements in December 2023.

Staff had also been signposted to other support services, as it was recognised that staff and the skills, they had were the Directorate's greatest asset.

The Service Director Education, SEND and Family Solutions confirmed that the only change to the Tipton Road facility was in leadership management.

- (a) Councillor P Lee referred to the staff that were at risk of redundancy, raising concerns in relation to the impact that would have on the remaining staff.

In response the Service Director Education, SEND and Family Solutions advised that the current consultation exercise would result in some level of anxiety, however support for staff had been offered from the outset and it was right and proper to alert those staff of the possibility of redundancy whilst providing support and guidance to those staff.

Resolved

That the report submitted on the Children's Services Phase Two Redesign, be noted.

22. **Questions from Members to the Chair under (Council Procedure Rule 11.8)**

There were no questions to the Chair pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 11.8.

The meeting ended at 8.05pm

CHAIR

Children’s Services Select Committee

Progress Tracker

Subject (Date of Meeting)	Recommendation/action	Responsible Officer/Area	Status/Notes
(19 th June 2023) Programme of Meetings and Business Items for 2023/2024	Minute No. 7 Resolution 9(a) – Meetings to be arranged for Members to the Children’s Services Family Centres and the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub	Director of Children’s Services	Details of available dates were forwarded to Members on 31 st October 2023
(11 th September 2023) Public Forum	To consult with Corporate Landlord Services in relation to the regularity of school condition surveys.	Service Director Education, SEND and Family Solutions	A list of the Department for Education (DfE) condition surveys are held for all maintained schools and a spreadsheet is also maintained for this purpose. Academies are responsible for their own buildings.

Children's Services Select Committee Progress Tracker	J Branch be requested to determine the position in relation to DBS checks for Members and details of the criteria required.	Assistant Director People and Inclusion	A briefing note will be forwarded to Members following the review of the policy on DBS checks.
	To discuss with the Chair the possible date of a future meeting to submit a report on Child Friendly Dudley.	Service Director Education, SEND and Family Solutions	It has been agreed with the Chair that this report will be submitted to the March meeting of the Select Committee.
Children's Social Care Complaints, Comments and Compliments Annual Report 1 st April 2022 to 31 st March 2023	That the Service Director Children's Social Care be requested to submit annual reports on learning in relation to complaints through the Centre for Professional Practice.	Service Director Children's Social Care	It has been agreed with the Chair that the report will be submitted to the March meeting of the Select Committee.

Future Business 2023/24

<u>Date of Meeting</u>	<u>Work Programme</u>	<u>Responsible Officer/Area</u>	<u>Notes</u>
18th January 2024	Serious Violence Strategy	Director of Public Health	
	The Role and responsibilities of the Public Sector Housing Team: what powers of enforcement they have at their disposal and an understanding of how they put the child at the centre of the work they undertake.	Director of Housing and Communities.	
	Medium Term Financial Strategy	Director of Finance and Legal	
	Dudley Virtual School	Director of Children's Services	
11th March, 2024	Annual Report 2023/2024 and potential items of business for 2024/2025	Lead for Law and Governance	
	Education Report	Director of Children's Services	
	Child Friendly Dudley	Director of Children's Services	

	Learning in relation to Complaints through the Centre for Professional Practice.	Director of Children's Services	

Meeting of the Children's Services Select Committee – 16th November 2023

Report of the Director of Children's Services

Dudley Children's Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report for 2022-2023

Purpose of report

1. To present the Dudley Children's Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report to the Select Committee.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended:-
 - Members consider and comment upon Dudley Children's Safeguarding Partnership (DSPP) Annual Report for 2022-2023

Background

3. The Social Work Act (2017), and subsequent revision of the Statutory guidance Working Together (2018) places the responsibility of ensuring effective coordination between agencies to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in their area under the leadership of three key safeguarding partners, that being the Local Authority, Police and Health (Integrated Care Board) with support from wider partners.

This report reflects work carried out by the multi-agency safeguarding arrangement between April 2022 and March 2023.

4. The DSPP is the overarching strategic group which oversees the work of the Children's Safeguarding Partnership Group and the Safeguarding Adults Board, enabling a life course safeguarding approach across the Partnership. Since our last report, we have maintained a life course approach but still recognise that some sub groups should remain focussed on the work of children.
5. The DSPP have embedded the role of Independent Scrutineer to support us in our safeguarding work across the Partnership. This has

provided us with robust challenge as well as advice and guidance to help ensure our Partnership safeguarding arrangements are effective. Our Scrutineer chairs the DSCPG and has been a critical friend, providing independent oversight of our multi agency work.

This report mentions work that is being done on our family Safeguarding model. The DSPP fully supports this model of practice, and we will be able to update more in our next report.

We continue to conduct our multi agency case file audits, which we have renamed Multi Agency Assurance of Practice (MAAP) to better reflect the purpose of this exercise. We have used this process to gauge our preparedness for any JTAI (Joint Targeted Are Inspection) which will involve the Local Authority, Police and Health colleagues.

Finance

6. A breakdown of how the DSPP was funded can be found in the DCSPG Annual Report

Their budget for 2022-23 was not fully utilised, however as this is Partnership money; this has been ring fenced. The surplus money continues to fund our Independent Scrutiny arrangements as well as our training offer, which is more face to face events, then in previous years (due to Covid)

Law

7. New arrangements for Safeguarding were introduced by the Social Work Act 2017 and the revised publication of Working Together 2018.

We are awaiting a revised version of Working Together and when this is released, will discuss in future Annual Reports.

Risk Management

8. There are no identified risks within this report

Equality Impact

9. To the best of our knowledge there are no Equality Impact implications arising from the content of this report

Human Resources/Organisational Development

10. Nothing to note

Commercial/Procurement

11. There are no commercial or procurement implications arising from the content of this report

Environment/Climate Change

12. There are no areas identified in this report

Council Priorities and Projects

13. The work of the DSPP supports the Borough Vision 2030: ensuring Dudley is a place of healthy, resilient, safe communities with high aspirations and the ability to shape their own future

Our strategic plan and priorities support the One Council ethos in relation to supporting stronger and safer communities. We continue to build strong relationships with statutory and voluntary sector partners to ensure safe and high-quality care for children.

We regularly seek assurance, ensuring Children's Social Care delivers high quality; value for money services; growing resilient families and communities, ensuring less children are in care.

The priorities of the Partnership also support Growing Resilient Communities: empowering people to be self-reliant, independent, and well-co-ordinated to grow strong, connected, and resilient communities.



Director of Children's Services

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List of Background Documents

Appendix 1 – DSCPG Annual Report 2022-23



**Dudley Safeguarding
People Partnership**

**Dudley Safeguarding Children Partnership Group
Annual Report 2022/23**

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1. Foreword from Independent Scrutineer (Vicky to write)



It is my pleasure to welcome you to the annual report of the Dudley Safeguarding Children Partnership Group. This report covers the period between April 2022 and March 2023. It reflects the safeguarding commitments of all partners, as we work to achieve our intentions as set out in our strategic plan.

Independent scrutiny provides assurance by reflecting and reporting on the effectiveness of multi-agency arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children, including arrangements to identify and review serious safeguarding cases. It is part of a wider system which includes inspectorates' single assessments and Joint Targeted Area Inspections (JTAs.) My role is to consider how effectively arrangements work for children, families, and practitioners, and how well partners provide strong leadership. I act as a critical friend to the partnership and challenge through ongoing appraisal of the partnership's work in line with Working Together 2018 and the Wood Review of multi – agency safeguarding arrangements 2021.

This report was prepared by the DSPP Business Support Unit on behalf of the Partnership and recognises the progress the DSPP has made throughout the year and the challenges that remain that we will continue to address in 2023/24. I have reviewed the contents and, as the Independent Scrutineer, I can say that the contents are an accurate report of the activities of the Partnership and its Sub-Groups. It highlights the areas where progress has been made and what we need to focus on in 2023/24 and beyond.

There is a strong commitment from the Multi – Agency partnership to work together on agreed priorities and the Executive is well attended by senior leaders in organisations. I provide a report to each Executive meeting with an overview of scrutiny activity during the quarter with recommendations for the Executive to consider. I have undertaken two bespoke areas of scrutiny on behalf of the Executive during the year, one with Russell Hall hospital where I met with the Safeguarding Team and spent some time with Maternity services and the second meeting frontline police officers to consider how they understood and were supported regarding safeguarding issues they dealt with in their day to day work.

Dudley Safeguarding Children's Partnership Group has good representation from across the Children's Workforce and last year we strengthened involvement of our education colleagues. There is increasing evidence of the partnership holding each other to account through a culture of high support and high challenge.

We have continued to make progress throughout the year but recognise that there is still more to be done to ensure our partnership works effectively to ensure Dudley's children are appropriately supported to achieve their potential. We have improved our multi – agency data sets to help us understand where we need to focus our resources but know we need to do more and to ensure we can do this the Executive have agreed to fund a data post to support the work of the DSPP. We have changed

our approach to auditing to ensure we really understand what good looks like for children and focusses less on process and more about whether we are making a difference.

The focus of the partnership on Restorative and Trauma informed practice is illustrated clearly in the two case studies at the end of this report and this approach has been strengthened by the move towards the Family Safeguarding Model which has recently gone live in Dudley. Family Safeguarding brings together all of the professionals working with the family into one-multidisciplinary team. The professionals involved include social workers, domestic abuse specialists, substance misuse workers, mental health practitioners, and psychologists, all working together to address compounding issues of domestic violence and abuse, parental substance use and parental mental health. I am looking forward to reporting on the impact of this way of partnership working in the next annual report.

What's Next for the Partnership? Issues of Note and Risks to be Dealt With

Over the next 12 months we recognise that we need to strengthen our multi – agency response to children and young people who are exploited both criminally and sexually. To support this we recognise that we need to undertake a piece of work to really understand our ‘problem profile’ and what this means in terms of how we best deploy our collective resources to safeguard these vulnerable young people.

We need to ensure our multi – agency audit processes provide assurance on the quality of safeguarding practice in Dudley and our sub – groups deliver on our strategic plan. We need to ensure that the learning from Local Safeguarding Practice Reviews is embedded in practice and is having the desired impact of ensuring that children in Dudley are safer as a result.

I will be undertaking a scrutiny exercise to understand issues in relation access to Mental Health services for our children on young people on behalf of the Executive. As part of this work I want to hear directly from children, young people and their families about what is working well and how we need to improve as well as hearing from frontline practitioners about the challenges they face and how we can improve multi -agency working.

It will be helpful to understand the impact of the Family Safeguarding Model and how this strengthens our ‘Think Family’. approach to working with children and young people.

We will need to ensure that we respond as partnership to new Statutory Guidance and particularly Working Together 2023 when it is published. The partnership will need to ensure that it has a good line of sight on how Family Help is improving outcomes for children and families in Dudley. The partnership will need to review their priorities ready for the year 24/25 in light of this.

Whilst there is much to do, I am confident that Dudley’s Safeguarding Partnership will rise to the challenge and our practitioners will continue to work tirelessly to ensure our children are safeguarded.

I look forward to updating you on our progress and the difference we are making in our next annual report.

2. About the DSCPG

2.1 The Annual Report

Welcome to the Dudley Safeguarding Children's Partnership Group's annual report. This document provides an overview of the effectiveness of services in place to safeguard children across the Dudley Borough. The information relates to the period 1st April 2022 – 31st March 2023.

The report will be available on our website via [the DSCPG page](#) and will be shared with our partners for dissemination. The report will also be shared with the Health and Wellbeing Board, Dudley Safeguarding Adults Board as well as a copy shared with the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel and What Works Centre for Children's Social Care within seven days of being published.

2.2 Our Statutory Safeguarding Partners

Our Statutory Safeguarding Partners are responsible for the co-ordination of the safeguarding services in Dudley. They are a strategic leadership group with joint and equal responsibility for ensuring everyone works together to promote the welfare of children in Dudley.

In Dudley, our statutory safeguarding partners consist of the Chief Constable of West Midlands Police, the Chief Executive of Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council and the Accountable Officer for the Black Country and Black Country Integrated Care Board.

Each Chief Officer is given permission, under Working Together 2018, to delegate their functions to senior officers. In Dudley the senior officers are:

- Catherine Driscoll – Director of Children's Services, Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
- Sally Roberts – Chief Nursing Officer (Designate), Black Country Integrated Care Board
- Anthony Tagg – Chief Superintendent, West Midlands Police

These senior officers meet formally on a quarterly basis as part of the Dudley Safeguarding People Partnership Executive (DSPP). The DSPP covers the life course, and the Executive membership also includes the Director of Adult Social Care for Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council. The Executive is chaired by the Independent Chair of the Dudley Safeguarding Adults Board who is also the Chair of the DSPP. The Independent Scrutineer for the DSCPG is also a member of the Executive.

The Safeguarding partners identify the agencies needed to work as part of the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements (MASA)¹ and they have a statutory duty to co-operate with the identified safeguarding arrangements. These agencies are represented on various workstreams and sub groups which report into the DSCPG. Over the past twelve months we have enhanced the involvement of education partners and ensured we have head teacher representation at the DCSPG as we recognise the important role of our schools and education settings in ensuring

¹ Known as 'relevant agencies'

children are safeguarded. We ensure that we have a wide range of partners at the meeting to ensure our safeguarding messages are shared and those that are not represented, receive regular updates.

2.3 Our Shared Vision

Safeguarding is fundamental to ensuring Dudley is a place of healthy, resilient and safe communities with high aspirations and the ability to shape their own future. These safeguarding arrangements build on a strong foundation of partnership working in Dudley borough. Our focus on ensuring coherence with partnership working foundations supports Dudley borough's 'Forging a Future for All' vision to 2030 which contains seven aspirations including a shared commitment to Dudley being 'a place of healthy, resilient, safe communities with high aspirations and the ability to shape their own future'.

Our shared vision reflects the life course Partnership approach. We believe that when support is needed, it is not often in isolation. To achieve our vision, the Partners will work together with all agencies to:

- Ensure the welfare and best interests of the person are at the centre of all we do.
- Treat everyone as valued partners.
- Believe change is possible and positively support parents and carers.
- Value difference, inclusivity and encourage engagement.
- Actively listen and take action in a timely and responsive way, avoiding unnecessary delay.
- 'Hear the voice' of frontline practitioners and take their views into account
- Be open and transparent in all that we do
- Support a working culture that challenges, scrutinises and uplifts the partnership

2.4 Our priorities 2022-23

DSPP priorities were reviewed in April 2022 and were agreed based on feedback from quality assurance activity and emerging local and national learning. The two priorities of neglect and exploitation have remained the same. The third priority is now 'Think Family' with a specific focus on transitional safeguarding.

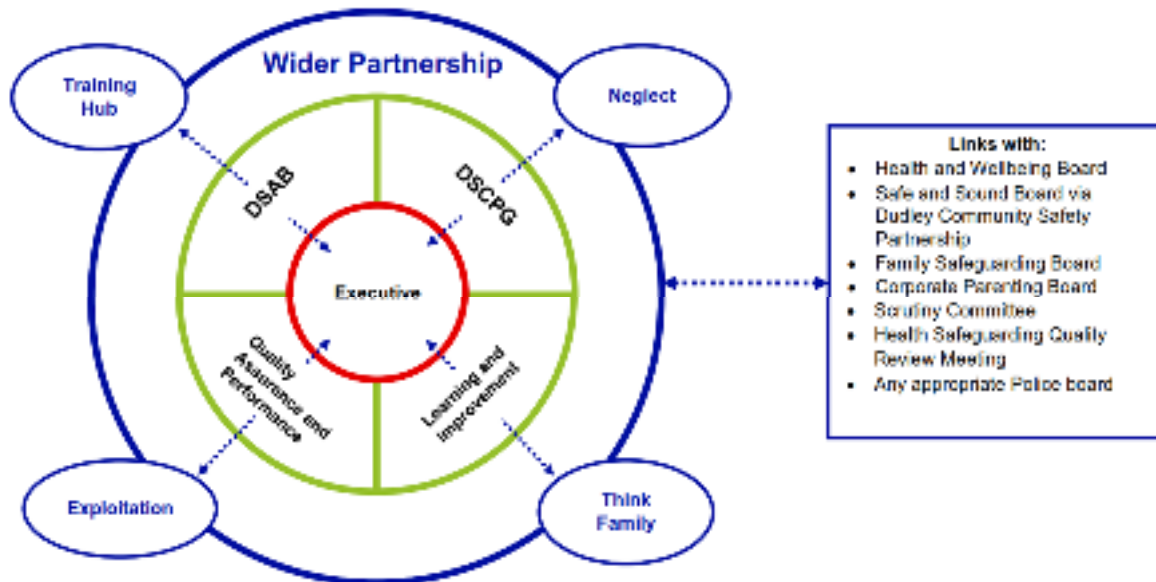
This third priority allows partners to be more flexible and adapt to emerging themes and trends.

1. Neglect across the life course
2. Exploitation across the life course
3. Adopting a Think Family approach

2.5 Our structure

We are a joint, life course Partnership which is overseen by an Executive group. Since reviewing our priorities, we have also revised our structure for the Partnership. This is so we strengthen our links with all agencies and other Boards in the Dudley

Borough. We are also keen to promote a culture of inclusivity regarding our safeguarding arrangements, utilising expertise and feedback across our Partnership. The effectiveness of this change will be discussed in this annual report. Below shows our structure for 2022-23:



2.6 Links with other Partnerships and Boards

We are members of the West Midlands MASA group and West Midlands Regional Procedures Group. This ensures we are up to date with the most recent changes as well as ensuring we work as effectively as possible with our cross-border partnerships. We recognise that many of our partners work across several local authority areas and therefore consistency in our safeguarding approach is paramount.

In addition to the regional groups, there are other groups which either carry out work on our behalf or provide us regular assurance. These groups include the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) strategic group and the Non Accidental Injury Forum (NAI). The NAI forum was established as a result of learning from our Serious Case Reviews/Local Safeguarding Practice Reviews.

The Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP) maintains links with the Partnership via their annual report as well as regular communication where there are specific emerging themes.

The DSCPG also works closely with Safe and Sound, Dudley's Community Safety Partnership, as we recognise that many safeguarding themes overlap for example, exploitation and domestic abuse. We also regularly provide updates to our health colleagues via the Safeguarding and Quality Review Meeting (SQRM)

This report will also be presented to the Health and Wellbeing Board.

About Dudley

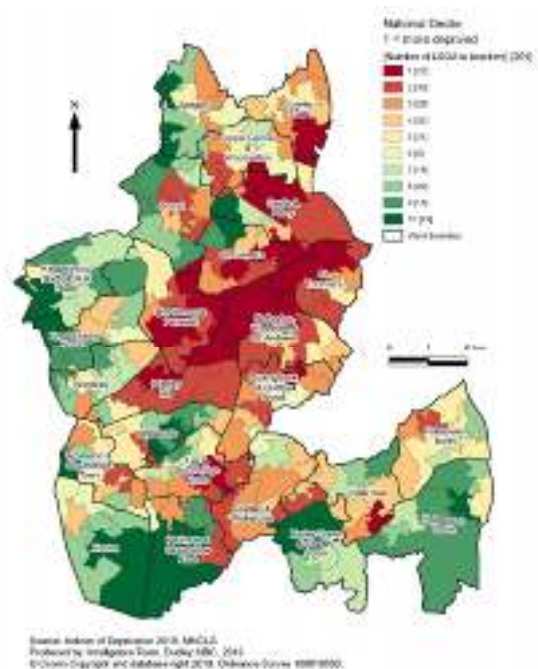
Dudley is a metropolitan borough formed in 1974. It is located on the edge of the West Midlands. Dudley is at the heart of the Black Country, which also includes the neighbouring boroughs of Sandwell, Walsall, and the city of Wolverhampton. The population has been growing at a modest but sustained rate in recent years, with around 10,500 more people living in the Borough in 2021 compared to the 2011 Census estimate.

3.1 Deprivation, Child Poverty and Family Income

A total of 75,030 children and young people aged 0 to 19 are estimated to live in Dudley Borough (Census 2021). This is 23% of the total population in the area.

The proportion of children and young people from minority ethnic groups is rising and in January 2023, they represented 27.4% of the school population up from 22.2% in 2016. The number of children for whom English is an additional language was 11.5% in January 2021 up from 11.0% in 2016.²

Both absolute and relative child poverty has remained an issue in Dudley with rates significantly higher than England. The most recent data available from 2021/22 shows that 21.2% of children in Dudley aged under 16 live in absolute low-income families and 27.1% within relative low-income families. For both measures, Dudley continues to have a significantly higher percentage than England with the recent trend increasing and getting worse. However, is not statistically significantly different to the West Midlands.³



In March 2023 there were 9,235 Dudley Borough residents claiming Universal Credit or Jobseekers Allowance. This is 4.7% of the working age population (aged 16-64), which is lower than the proportion 10 years ago in 2013 (5.4%). The proportion of West Midlands residents claiming is similar at 4.9%, England is lower at 3.8%.⁴

The mean gross annual wage for adult Dudley residents working full-time was £34,695 in 2022, below the national figure of £40,547 for England and below £36,855 for West Midlands⁵.

² Source: School Place Planning team/ School census

³ Source: Office for Health Improvement & Disparities. Public Health Profiles. [accessed 09/08/2023] <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk> © Crown copyright [2023]

⁴ Source NOMIS. [accessed 09/08/2023] <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/>

⁵ Source: ONS. Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2022

The mean gross weekly earnings for full time adult employees in Dudley was £706 in 2021 (ONS annual survey of hours and earnings). This is lower than the West Midlands (£710) and England average (£766)⁴.

3.2 Education, Employment and Training amongst Young People

The number of young people (aged 16-24) resident in Dudley borough claiming Universal Credit/Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) in March 2023 was 1,790. This number has remained stable since March 2022. This is a similar picture to England and the West Midlands⁴.

3.3 Health Inequalities

The infant mortality rate in Dudley is 4.3 per 1,000 live births for 2019-21. There has been no change in the rate from 2018-20. The Dudley rate is similar compared to the England value of 3.9 per 1,000 live births.²

Smoking status at the time of delivery in 2021/22 for Dudley is 9.4%, which is statistically similar to that for England (9.1%) and also the Dudley value for 2020/21, which was 8.8%.

Breastfeeding prevalence at 6-8 weeks for Dudley Borough Mothers is 43.4% (2021/22), this value is statistically significantly worse compared to the England value of 49.2%.

Breast milk being babies first feed is 64.4% (2020/21), this is statistically significantly worse compared to the England value of 71.7% for the same period.²

Dudley's Primary course immunisation coverage in the first year of life in 2021/22 was 94.6%, this an increase compared to 2020/21 (93.7%) and is similar the World Health Organisation (WHO) target of 95%. However, Dudley's proportion is higher compared to England's 2021/22 value of 91.8%².

The proportion of Dudley Borough Reception children overweight (including obesity) in 2021/22 was higher in Dudley (24.0%) compared to England (22.3%) and similar to the West Midlands (23.7%). Excess weight in Dudley children has decreased from 27.1% in 2019/20. (Due to the Covid-19 pandemic 2020/21 data was not published)².

Dudley's latest under 18 conception rate (17.3 per 1,000 for 2021) is statistically higher than for England (13.1 per 1,000) and the West Midlands (15.2 per 1,000). The trend both nationally and for Dudley is decreasing; in 1998 the value was 54.7 per 1,000 in Dudley which is a reduction of 68% compared to 2021².

The proportion of 9 and 11 year olds bullied at or near their school has remained above 25% over the last 10 years, results in 2022 show that 31% of primary school pupils said they had been bullied at or near school in the past 12 months.⁶

⁶ Source: Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire

3. Our data

We have a multi-agency dashboard that consist of high-level partner information. We are still improving our dataset, and this is regularly reviewed. We know we have more to do with this and will ensure it is revised in line with our priorities.

Indicator	2021/22 Q4	2022/23 Q4	Trend
Step-Downs from Children’s Social Care to Early Help	74	47	Neutral
Step-Ups from Early Help to Children’s Social Care	46	63	Neutral
% Re-referrals back to Early Help within 12 months	14%	25%	↑
Total Number of completed Early help Assessments (EHAs) as at Q4	2435	3133	↑
% of EHAs completed by Partners (not LA)	46.2%	59.6%	↑
No. of Children receiving Permanent Exclusion (by term not quarter)	38	56	↑*
% of new contacts that progressed to Social Work	20%	14%	Neutral
No. of Children in Need (at end of Quarter)	1468	1205	↓
No. of Children on Child Protection Plan (at end of Quarter)	317	252	↓
No. of Children Looked After (at end of Quarter)	585	588	↑
No. of first -time entrants (FTE) to the Youth Justice System	17	13	↓

* Data for spring term 2021-2022 academic year.

The launch of the Early Help Strategy and work by the Children’s Front door improvement groups, is seeing a positive impact across the partnership The total number of EHAs increased in 2022-23s, and we saw an increase in EHAs completed by Partner Agencies.

The number of children who were supported with an Early Help Family Plan increased from the previous year. Additionally, 93.8% of closed Early Help Cases that received an intervention were not open to Level 4 Services within 6 months after closure. This further evidences that the Early Help system is increasingly effective at successfully supporting families at level 1 or 2 of Dudley’s Level of needs.

Understanding and applying the Threshold Document has been identified as one area for development both within the Front Door and across the partnership and the DSCPG, The document was revised at the end of the reporting period (March 2023) therefore we will update on this impact of this in our next report.

The number of families stepped down to Early Help remains steady, The data suggests that the regular monitor and review of Children on Child In Need (CIN) is effective to ensure that robust planning is in place for these children enabling children to receive the support and step-down to Early Help in a timely and sustainable way.

As of 31st March 2023, there were 252 children subject to child protection plans; (317 as of 31st March 2022) Over the course of the 12 months in this reporting period, a total of 627 children had been subject to a plan (698 2021-2022); therefore, both the end of year total and 12-month figures have decreased this year. This is in line with the general decrease in the number of ICPCs being requested by the Local Authority. This was predicted given the month-on-month trend and is understood as an outcome of working with families more restoratively at the Child in Need stage and reducing the need to enter into Child Protection. A further decrease is expected with the development of Family Safeguarding model during 2023.

The most common feature for our children who are subject to child protection plans is a concern in relation to emotional abuse. This has seen a slight decrease in the past year as the principal category and is slightly more likely for our children than for those with our statistical neighbours.

The Youth Justice Board data indicates a decrease in First Time Entrants to the youth justice system compared to the previous year, showing Dudley is a safe place for children to grow up. This will have been contributed to by the strengthened prevention and diversionary activity undertaken by the youth justice service (YJS):

- The YJS has continued to engage in schools all over the borough to deliver topical based intervention to children of all secondary ages.
- The YJS undertook a project aimed at supporting children transitioning between schools and year groups by providing them with intensive mentoring alongside assessments for special educational needs support.
- Turnaround Programme: This Ministry of Justice funded initiative has enabled the YJS to target a cohort of children early on in their potential offending/anti-social behaviour journey by, with a focus on familial support being offered.
- The work of the YJS is to apply a 'Child First' way of thinking and to appropriately divert children away from the criminal justice system. This is in addition to the valuable work completed by services in the council and partner agencies with communities to support children and help them lead a crime free life.

Progress against our priorities

During 2022 – 2023 Dudley Safeguarding People Partnership has fully embedded the new subgroup structure which has proved beneficial in progressing our priorities. To support this DSPP held its first Annual Conference on 5th July 2022 where the partnership priorities were formally launched.

Joining us were keynote speakers Dez Holmes, Director at Research in Practice and Professor Michael Preston-Shoot, Emeritus Professor of Social Work at the University of Bedfordshire. Dez spoke about developing a transitional safeguarding approach and Michael spoke about learning from self-neglect SARs, research and people with lived experiences.

Facilitating the day were AFTA Thought, an organisation who use drama to bring learning from recent CSPRs and SARs to life.

Priority 1 – Neglect across the Life course:

We know from our data that there has been a reduction in children on Children Protection Plans for Neglect, a slight increase in step ups to children social care from Early Help but we have seen a decrease in children on Child in Need Plans. Which suggests that more families are receiving the right help at the right time.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Assessments with a factor of 'NEGLECT'	178	152	126	98
Total Assessments	1123	1053	836	742
% with a factor of NEGLECT	15.9%	14.4%	15.1%	13.2%
CP Plan starts with a category of Neglect	26	44	38	21

The subgroup has strong partnership leadership with the ICB Designated Nurses chairing the subgroup and overseeing the Neglect work plan for the Partnership.

What we did:

- We have revised our Children’s neglect strategy and formally launched this in November 2022 which ensures we have a multi-agency response to cases of neglect or suspected neglect. The number of children on child protection plans during quarter 4 of the reporting period was at the lowest for the year which evidences early signs of the strategy being embedded.
- We developed a cost-of-living resource web page in response to the National challenges around the rising cost of living, the resources were requested of the subgroup who all helped to populate ways to support children and adults in the Dudley borough
- We have continued to work with the NSPCC regarding the roll out of the Graded Care Profile 2A. We know that early identification of neglect and attachment issues are paramount to give all children the best start in life. . Dudley are the first area in the UK to identify families and provide support before the baby is born via this pathway. A new GCP2 antenatal pathway has been developed to embed the GCP2A tool as a universal prevention screen at every maternity care contact. We are working with our partners to ensure that this is embedded in practice through supervision for example and monitoring its impact via the quality assurance sub group.
- We have continued to deliver Graded Care Profile 2 (GCP2) training as our preferred method for recognising child ‘neglect’. 138 new practitioners were trained in GCP2. From the reports seen the tool is predominately completed by local authority staff. 55 GCP2 assessments were undertaken on 65 children from 30 families.
- Public Health commissioned a trainer to deliver adolescent neglect training with 36 receiving this training during the period. This training will continue into the next year. Some feedback from delegates included;
 - *‘I now have a greater understanding of adolescent development and feel I have a toolkit to support me with working with that age range’*

- *‘The course was very informative and well delivered I was able to improve my knowledge and understanding’*
- The voluntary sector provided a range of services delivering support for families in poverty, at risk of neglect; including outreach and family support. 5,152 children and young people registered for Dudley’s Holiday Activity and Food programme, accessing a total of 16,126 sessions supplied by 72 different providers. All sessions included free enriching activities and at least one meal. HAF works with community providers to enable families to build relationships that can be sustained beyond the HAF delivery period.
- A Safer Sleep Guidance for the Early Years sector is in development with an audit and charter for the sector to adopt.
- The Know More Campaign has been revised to update key public health messages to contribute to reducing child mortality. These have been approved by Black Country CDOP.
- The partnership has an ICON implementation group. ICON has been presented at the GP Safeguarding Forum by the Named GP and Designated Nurses.
- A Position statement was developed for Was Not Brought and Did Not Attend to ensure we have a consistent approach to children and adults not attending for their appointments this will support professional curiosity where neglect could be a feature in a child or adults life.
- We developed a number of safer7s to promote key issues such as Affluent Neglect, Child Neglect, ICON & GCP2

Priority 2 – Exploitation across the life course:

We know that there are vulnerable children at risk of exploitation in our Borough. We have a dedicated Exploitation Hub in Dudley which leads on the response when children and young people are at risk of exploitation .

The Children’s exploitation subgroup is the group responsible for delivering this priority, it has strong partnership leadership with the Voluntary Sector and Police co-chairing the subgroup and overseeing the Children’s Exploitation work plan for the Partnership

What we did:

- Continued to hold a monthly Child Exploitation Operational Group to identify perpetrators, locations and high-risk victims of exploitation and work collectively across the Partnership. This provided a cohesive approach to supporting children and young people.
- DSPP undertook a detailed exploration of Exploitation in January -March 2023. The work plan is being progressed by the Exploitation Subgroup and overseen by the Children’s Quality Assurance Group. This gave assurance that the Local Authority Child Exploitation Team provide an effective service to children who are at risk of exploitation and their families, which was also highlighted in the October 2022 Ofsted Inspection, however the assurance work highlighted the need to strengthen the pathway for partners and we have already begun work to address this

- DSPP carried out a specific audit of the use of partnership Exploitation Screening Tools in March 2023 with the learning being implemented by the subgroup and will be reported in the next annual report.
- We promoted and shared the language matters document in terms of working with young people at risk of exploitation.
- We responded to low levels of uptake of the Exploitation Training by implementing a working group to undertake a specific learning needs assessment, this resulted in the course being revamped under a new name of Harm Outside the Home, the impact of this will be seen in the next annual report.
- Barnardo's and PHASE Trust continue to deliver direct support to children within the exploitation hub for referred children and young people.
- During the reporting period, 52 young people were supported by PHASE Trust 24 were Sexual Exploitation 24 (23 female and 1 male), 28 were criminal exploitation (22 male, 5 female and 1 transgender female)
- 80% of the 52 young people were evidenced to have reported a better understanding and awareness of their risks. This was measured using nationally recognized risk assessment tools, reports from referring statutory agencies and their own case studies. From these, we were also able to measure that 77% had displayed definite positive changes to their behaviour, leading to a reduction in their risk levels.
- Barnardos (Dudley base) have supported 32 young people around CSE. A direct quote from a young person who has received support from Barnardos;

"It has helped me with other coping strategies with self-harm and harming myself is not the only that can help me"
- The exploitation health forum was re-launched in Jan 2023, facilitated and chaired by the Assistant Designated Nurse. This forum ensures that health professionals are cited on exploitation themes and concerns across the borough.
- Public Health continue to subsidise sessions in education settings to raise awareness of exploitation with information on how to recognise exploitation and how and when to access help and support.
- Dudley's Safe and Sound Board (Dudley's Community Safety Partnership) have drafted a needs assessment and strategy in response to the new Serious Violence Duty. Mapping has been completed of support services, whilst a system wide commissioning group has been established to oversee procurement and contract management of local services.
- Safe & Sound Board, through its website, campaigns and meetings has raised awareness, sign posting to support and advice and reporting issues of how to report safeguarding concerns, Hate Crime, Modern Slavery, Prevent, Domestic Abuse, Sexual Assault and Abuse, VAWG, On-Line Harms, Fraud and Scams, personal safety and violence prevention.

[Priority 3 – Adopting a Think Family Approach](#)

Although there is no specific subgroup for this priority, the partnership has progressed this area in the following ways.

- The restructure of our priority groups for Neglect spans across the life course which addresses any cross-cutting issues.
- The chairs of both Exploitation Groups regularly meeting to discuss such issues of transition between children's and adults.
- Following on from the success of the DSPP conference held in July 2022, partners felt it would be beneficial to have more opportunities to enable more discussion on and progress the priorities of DSPP. In response to this DSPP and its partners organised and held a development workshop on 27 March 2023 with a theme of Think Family, which was well attended across the partnership.
- Feedback was excellent from delegates regarding the opportunity to connect and network, appropriate amount of time spent on each session and the format of the workshop, splitting it into two halves one for Neglect and one for Exploitation with a golden thread of 'Think family'
- By the end of the workshop members had contributed to the work of the sub groups by recognising achievements to date against the respective strategies, highlighting the areas that require development and identifying ways forward in terms of next steps for the groups and partners. The general feedback from each of the sessions was fed into the Exploitation and Neglect Subgroups.
- Work has been undertaken to support the Children's Services re-design which will be implemented in July 2023; this includes an Adolescent Safeguarding Team which is multi-agency and works on the principals within a Family safeguarding approach. The Dudley Exploitation Team will sit within this service
- Over the past 12 months DIHC & Dudley Group have continued its work to develop a safeguarding infrastructure across the life course and in doing so embed a Think Family approach. This has included the successful launch of a suite of safeguarding policies and procedures. The organisation has an overarching Safeguarding Children and Adults policy.
- The DIHC safeguarding team have delivered a short training package on Think Family within safeguarding supervision sessions, service, and team meetings, and a 7-minute briefing has been disseminated within the Trust. The Designated Team work across both adults and children, there is adult and children expertise in the team and utilise this to share learning from reviews, incidents and themes. This learning is shared via GP safeguarding forums and the Safeguarding Quality Review Meeting.

[Children with Disabilities](#)

The Children with Disabilities Team has now been a part of Children's Services for over 18 months and improvements in the service provision are now visible. All new referrals are now being reviewed on the date received and assessments are being allocated and completed in the 45-day timescale or earlier, with all children now being visited in line with their assessed care plan. All children and young people

open to CDT have an appropriately skilled allocated worker who is supporting delivery of their plan. There has been a significant change in the way we communicate with our young people and new workers have brought new concepts and tools to assist in capturing and recording children's voices in visits and plans, which will be an area of focus over the next 6 months and this work is being supported by the Dudley Centre for Professional Practice (CPP). Referrals are now being made for all 16 year olds to the Transitions team so Preparation For Adulthood (PFA) work can commence at an earlier stage and all 17 year olds who are eligible for a Care Act Assessment are now allocated to a Preparing For Adulthood (PFA) worker to help develop their Care Act plan. Three young people who were children in care have been transitioned to Adult Services, with provision of semi supported accommodation in place for two young people which meets their needs. Both young people were able to celebrate their 18th birthday with their house mates and family. The transformation in service delivery has been significant as has the impact on achieving better outcomes for our children and families, however we are clear that there are still areas of work which require further development and change

Other areas of progress that support our priority work:

- We reviewed our multi-agency threshold document to ensure the terminology reflects our right help, right time ethos.
- Development of an Integrated Front Door that enables children and families to receive support at the lowest effective level.
- We have strengthened the quality assurance arrangements from our Neglect and Exploitation subgroups to the Quality Assurance Subgroup by implementing 6 monthly assurance activity reports into the group.
- Education Outcomes have developed a Children Out of Sight strategy (COOS), with safeguarding embedded into this strategy.
- An operational working group is in place to discuss children not in school or with low or no attendance and link contextual safeguarding themes such as, exploitation and neglect.
- The Police have introduced a new internal guide (Aware) which covers the minimum standards of professional curiosity and recommended good practice for all officers when they encounter children. Aware mandatory training has been rolled out for all incidents involving children and has been helps officers build a better understanding of children at risk of significant harm.
- We reviewed our current multi agency audit process which is now entitled Multi-Agency Audit of Practice (MAAP), ensuring we focus on the quality of practice and the difference we make and analyse the findings and embed learning in our practice ensuring we have a shared understanding of what good looks like.
- A 'True for Us' piece of assurance work completed across the partnership which found there was a general consensus that decision making in the MASH is timely and agencies work hard to ensure that information sharing to inform initial decision making is robust, however the learning initiated further exploration of key themes of Exploitation and Initial Need and Risk.
- Dudley's Voluntary Sector have established a safeguarding leaders forum; a regular meeting with senior leaders in Children's social care, family

safeguarding, early help has supported dissemination of key information relating to safeguarding and collation of concerns/priorities.

4. LADO

The Designated Officer (DO) nationally known as the LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) oversees allegations against adults in a Position of Trust (POT) who work or volunteer with children and young people.

As part of this role the LADO via training continues to raise the profile/Role of the LADO and of the Management of Allegations Process within the authority and to local partner agencies so they are better informed on how to manage matters which meet the following threshold criteria for LADO involvement.

i.e. Information which comes to light, which suggests an employee, volunteer or contractor has:

- Behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have harmed a child;
- Possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child; or
- Behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children
- behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children

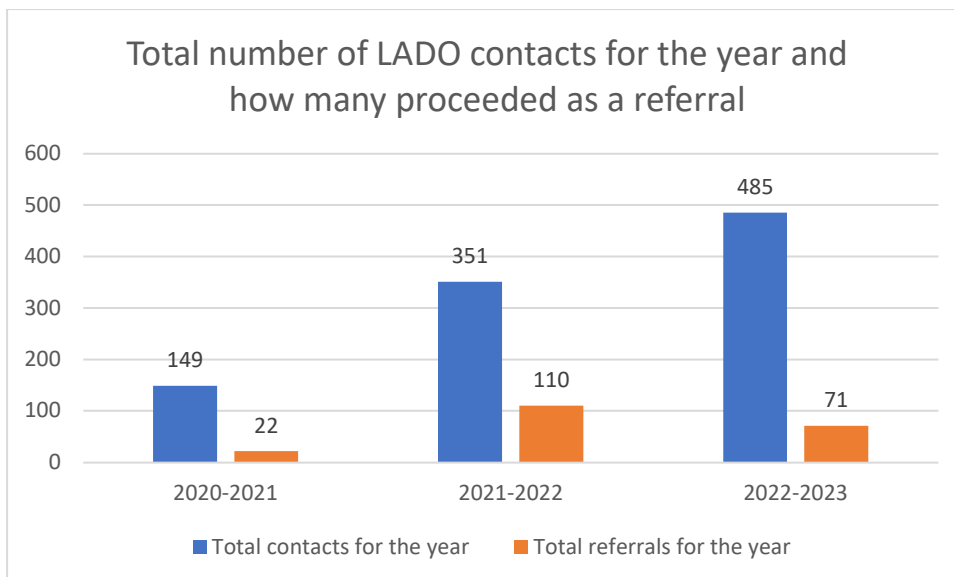
The main duties of the LADO are to:

- Manage individual cases – referral and investigations
- Provide advice and guidance
- Liaise with police and other agencies (Ofsted)
- Monitor progress of cases for timeliness, thoroughness, and fairness

During the reporting period, the LADO has continued to deliver the management of allegations multi agency training, ensuring that the work force in Dudley is appropriately trained to deal with this. Developing positive relationships with partner agencies is imperative in supporting the principles of retroactive practice and something the LADO continues to strive for. There is still work to be done around engaging faith organisations which is something we will update on in our next report.

LADO records were viewed by Ofsted during inspection October 2022. Feedback was as follows: *'The designated officer service in Dudley responds promptly and robustly to concerns about adults in a position of trust who present risks to children'*.

An aspect of the LADO role is monitoring the timeliness of case progression. All cases are expected to be concluded within 6 months and overall, this timescale continues to be met.



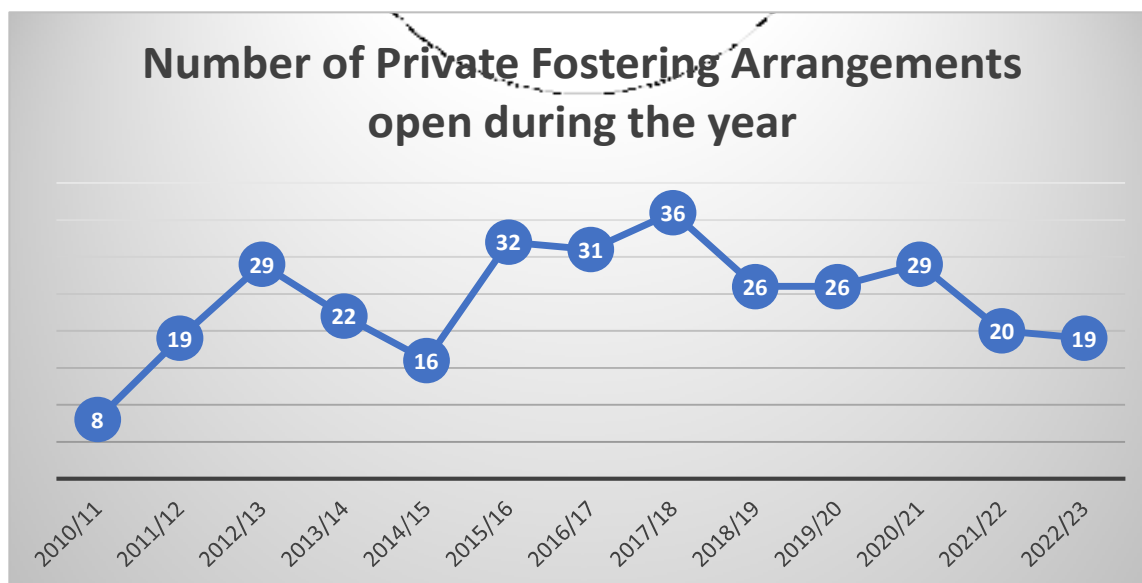
Whilst there has been an increase in agencies contacting the LADO service the referrals are less than the previous year, this could be as a result of more robust LADO analysis at initial point of contact which indicates the matter does not meet LADO threshold. For example, the LADO often receives contact from education and nursery settings despite their being no allegation against a named staff member, such as relating to a leadership and management issue. In this instance the LADO would liaise with the Safeguarding Lead in Education and or Early Years Child Care Co-ordinator and/or signpost the referrer as appropriate.

The introduction of the fourth criteria '***Behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children***' is often used by agencies when contacting the LADO for advice.

5. Private Fostering

The Private Fostering Regulations apply when children, aged under 16 years (18 if they have a disability) live with a person who is not a close relative for 28 days or more. The term 'close relative' has a specific definition within the Children Act 1989, it includes grandparents, brothers, sisters, uncles and aunts (whether of full or half blood or by marriage) and step-parents. Children living with people who are not close relatives, such as a cousin, great aunt or family friend need to be assessed and reviewed under the Private Fostering Regulations to ensure the placement is able to safeguard and promote his/her welfare.

Private Fostering arrangements are often confused with a child being fostered by an Independent Fostering Agency. This is not the case; a Private Fostering arrangement is one that is arranged by the parent (person with Parental responsibility) and not the Local Authority. Parents retain the responsibility to support their child, this includes financial support for the Private Foster carer.



From the Graph above since notifications were recorded, the number of Private Fostered children had increased then decreased within the Dudley Borough over the years, however it appears during the Covid Pandemic numbers had dropped, this would have been contributed to as children from overseas did not travel to the UK

It is evident that Children who are Privately Fostered can have complex needs including additional competing factors such as legal implications, social and Parental Responsibility (PR) issues, thus leaving this group of children extremely vulnerable. Through the ongoing commitment by the Directorate to have dedicated resources for Private Fostering it has been a positive year so far, not only in terms of statutory compliance but also with regards to the outcomes for children in Private Fostering arrangements. With a dedicated post the Private fostering worker can devote more time for awareness raising and training as well as offering a supportive/ protective service to carers and privately fostered children. This was recognised in the October 2022 Ofsted Inspection.

6. Learning from Reviews

Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (LCSPR) are undertaken on 'serious child safeguarding cases' to identify what has worked well and learn lessons to improve the way in which local professionals and organisations work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

Not all incidents that are reviewed will meet the definition of a 'serious child safeguarding case' but may still raise issues of importance. This might include cases where there has been good practice, poor practice or where there have been 'near misses'. In these circumstances the Partnership will decide whether to conduct a local practice learning review or case audit to ensure that learning is captured and shared with the workforce.

6.1 Activity in this period:

Seven serious incident notifications were submitted to the National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel. This is an increase compared with last year where there were five.

The Partnership's Rapid Review Panel met to consider the circumstances of these notifications. Three reviews progressed to a Local Safeguarding Practice Review (LCSPR), with a further three following alternative review routes such as a Practice Learning Review and one did not meet criteria for review.

The themes included within the serious incident notifications are:

- Non-Accidental Injury
- Neglect
- Hidden or concealed pregnancy
- Child Criminal Exploitation
- Adultification
- Domestic abuse

At the time of writing the LCSPR's are still in progress but immediate learning has been shared across the partnership as appropriate.

One Local Learning Review was published in 2022/23 relating to the previous reporting period, a summary of which can be found below:

Child Z

Child Z was brought into the Emergency Department by ambulance in moderate diabetic ketoacidosis (DKA). He was diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes and admitted to the Paediatric Ward. Professionals raised concerns over neglect, delay in accessing medical attention, delayed developmental presentation, unkempt appearance and poor dental hygiene. Further concerns were raised while Z was in hospital around mother's inability to manage the complex demands of a child with diabetes and comprehend the potentially fatal consequences of any mismanagement of the treatment programme. There was not a causal link between the neglect Z experienced and Type 1 diabetes. The review acknowledged there may have been opportunities to intervene earlier, although this would not necessarily have prevented the significant event of hospitalisation for diabetes, the response to neglectful parenting may have been different.

The review identified multi-agency learning in relation to:

- Recognition of chronic and cumulative neglect
- Consideration of collective safeguarding history rather than viewing incidents in isolation
- Multi-agency review of cases where the length of hospital stay overrides what is considered a normal timescale
- Support for parents with learning difficulties
- Appropriate professional challenge and resolution

A Partnership action plan for this review has been completed, as part of this DSPP launched its amended Professional Challenge and Resolution process in April 2022. Also in November 2022 we launched DSPP's Child Neglect Strategy along with a relaunch of the Graded Care Profile2 training course to raise awareness and increase attendance.

Full details of the reviews and learning resources are now available on the [DSPP website](#).

There are action plans in place for these reviews and progress is regularly reviewed by the Learning and Development sub group.

To ensure this learning is embedded into safeguarding practice across Dudley it was agreed that a thematic learning plan will be implemented from April 2023. The thematic learning plan will be an opportunity for staff and partner organisations in Dudley to be made aware of the key learning from our quality assurance activity and case reviews along with offering information in relation to this learning.

It is hoped that each month it will enable organisations and individuals to feel more aware of local learning and how they can implement changes in their everyday practice, along with strengthening the key priority of 'Think Family'.

The thematic learning plan will be a combination of tools, procedures, information briefings, promotion of training and other learning opportunities. The themes of the learning plan will alternative between a children's, an adult's or a joint theme each month and they will be chosen from key themes from Dudley's local learning.

6.2 Learning from Audits

During 2022/23 DSPP re-evaluated the multi agency audit process, replacing the previous Multi-Agency Case File Audit (MACFA) with a Multi-Agency Audit of Practice (MAAP) process.

MAAP Audits will look at and scrutinise multi-agency practice from a random selection of cases to assess the quality of practice and lessons to be learned in terms of both multi-agency and multi-disciplinary practice. The following will underpin the MAAP Audit process:

- Focus on multi-agency and multi-disciplinary interventions and have a clear focus and clearly defined terms of reference
- An expectation that all agencies commit to the MAAP procedures
- Focus on current practice, considering interventions that have occurred within the last 12 months
- Consider interventions that are within the remit and work of local agencies
- Include a focus on the welfare of the child, other children living in the household, timeliness, communication and engagement with families or other significant adults

The intention of the MAAP Audit process is to carry out audits in a spirit of appreciative inquiry to "shine a light on what is working well in organisations and potentially engage all stakeholders in building conditions for best practice" (Bellinger and Elliot, 2011)

Audits provide a valuable opportunity to dip sample multi-agency practice on specific themes and for the partnership to assured about safeguarding practice.

DSPP conducted one MACFA in 2022/23 on the theme of **Domestic Abuse** and one MAAP on the theme of **Transitions for 16–17-year-olds with a diagnosed disability**.

There were areas of good practice and areas identified for improvement and these actions are monitored through the Quality Assurance and Performance sub group.

The audits highlighted the following key learning:

- Assessment and care planning to include a Trauma Informed Perspective when working with families who are experiencing Domestic Abuse needs to be strengthened, to respond to this both Children's Social Care and DSPP will put into place a comprehensive learning offer on Trauma Informed Practice.
- Direct work to establish an understanding of the child's perspectives and experiences that directly influences planning and decision making for them was inconsistent, this is an area of focus the partnership.
- Work with perpetrators of violence continues to be an area of development in challenging the behaviour of perpetrators and how they are engaged in meaningful intervention to change their behaviour and understand the impact on others.
- The coordination of child protection planning could be strengthened, key partners are not always aware of the plans for children and the interventions for families are not always focussed or smart.
- There was an identified need for transition planning to start at an earlier opportunity, this has resulted in a revision of the transition pathway commencing, led by Dudley Disability Service.
- There was some evidence of the use of the Multi Agency Escalation and Resolution process where families needed support, however this is inconsistent, to respond to this DSPP will be developing a course on Professional Curiosity and Escalation.

7. Multi-agency training and its impact

During the year we changed our approach of our offer of Learning and Development, the programme was amended to better reflect learning from our reviews and responded to local and national emerging themes. The learning offer was adapted to a blended approach of online learning events and the return of face to face training.

7.1 Key Developments

- The Learning and Development Strategy was refreshed for 2022-2024, this was streamlined to make it more focused on what we are trying to achieve and how.

- The first DSPP competency framework for safeguarding training in Dudley was developed in line with statutory guidance and national competency frameworks.
- The training plan was revised to ensure all training directly linked to DSPP priorities or local learning identified through case reviews and audit activity
- A full training needs analysis completed which will inform the 2023-24 programme.
- There has been more focus on training and development for education colleagues (Facilitated by the Safeguarding in Education Lead) this has included schools and education outcomes staffing. Through training and updates at each DSL Forum and the planned Education Safeguarding Conference in July 2023.

7.2 Training Data:

68 total training events (both adults and children courses) were delivered through the DSPP between 1st April 2022 and 31st March 2023.



We offered a total of 2068 places, of which 1106 were used, and out of that 849 delegates attended the courses.



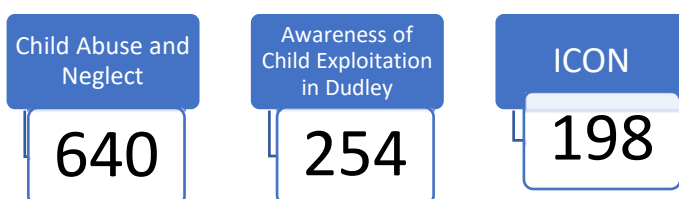
We found that 344 delegates cancelled their place prior to the course, mainly due to capacity, and 257 did not attend on the day, and again this was mainly due to operational service delivery issues.

70% of our training was half day or less and 30% was full day.

Delegates representing 48 different services or organisations have been able to network and build relationships on multi-agency training

Attendance at our training in relation specifically to our key priorities is as follows:

eLearning:



Training



Due to the low uptake of our Exploitation Courses, a working group from the Exploitation Sub Group was tasked with exploring this further.

Attendees reported improved knowledge following courses which will improve their practice:

“I have learnt how to use the GCP2 tool which will be an asset to my job role. The training content and provider were fabulous and very informative.”

Graded Care Profile2 Training

“this training has enhanced my knowledge and skills, allowed me to network with others and show me the formal procedures to follow”

Understanding the Management of Allegations in Dudley

“As a care experienced social worker who has their own ACEs, it really is important to have this type of training to be able to be better equipped to be able to work with families using the professional perspective first, which can then be informed by the personal perspective”

Introduction to Childhood Adversity and Trauma Informed Practice

7.3 Training Evaluations

What we can see from our data embedded in our Learning Management System is that (at this time of writing this report):

- 77.7% of people complete pre-evaluation
- only 59.4% of people complete post course evaluation
- only 12.5% of people complete post event stage 2

This suggests there is more work to do in measuring how our training is making a difference to practice in Dudley.

Learning Gain

Pre-booked average	Post Event Average	Learning Gain
3.01	4.30	1.29

Data collected from 01.04.2022 – 31.03.2023

Our learning gain figures show that our training is improving professional knowledge which will in turn improve safeguarding practice. We regularly ask for feedback on our courses to ensure we are delivering the right material to the right audience. We are part of a regional learning and development group which enables us to share best practice.

We have made significant progress on working with partners to develop and facilitate our courses which will be running from 2023-24.

We have started discussions on a regional level to enable Dudley to gain improved learning on practice improvement as a result of our training and awareness raising. The implementation and subsequent analysis of the thematic learning plan will also significantly address closing the loop in learning and improvement cycle.

8. Voice of the child

The DSPP does not have a single mechanism, currently, for recording the voice of the child. Instead, the Partnership seek assurances from partners that children are at the heart of everything they do and that they actively engage with them.

We have seen excellent examples of partnership engagement with young people. For example; A young person shared that his social worker always responds and is available when he needs him. He was very happy with the service; his housing and leave to remain status has been addressed with support. A parent stated that she finds the social worker supportive.

A further example is the dedicated work from the police CSE officer who helped build trust over a protracted period of time. This was essential due to offences disclosed by the victim and the seriousness of offending which was still taking place. As a direct result of the trust and relationship made with the young victim, verbal and physical evidence was secured which in turn led to a Crown Court trial. The offender was found guilty of all offences and sentenced to a lengthy jail term.

Moving forward, we will continue to use the information as assurance of our safeguarding practices across the Borough, but we recognise we need to do more to receive children and young people's feedback to influence and shape our work in the next twelve months.

9. Our priorities for 2023-2024

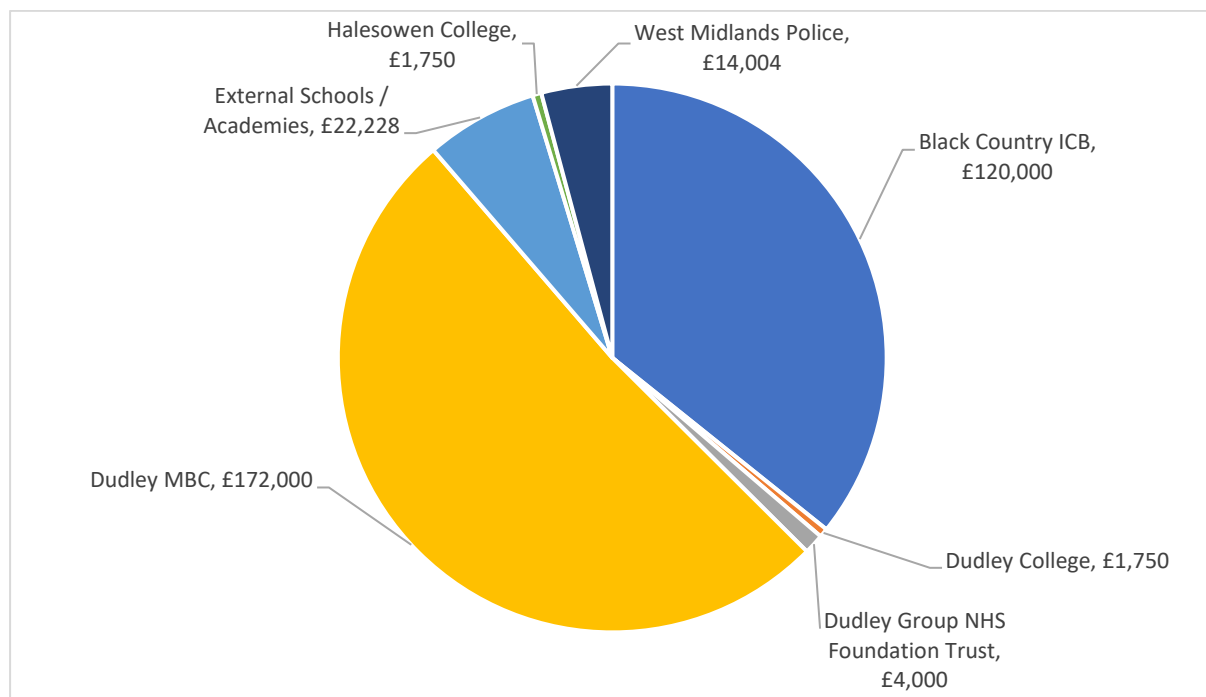
The priorities for the forthcoming year reflect 2022-23 priorities and we will continue to further progress the identified work plans. In the next twelve months we will also focus on the following:

1. Ensure our dataset is truly multi-agency and reflects our revised priorities and that we know what we are doing is making a positive difference to children and young people. Recruitment is underway for a dedicated Performance Officer for the DSPP to support this work.
2. Within Child Protection Plans where the risk of neglect has been identified, there is a direction for the GCP2 tool to be used, particularly for younger children. The forthcoming implementation of the Family Safeguarding model in 2023-24 will further support timely and proactive responses to neglect with a multi-agency context.
3. Ensure we have a robust approach to understanding use the voice of children and their families and this influences the work of our partnership and how we deliver services. Improving the use of child/parent feedback as a quality assurance indicator will support this.
4. Ensure the GAP for 16–18-year-olds in health professional attendance at safeguarding meetings; MACE and open strategy discussions is closed. Without health present at these meetings the assessment of risk and care planning would not be robust in that health information was not known.

5. Develop robust transitional arrangements for 16-18 years who are at risk of exploitation.
6. Develop a more robust hoarding/ squalor/ clutter tool which reflects a think family approach. Learning from reviews highlighted that professionals are using a number of different tools to assess the conditions in a home.
7. Revise the exploitation screening tool and appropriate risk levels to ensure its effective use across the partnership.
8. Implement a Thematic Learning Plan to enable staff and partner organisations in Dudley to be made aware of the key learning from our quality assurance activity and case reviews and how they can implement changes in their everyday practice.
9. Develop the learning offer based on the findings of a Training Needs Exercise. This exercise will demonstrate the training needs across the partnership and strengthen the adults learning offer.
10. Partners to assist in the co-delivery of Multi-Agency Courses: Health and Social Care Partners to jointly deliver a brand new course on Professional Curiosity and Effective Challenge (key finding from both adults and children's reviews)
11. Hold an Annual Conference directly linking to case reviews; The theme of the conference will focus on Developing a Trauma Informed Partnership and will take place during Autumn of 2023
12. Review the Training Impact Process to better inform the Partnership of the impact of its multi-agency training on practice

Appendix 1

DSPP funding arrangements 2022-23



Appendix 2

Case Study 1:

Child A is primary school aged, is of mixed heritage born. Child A is a very active and cheerful girl who is articulate and expressive. The family have been known to Children's Services for a number of years due to domestic abuse in Child A's parents' relationship. Child A is currently subject to a Child Protection Plan. The case was initially referred in 2022 when father was convicted for a domestic abuse offence against the child's mother.

Father is assessed as posing a High Risk of Harm to current or future partners and children who would be exposed to these behaviours, based on his history of offending, and current conviction.

There were cumulative concerns around the neglectful parenting of Child A due to concerns around poor routines and boundaries within the home, which were directly impacting the school attendance and emotional wellbeing of Child A. Child A had also disclosed that her mother had hit her previously. The Child in Need Plan had not achieved change, therefore a multi-agency decision was made to present the family at an Initial Child protection conference, following completion of a Child Protection Enquiry, to ensure that safeguarding measures were proportionate to the concerns and safeguarding needed.

When the Social Worker first started working with the family, the mother was not working with the Social Worker due to the experience of having changes of Social Workers involved and she felt that father was still trying to control her by using their child and request for contact as a weapon.

Direct work was completed with the mother, using the voice of the child captured in direct work sessions with Child A, to help her understand how the current family situation was upsetting her daughter. The mother was also supported to share her concerns around the risk father continued to pose to Child A.

Over the period of intervention, the Social Worker was able to support mother to build her confidence to the point where she attended the Review Child Protection Conference and stay until the end (whereas previously she had walked out of the ICPC and her engagement with Children's Services and other professionals since the ICPC had been quite limited). The Social Worker reflected that this intervention was successful due to working restoratively with mother, working with her to identify risks and identify and praise strengths. In working in this way, it was discovered that mother found it difficult to attend meetings due to her additional communication needs and she struggles to sometimes control her emotions. The Social Worker supported mother to come up with a plan for the Review meeting, that if she felt she was getting anxious she should take 5 minutes to calm down before returning. Mother said that she also struggled to retain a lot of information and when lots of things were spoken about in one go, she couldn't remember what had been said.

These views were shared with the Child Protection Conference Chair who made adjustments to accommodate her needs.

The father was included in the assessment process by ensuring he was included in all meetings and completing a home visit to gain his views, wishes and feelings to inform the Review SW Report.

At the end of the involvement mother expressed that she was disappointed that the Social Worker would no longer be involved as she felt genuinely cared for.

Case study 2:

M is an 11-year-old admitted to the children's ward on multiple occasions within a short time frame for mental health concerns and challenging behaviour. There was no mental health diagnosis, but M was involved with the child and adolescent mental health services and there was an ongoing investigation for autism. M was formerly subject to a child protection plan for previous concerns regarding fabricated and induced illness. M was residing in a refuge with her mother due to allegation of financial abuse from M's father, which the police closed due to lack of evidence.

A safeguarding referral was made when police brought M to the hospital due to them absconding from the hostel and refusing to return to the hostel with their mother or return home to their father. During M's admission to the ward, their behaviour was extremely challenging, and posed a risk to both themselves, staff, and other patients. During admission M physically assaulted their mother and six members of staff. Despite numerous attempts to discharge M, they refused to leave the hospital.

Staff observed the behaviour displayed by M and recognised that this may be due to past or current unknown trauma. There were ongoing concerns that M's mother was an overpowering and continuous presence on the ward which was a barrier to staff fully engaging with M to hear her story.

As a result, a referral was made to St Giles Trust based within the hospital, to engage M in violence reduction work. M's mother consented to the referral. The St Giles worker developed an excellent rapport with M through activities and discussion, getting to know M and their likes/wishes to the point where M's mother would leave the ward for a couple of hours whilst M was in the workers presence.

It was here that M suggested and further discussed their negative thoughts associated with home and the worker could speak to M alone in a 1:1 situation. As a result of the intervention by St Giles Trust, M's aggressive behaviour reduced on the ward, and they were able to share their concerns and feel listened to.

A further professionals meeting was held with the multi-agency team involved in M's care. It was agreed a therapeutic placement would be sought for M and this was the discharge location. A multi-agency approach was taken to assure safe discharge and continual follow up support and assessment of M. M was happy to be discharged to the residential placement.

The ward staff acknowledged M's behaviour was their way of asking for help and the staff worked hard to ensure this was heard. The St Giles worker took the time to build rapport with M and understand their views and wishes. The multi-agency approach and discharge planning ensured that M's wishes could be met, and the outcome was successful.

Meeting of the Children's Services Select Committee – 16th November 2023

Report of the Director of Children's Services

Education Report

Purpose of report

1. To provide an update on Education Outcomes to Children's Services Select Committee

Recommendations

2. The Select Committee are asked to note and comment on the contents of the report.

Background

3. The report contains updates on the work of the Education Outcomes team as follows:
 - Primary Data Overview
 - Attendance 2022/3
 - Suspensions Data
 - Education Strategy Themes
 - AP Strategy Update
 - Poverty Proofing
 - Inspections

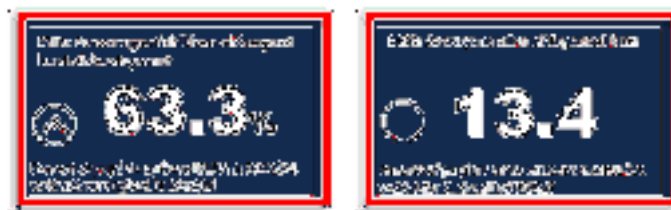
Primary Data Overview

4. KS2 headline measures include progress and attainment measures. These are:

- the percentage of pupils achieving the ‘expected standard’ in English reading, English writing and maths at the end of KS2
 - the pupils’ average scaled score in:
 - English reading at the end of KS2
 - maths at the end of KS2
 - the percentage of pupils who achieve at a higher standard in English reading, English writing and maths
 - the pupils’ average progress in:
 - English reading
 - English writing
 - maths.
- 5 The percentage of pupils achieving the expected standard is a combined measure across the three subjects. To be counted towards the measure, a pupil must have a scaled score of 100 or more in reading and a scaled score of 100 or more in maths; and have been teacher assessed in writing as ‘working at the expected standard’ or ‘working at greater depth’.
 - 6 The percentage of pupils achieving at a higher standard is also a combined measure across the three subjects. To be counted towards the measure, a pupil must have a ‘high scaled score’ of 110 or more in reading and maths; and have been teacher assessed in writing as ‘working at greater depth’.
 - 7 Unlike the expected standard, which was determined by the STA’s standard-setting teacher panel, the high score was determined by the department solely with reference to the distribution of pupils’ test results, to identify the pupils who achieved the highest marks on the tests.
 - 8 In addition, there is also a range of measures, which covers attainment and progress in individual subjects and for various pupil groups. For example, the percentage of pupils gaining the expected standard in English grammar, punctuation and spelling, and breakdowns showing performance of pupils with particular characteristics, such as disadvantaged pupils, or those for whom English is an additional language.
 - 9 DfE shares detailed information on performance measures with school leaders, governors, and other relevant stakeholders (including local authorities, academy trusts, dioceses, and Ofsted) via Analyse School Performance (‘ASP’) - a secure platform providing users with restricted access to performance data relevant to their role and/or function.

10 Key Stages EYF5 Outcomes for Children in Dudley

EYF5



11

Key Stages KS1 Outcomes for Children in Dudley remains below England in most indicators but is improving year-on-year



Key Stages KS2 Outcomes for Children in **Dudley** remains **below** **England** in most indicators but is improving year-on-year



Attendance Overview 2022/23

13 National Picture

Since the relaxation of restrictions on schools imposed during the height of the Covid pandemic, there have been concerns about increased absence from school, and in particular an increase in the proportion of pupils with high levels of absence.

- 14 **At the time of writing, the estimated absence rate for the 2022/23 academic year was 7.5%. This is not directly comparable to final data that has been published for previous years.**
- 15 The most recent final Department for Education attendance statistics for a complete academic year is for 2021/22, when the absence rate for any reason was 8.5%. This is much lower than the previous year when absence was affected much more by the pandemic (25.9% absence rate for any reason in 2020/21). However, it is higher than in the six years prior to the pandemic (when absence ranged between 4.5% and 4.8%).
- 16 In 2021/22, 22.5% of pupils were recorded as “persistently absent” (defined by the Department for Education as missing 10% or more of possible school sessions).
- 17 Some groups of pupils are more likely to be absent or persistently absent than others. For example, in 2021/22, 37.2% of free school meal eligible pupils were persistently absent compared with 17.5% of pupils that were not eligible.

18 Dudley Picture 2022/23 (National statistics currently unavailable)

- 40,961 children in Dudley schools eligible for counting (YR to Y11)
 - 9332 Persistently Absent in 2022/3 – 23%
 - 843 Severely Absent in 2022/3 – 2%
- 19
- Overall, School Attendance slightly worse than National and Regional levels (92% vs 92.5%)
 - Attendance still not back to pre-covid levels (92% vs 95%)
 - Increased numbers of children in Dudley absent from school, without a school place (CME) or receiving unsuitable Electively Home Education (EHE).
 - EHE from 160 to 500 since 2018 (weekly average)
 - CME from 60 to 300 since 2018 (weekly average)
 - DFE assigned support via Attendance Advisor
 - Significant issue with parents taking children out of school
 - Significant increase in 'medical' based absence but without formal diagnosis
 - Statutory Duties widening for all LAs as focus on attendance intensifies

Suspensions Data 2022/23

- 20
- 3318 individual suspensions – more than previous year
 - 1738 CYP – 686 were repeated individual children
 - 85% were from secondary children – 63% of total from year 8, 9 and 10
 - Year 1 and Year 6 highest years for primary
 - 52% of suspensions FSM
 - 65% male
 - 39% with SEND
 - 17% EHA, CiN, CP or previous involvement
 - 46% for persistent disruptive behaviour – 50% of all suspensions during summer term
 - 17% for pupil-on-pupil assault
 - 21% for verbal / threatening abuse

- 21
- **Latest National Data – 21/22 released at end of July 23**
 - National – 0.08%
 - West Midlands – 0.11%
 - Dudley – 0.14%
 - **128 actual** (110 - 21/22)
 - **88 upheld** (82 - 21/22)
 - 2021/22 – 75% were upheld from initial
 - 2022/23 – 69% were upheld from initial – a reduction from previous year

22 **Reasons:**

- 34.41% of PEx was for PDB – **48.3% Dudley 22/23 (upheld)**
- 12.64% for Assault on pupil – **18.% Dudley**
- 12.50% for Assault on adult – **7.9% Dudley**
- 11.49% for Verbal/Threatening abuse – **11.2% Dudley**
- 15.7% for Weapon related – **13.5% Dudley**
- 10.14% for Drug / Alcohol related – **1.1% Dudley**

23 **Analysis**

- 78.6% of all upheld PX are within Years 8, 9 and 10
- 48.3% have no SEN identified
- 57% are on FSM – 52% of suspensions are FSM
- 57.3% are male – this is against suspension data of 64.6% of suspensions
- 42.7% are female – against 35.4% of suspensions – why is the gap narrower at PEx level?

Education Strategy Themes

- 24 The Education Strategy for 2023-2026 sets out our ambition for our children and young people and how we intend to fulfil our responsibilities in providing them with everything they need to go forward and do fantastic things with their lives.
- 25 We are making it our mission to improve access, quality and outcomes for all children and families in our local area in the next three years. By working with our partners, we will do all that we can to drive educational excellence and get all schools to, at the very least, an Ofsted judgement of 'good'.
- 26 We want to align services, schools and settings to address barriers to learning and recognise the individual needs of both children and communities to tailor the educational support we provide.
- 27 In Dudley, we have high aspirations for all our children and young people, whatever their starting point. Access to a quality learning pathway, from childhood through to adulthood, enabling them to thrive and develop the life

skills that will support them into a productive and happy adulthood, is at the root of our ambition to ensure that children of all abilities do well in our schools and colleges gaining important skills and expertise for life. Fundamentally, we recognise the importance of impacting life chances.

28

Game Changing Themes	
What needs improvement?	
1	Ensuring children coming into our system or returning to our system have suitable provision which is meeting need and inclusive
2	Ensuring a suitable education that works for all children regardless of ability, behaviour or background
3	Ensuring that all children are attending full time education
4	Ensuring children transition between the different points in their educational journey in a coherent and supported way
5	Bringing teams together to ensure children and families are supported holistically
6	Maximising our impact on children's outcomes at all levels through robust Quality Assurance, Intervention and Support

AP Strategy Update

29 The Alternative Provision strategy is now being redeveloped to ensure that it is fit for purpose and meeting the needs of CYP across the local area. This was launched in September 2023 with an internal meeting of LA Officers, Health, Social Care and other stakeholders to outline a clear rationale behind the direction of travel. On 12 October there was a Secondary Headteacher Workshop with every school represented and a clear sense of purpose and collaboration to ensure that our new strategy is fit for purpose and future proofed. A Primary Headteacher Workshop takes place on 20 October followed by a meeting of our AP Leadership Group (those responsible for AP across the area). Once these workshops are complete, a draft strategy will be released for consultation and collaboration.

30 The Alternative Provision Strategy is being developed to be consistent with the principles underpinning the SEND Strategy and our Inclusive Pathways programme in order to:

- increase the number of children and young people supported in mainstream provision
- reduce the number of exclusions from schools
- address the rising number of young people receiving home tuition
- stop off-rolling, leaving young people without education

- reduce the increasing use of specialist provision
- ensure specialist provision is in the right locations.
- increase the number of young people in education, employment and training, therefore reducing our NEET statistics.

31 OUR END GAME

1. Clear Ethos & Vision for Alternative Pathways
2. A change is 'language' from AP to 'Educational Pathways' which meet childrens' needs.
3. New Inclusion Strategy and development of Inclusive Pathways
4. A comprehensive review and implementation of new AP
Places/Alternative Curriculum – with good physical space and buildings
5. A focus on Behaviour Outreach/development of relationships
6. Development of a 'behaviour curriculum' in schools
7. Effective Transition in AND out including date stamped exit points.

Poverty Proofing

32 We are planning to pilot the ***Children North East's Poverty Proofing the School Day programme*** in 8 of Dudley's Primary Schools over this academic year.

33 Children North East's Poverty Proofing the School Day Programme aims to make sure no activity or planned activity in schools identifies, excludes, treats differently, or make assumptions about those children whose household income or resources are lower than others.

Schools participating in the pilot will go through an audit experience whereby Children North East staff:

- Come into school for a week.
- Have a whole school day experience alongside the pupils.
- Consult with all students.
- Consult with parents.
- Consult with all staff.
- Write a report on their findings.
- Support schools in action plans to support those children and families living in poverty, or under cost-of-living pressures.

34 **Previous audits across the country have revealed children struggle with some of the following elements of a school day:**

- being easily identifiable through their FSM status or brown paper bag containing their lunch on a school trip
- not being served at lunch if the bill had not been paid.
- non- uniform days
- the cost of new uniform/ replacing lost items
- not affording sweets to bring in on their birthdays.

- feelings of embarrassment for show and tell
- being picked on for having holes in their clothes, or looking scruffy
- losing playtime because they haven't read at home, or had their book signed.

35 **The Newcastle University Evaluation of the Poverty Proofing the School Day Programme showed:**

- This is a high impact programme that shifts whole school ethos.
- There was evidence of improved attendance and attainment as a result of removing barriers to learning.
- Greater take up of free school meals.
- More effective use of pupil premium
- Less costly school day
- Increase in uptake of school trips and music tuition by the most disadvantaged pupils.
- Improvement in pupil mental health and wellbeing
- Increase in communication and improved relations with parents.

Ofsted Update

36 Ofsted inspections continue in line with the expected schedule. Maintained schools continue to perform well and over the last 6 months five of our long term RI (Requires Improvement) schools have moved to good gradings. 86% of maintained primary schools are now good or outstanding along with 100% of secondary and special schools. In terms of academy schools, conversations are held with the DFE where concerns are raised about inspections or performance, although the LA has little jurisdiction over their improvement journey.

37

Patterns from recent inspections



PHASE	LA				Trustees				Decision LAWY
Primary/ Nursery	45				33				78
	Continuing	Good	Fair	Need	Continuing	Good	Fair	Need	
	3	27	4	5	2	18	7	4	
	7%	60%	11%	14%	3%	55%	21%	12%	
Good or Better	70%				58%				65%
Secondary	1				15				12
	Continuing	Good	Fair	Need	Continuing	Good	Fair	Need	
	3	4	6	5	1	6	9	1	
	75%	100%	100%	50%	7%	40%	45%	5%	
Good or Better	75%				50%				65%
Special / AP	3				1				7
	Continuing	Good	Fair	Need	Continuing	Good	Fair	Need	
	2	4	6	5	0	1	3	1	
	33%	67%	100%	50%	0%	100%	33%	100%	
Good or Better	75%				100%				75%

Finance

- 39 There are no direct financial implications arising from the proposals outlined in the report.

Law

- 40 The law governing Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council's (the Local Authority) statutory duties in relation to education in its area is provided by the Acts of Parliament, Regulations and Statutory Guidance regularly published and updated by Central Government.

In particular, the Education Act 1996 obliges the Local Authority to:

"... ensure that their relevant education ... and ... training functions are ... exercised ... with a view to ... promoting high standards, ... ensuring fair access ... and ... promoting the fulfilment of [the] learning potential by every person to whom this subsection applies." sub-section 13A(1)

AND

"... establish primary schools and secondary schools ... maintain primary and secondary schools, whether established by them or not; and ... assist any primary or secondary school which is not maintained by them [for the purpose of fulfilling their functions under this Act] ..." sub-section 16(1)

The Local Authority must therefore have policies and procedures that enable it to collate, interpret and act upon data regarding the social and educational needs of local children and young people, as well as the progress of local schools. This will enable the Local Authority to improve the educational provision available and the attainments and outcomes of the pupils and students in its area.

Consequently, because this report summarises the data being collated and describes the work being done by officers within Education Outcomes, it demonstrates how they are ensuring that the Local Authority is complying with the statutory duties cited above.

Risk Management

41 There are no deemed risks as this report is provided for information purposes only.

Equality Impact

42 The HR/OD Business Partner is fully engaged with officers within the Childrens Services Directorate to support the delivery of the key principles of this strategy

Human Resources/Organisational Development

43 The HR/OD Business Partner is fully engaged with officers within the Childrens Services Directorate to support the delivery of the key principles of this strategy.

Commercial/Procurement

44 There are no direct commercial or procurement implications associated with this report, however improved relationships with Dudley schools does create opportunity for increased trading.

Environment/Climate Change

45 The report is for information only and there is no perceived impact on climate change or environmental factors.

Council Priorities and Projects

46 A place where everybody has the education and skills they need, and where outstanding local schools, colleges and universities secure excellent results for their learners.

A place of healthy, resilient, safe communities with high aspirations and the ability to shape their own future.

Catherine Driscoll

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Meeting of the Children's Services Select Committee – 16th November 2023

Report of the Director of Children's Services

Family Hubs and Start for Life Information and Update Report.

Purpose of report

1. This report is to set out an overview of the development and recent progress of the Dudley Family Hubs and Start for Life programme. Within the report are steps taken to achieve a successful launch and how the service will be delivered across the Borough.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that Members of the Select Committee note the content of the Family Hubs and Start for Life Information and Update Report.

Background

3. **Family Hubs and Start for Life Overview**

The Family Hub and Start for Life programme has transformed Dudley's Family Centre resource into 5 Family Hubs, place based in **Brierley Hill, Coseley, Dudley, Lye and Stourbridge**, with the commitment to the development of a spoke (Hub and Spoke model) for Halesowen, at Halesowen Leisure Centre.

Linked to this is the development of further spoke services across communities to form part of the Family Hub Network. The offer is a 0-19 service (0-25 where young people are care experienced or have SEND) and will support a range of integrated and co-delivered Early Help services with Health and Community based resources. Additionally, the Youth offer delivered by both Dudley Council and

voluntary sector partners will be included in the Hib model and so co-delivered as part of the whole family offer.

The Family Hubs programme sets out a vision for providing families with the integrated Early Help support as needed to care for their children from conception, throughout the early years and into the start of adulthood. This is to enable parents to establish a firm foundation for their children, from which to meet their full potential in life.

Developing the Hub network with key partners including Public Health and the DFE as added investment aimed at specific key focus areas:

- Parenting Support Parent and Infant Relationships.
- Perinatal Mental Health Support
- Language Development and the setting out a Home Learning Environment
- Infant feeding

In this work we are establishing Parent and Carer Panels and Publishing the Start for Life Offer. Also, in support of the development of 0-19 (25 if SEND) offer.

The Family Hubs Model has 3 principles:

- Access - a clear, simple point of access for help and support.
- Connection - Services, professionals & sectors working together and Relationships.
- Building on family strengths – Supportive Family work delivering sustainable change.

Hub Launch

The Dudley Family Hubs launched successfully in August 2023 and required the joining-up of local partners involved in the, early help, early years and family support system – including local authorities, NHS, voluntary, community, faith and charity sector partners – to plan and deliver services in a place-based way to meet all minimum expectations and some “go further” options.

Foundation for Developing Family Hubs

We have developed new Family Hub integrated teams to extend the reach of universal, early help and targets service being believers locally to or with the hubs setting.

Capacity across the whole system required enhancing to enable trained staff to deliver evidence-based programmes and to link work to key strategic objectives across the preventative partnership – set out in the key focus areas above.

Developing the skills, knowledge, and confidence of the workforce within the core Family Hubs teams and wider Family Hubs Network by developing a whole system “Consult, Coach and Co-work” model from specialists linked into the Family Hub Network was needed. Improving knowledge and relationships across the whole system but specifically community assets in order to help families self-navigate to support.

We have developed peer to peer and volunteer resources that add value across the programme and provide “Welcoming Face” and Family Hub Navigator support along with strand specific support.

Pooling budgets and joint commissioning ambitions are to be tested through the programme through commissioning a consortium approach to peer2peer and volunteering that sustains existing good practice, nurtures and scales-up and develops new provision across the 5 townships. This also builds greater sustainability in the model.

The Aims and Goals of the Programme

Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme is a “test and learn” vehicle for a whole system move towards integration. Using “Family Experience” markers to inform, guide and evaluate the journey. Bringing relationship improvements between services and sectors and a workforce more able to work across professional boundaries.

An outcome of this work is increased community and workforce capacity and skills to identify and respond restoratively to support families to identify the support they need much earlier. Integrating services will create capacity for specialist services to offer “consult, coach and co-work” approach to support and reduce escalation.

Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme will provide an opportunity to increase the reach of universal and early help to all families. This will be achieved through improved data sharing and seamless pathways – “less referrals and more introductions” and “persistent engagement” approach to outreach using motivational interviewing approaches.

Development of Family Hubs and the Start for Life Programme is an opportunity to co-locate services both permanently and transiently, thus improving access and service integration. However, as a short

term funded initiative, sustainable commitment and funding will be required beyond the grant term.

Specialist strands of service being delivered within the programme.

Infant Feeding: Dudley Borough has a reasonable breadth of infant feeding support on offer including antenatal infant feeding workshops, an infant feeding team with specialist midwives and community breastfeeding support workers, as well as a commissioned infant feeding peer support service.

However, there is a need to enhance capacity and focus on areas in greatest need. Whilst 22% of minimum requirements have already been achieved for infant feeding, a further 66% of minimum requirements are now close to being achieved in this work.

Identified areas for development include:

- Train and build infant feeding support competencies in the Family Hubs integrated teams, to include the ability to offer drop-in sessions.
- Establish infant feeding equipment loan schemes from each of the five Family Hubs.
- Increase out of hours capacity from the infant feeding team and increase specialist midwife time.
- Recruit more volunteers to expand infant feeding peer support sessions to all five Dudley townships and increase the diversity of these trained infant feeding peer supporters.
- Increase flexibility of peer support offer through moderated digital (chatroom) provision
- To offer interpreting services along-side this work.
- Strengthen infant feeding pathway continuity between midwifery and health visiting services and to build specialist infant feeding capacity to support infants (6+wks) still in need.

Parenting Support: Dudley has a well-regarded parenting support offer. However, this offer is more often targeted at families with greater needs or older children, via Early Help referral. Family Nurse Partnership is commissioned to support young parents. All health visiting staff are trained to Solihull Approach Foundation-level. There

is a rolling Five to Thrive training programme targeting First1001Days frontline workers.

Prior to COVID, midwifery offered parents a one-off Real Birth Company workshop antenatally focused mainly on preparing for delivery, and a parenting education session for grandparents. Postnatally, the health visiting service offered a homegrown 6 week course focused on healthy eating and exercise, the introduction of solids, play with your baby, baby massage and sleep. Neither of these offers have yet been reinstated due to staffing pressures.

In July, 88% of minimum requirements had either been met already or were in process.

Identified areas for development include:

- Delivering support with very early parenting challenges identified.
- Increase the proportion of parents accessing the current online antenatal and postnatal parenting education offer.
- To reinstate group / peer support education opportunities at times that suit parents best.
- Work to normalise parenting education in the antenatal period – using social marketing approaches - *as before COVID take up was reported to be greater amongst higher educated parents.*
- A need to introduce a greater range of evidence-based, face to face parenting education programmes including PPP and PPP for babies.
- Build up knowledge about local community assets that could support parents in F1001D, and as a response to the lack of time by core workers (midwives, health visitors and GPs) to map the current neighbourhood picture.
- Build up awareness of a whole-system multi-agency referral pathway for parenting support.

Early Language (EL) & Home Learning Environment (HLE): More work is required to advance early language and home learning environment maturity, as none of the minimum requirements have yet been met, although 66% are in process.

Identified areas for development include:

- Online EH & HLE information to be made accessible across various local websites, and the 'Black Country Early Outcomes Project website for early language development to be boosted in awareness and usage.
- To co-produce a digital platform of whole-system information and accessibility in relation to EL&HLE - parent and professionals delivered together.
- To review our evidence based HLE interventions and build these into the Integrated Early Years offer across the Family Hub Network (adopting proportionate universalism approaches)
- Designed and deliver the HLE programme pan Dudley Borough. There is a need to fill this gap by developing a whole-system HLE project with key messages across the LA.
- The above work needs to have build in a response to Speech, Language & Communication needs as part of the prevention and targeted response offer via the hubs and its partner services.

What's being achieved and next steps.

The Family Hub model places us in good position to move quickly, responding to emerging need with family hub practitioners delivering advice and support closer to the community. Families and young people will benefit from support and services that trusted where the environment feel safe and welcoming.

Additionally, each Hub is responding to key public health and prevention areas which are critical to ensure families remain healthy and resilient and also where children get the best start in life and are included in a shared community offer and educational experience.

Areas of development include:

- Legacy of Children Centres is replaced by the Hubs and any old stigma attached family centres. We have launched a refreshed Hub brand through communication strategy and engagement - including communities to build the Dudley Family Hub Network brand with satellite sites where families go.
- Legacy of Children Centre staff and functions in Dudley is minimal, so there will be building new Family Hub integrated teams and extending the reach of universal and early identification of need for all families and developing the outreach

model of “persistent engagement” approach using motivational interviewing techniques.

- Capacity across the whole system in being enhancing to enable trained staff to deliver evidence-based programmes.
- We are developing the skills, knowledge and confidence of the workforce within the core FH teams and wider FH Network by developing a whole system “Consult, Coach and Co-work” model from specialists linked into the Family Hub Network.
- We are Improving knowledge and relationships across the whole system but specifically community assets in order to help families self-navigate to support
- We are developing peer to peer and volunteer resources that add value across the programme and provide “Welcoming Face” and Family Hub Navigator support along with strand specific support.

Finance

4. Dudley’s total indicative allocation for the Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme is between £3.71m and £3.87m over the three financial years as shown below.

The funding is allocated across the programme is as follows:

2022/23	2023/24		2024/25		Total	
	Lower range	Upper range	Lower range	Upper range	Lower range	Upper range
£387,000	£1,814,500	£1,804,500	£1,260,000	£1,335,000	£2,714,500	£2,879,500

Legal

5. This report has no direct legal implications for the Council.

Risk Management

6. There are no material risks to the Council’s Risk Management Framework resulting from the contents of this report. However, it should be noted that there are risks in relation to the sustainability of this offer in the long term and to the early help and prevention goals in

delivering the Family Hubs; so as to prevent an escalation of high cost and long standing reliance's on statutory services.

Equality Impact

7. This report has no direct implications for the Council's commitment to equality and diversity.

Human Resources/Organisational Development

8. This report has no direct implications for human resources, organisational development or service transformation.

Commercial/Procurement

9. There is no impact on the potential to commercially trade and no impact on our customer base.

Environment/Climate Change

10. This report has no direct implications on the environment or the Council's work in addressing Climate and achieving Net Zero target by 2041.

Council Priorities and Projects

11. The 2022/2025 Council Plan is clear in its ambitions for Dudley to be the Borough of Opportunity in ensuring that:
- Children and young people benefit from the best possible start in life in our Child Friendly borough.
 - Those with special educational needs and disabilities and care leavers achieve the best possible outcomes
 - Everyone, including our most vulnerable, have the choice, support and control of the services they need to live independently



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Meeting of the Children’s Services Select Committee – (16th November 2023)

Report of the Care Experienced Young Adults Accommodation

Purpose of report

1. To update the Children’s Services Select Committee on the delivery of accommodation to Care Experienced Young Adults as well as provide a response to the Children’s Services Select Committee’s recommendations to improve suitability of accommodation for this cohort of young people.

On the 13th March and 19th July 2023 Children’s Services Select Committee recommended the following:

Councillor C Bayton requested that an item be included on care leavers accommodation and the issues that may be posed going forward.

Recommendations

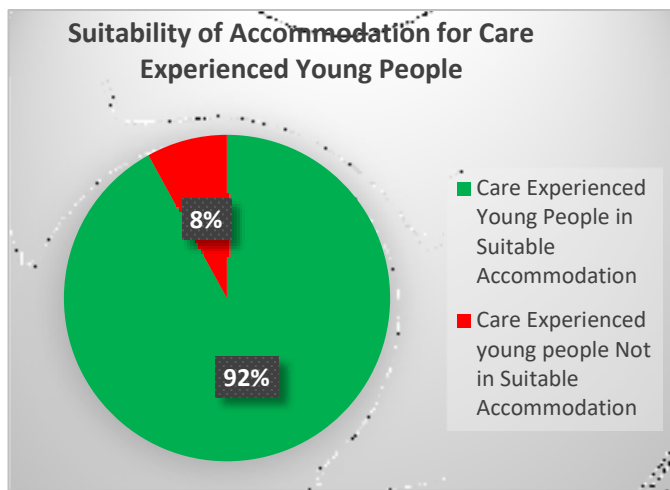
2. It is recommended that the report is noted by the Children’s Services Select Committee.

Background

3. We are supporting 274 Care Experienced Young Adults in Dudley. 22 individuals are currently in accommodation identified as unsuitable, with 252 in suitable accommodation.

The following graph sets out the summary of our young people in suitable accommodation:





To note, custody is automatically considered to be unsuitable accommodation, and this is detailed in [e] below.

Care Experienced young adults living in Dudley have housing priority status. This status does not however, extend to Care Experienced Young Adults who are living outside of Dudley.

Not all Children in Care and Care Experienced young adults want to live independently;

- a) For those that are in foster placement, they are offered Staying Put and preparation for this commences at their 16th Birthday or earlier.
- b) Where a care experienced young adult is not ready to live independently at age 18, where appropriate, we consider Supported Accommodation while the young person is bidding for a property.

Care Experienced young adults can continue to live in Supported Accommodation or live with host families after the age of 18. Examples of Supported Accommodation providers are YMCA or CHADD. There are trained adults who offer practical or emotional support as well as equip the care experienced young adults with the skills they will need for adult life.

- c) Specialist accommodation: This accommodation is for young people who may have a disability or need support with mental health problems. We start working with Adult Mental Health Service or Preparation for Adulthood Service from age 16. At age 17.5, Adult Services complete a Care Act Assessment – where applicable and appropriate, the young person will move into an Adult Services commissioned placement with 24/7 wrap around support. This will continue to be reviewed to ensure suitability of accommodation.

- d) In terms of living independently, young people have the option of increasing their independence skills, initially from age 16 to 18. Where appropriate, they choose to live in Supported Accommodation. During this period, the young person will attend housing pre-tenancy workshop to equip them with life skills. At age 18, the young person will have the choice to move into their own property. 44% of our Care Experienced young adults live independently.
- e) Where a care experienced young person is in custody, they are allocated a YPA, who works collaboratively with Youth Justice / or Probation Service and Housing to ensure that suitable accommodation and support is offered when released from custody.

Support Provided to Care Experienced Young Adults

We work with Care Experienced young adults at their pace. Young people can have additional holistic multi-agency wraparound support, depending on assessed need. This is available to all Care Experienced young adults.

Preparation for Adulthood and Multi-Agency Arrangements.

Before a child/ young person is in care, leaves care, there are a number of steps that take place;

- Each young person has a transition planning meeting in preparation for adulthood. This includes establishing whether a young person can live independently when they turn 18 and what steps need to be taken to enable this to take place.
- Each young person's Transition Plan, which commences at age 16, is regularly reviewed at a Transitions Panel. This is held 6 weekly and chaired by the Head of Service Through Care and attended by;
 - A Housing officer whose focus is on Care Experienced young Adults.
 - The Virtual School,
 - Adult Mental Health,
 - Dudley Finance
 - Children's Commissioning officer.
 - Team Managers and Service Across the Service and the
 - Homelessness Prevention YPA/ Officer
 - The Alliance

Detailed performance monitoring provides assurance of the living arrangements for each relevant young person. Actions are in place to achieve suitable accommodation where possible and reduce the risk of homelessness.

There have been significant improvements in our performance; At the start of this reporting year (April 2023), 80% of our care experienced adults were in suitable accommodation and this has increased to 92% for September 2023.

Homelessness Prevention YPA role

- We have been successful in appointing an experienced Homelessness Prevention YPA (Jenna Wood) who supports care experienced young adults who are at risk of homelessness, as well as completing preventative work to reduce likelihood of risk.
- Jenna commenced work on 1st February 2023. This is a DfE funded role until March 2024. Confirmation of extension has not yet been given by DfE.
- Jenna Wood works collaboratively with the Housing department, liaising closely with the Homeless team, to secure suitable accommodation for care experienced young people.
- Jenna works closely with Community Housing Officers and Anti-Social Behaviour Teams to reduce factors that leads to homelessness, as well as prevent complaints from neighbours.
- Since February 2023, Jenna has worked with 33 young people and successfully reduced risk to homeless. All 33 have secured accommodation.

Next Steps

We continue to work across our Region with the other local authorities and Trusts. A Regional Care Experienced Board has been established and the focus of regional collaboration is to provide a consistent offer to Care Experienced young adults across the region. This includes a review of the housing offer across the Region.

We continue to focus on reducing the numbers of care experienced young adults who are at risk of Homelessness and those in unsuitable accommodation. This work is boosted by the presence of a Homelessness Prevention YPA and closer collaboration with all LA

departments and key partner agencies, including commissioned services, through Transitions Panel as well as targeted work with our young people.

We have recently drafted a joint New Housing Protocol for Care Experienced, with Housing and Commissioning colleagues. We are consulting with Care Experienced young adults during Care Leaver's week in October 2023. We are also consulting Supported Accommodation Providers, to seek their views.

We are currently working with Care Experienced young people to review the Dudley offer, with a plan to share the draft during care leaver's Week.

5. Consultation has taken place with the Housing Department, Commissioning Service, the Care Experienced Young Adults Service.

No conflict of interest has been declared.

This briefing is not seeking a decision from The Children's Select Committee. The report's purpose is to provide an update to the Committee.

Finance

6. There are no additional or changed financial implications in relation to this update.

Law

7. There are legislative implications which have been taken into account when writing this briefing. In November 2022, Ofsted produced New Standards and Inspection Framework for Supported Accommodation Providers. All providers of Supported Accommodation were required to register their provisions with Ofsted from 1st April to 27th October 2023.

Risk Management

8. Department for Education has provided a grant to mitigate the implications for the registration of Supported Accommodation

Equality Impact

9. The work currently being undertaken with Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion, will further explore implications on Care Experienced as a protected characteristic in Dudley. This will include consultation with those in care and the young people who have left care.

Consultation with Care Experienced Young Adults regarding the offer as well as the draft Joint Housing Protocol will take place during the Care Leaver Week.

Human Resources/Organisational Development

10. There are no changes in relation to organisational development or HR implications in this updating briefing.

Commercial/Procurement

11. There is no impact to profit or of trade loss.

Environment/Climate Change

12. There are no additional impacts in relation to Climate Change or the environment with this briefing.

Council Priorities and Projects

13. This briefing supports the delivery of the role of Corporate Parent through members of the Select Committee.
It is in line with the Council Priorities for Dudley to be the safe and health borough, and the borough of opportunity.
14. This briefing does not identify any changed impact on Council or Borough activity. However, it does set out the housing needs of a particular group of residents as our care experienced young adults, and demonstrates the work in place to consistently meet those needs.



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