

Select Committee on Children's Services – 13 November 2008

Report of the Director of Children's Services

Dudley Children and Young People's Trust including the Children and Young People's Plan

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to inform the committee of the remit, membership and activities of the Children's Trust within Dudley, including the development of our Children and Young People's Plan

Background

Children and Young People's Trust

2. Children's Trusts are a response to Lord Laming's report of the inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié, which highlighted the extent to which better working together and better communication are crucial to improving children's services.
3. Children's Trusts have been created to address the fragmentation of responsibilities for children's services. They build upon, bring together and formalise the joint work that has already taken place in many local areas.
4. Section 10 of the Children Act 2004 requires local authorities to make arrangements to promote co-operation to improve well-being for children and places a duty on named 'relevant partners' to cooperate with those arrangements. This is the statutory underpinning of the Children's Trust, which is not named or defined in legislation. The essential features of a Children's Trust are set out in 'Statutory Guidance on Interagency Cooperation to Improve Well-being for Children' issued in 2005 and still extant. But beyond that, the precise structure or name of the Children's Trust is a matter for local determination so it can best fit with local circumstances.
5. The Children Act of 2004 and subsequent statutory guidance makes it clear that Local Authorities and Directors of Children's Services are expected to play a clear leadership role in the development of Children's Trusts and integrated services. However the genuine collaboration of all partner agencies is a vital ingredient in all of this. The LA cannot succeed in improving outcomes for children alone. In Dudley the current level of engagement and history of partnership working was judged to be good in a recent Audit Commission report.
6. In collaboration with our partners we agreed to set up our Children's Trust in Dudley in 2007. The Board of the Trust is part of the Dudley Community Partnership and is currently comprised of the following members;

An Independent Chair,

The Chief Officer, Dudley Council for Voluntary Services,
 The Chief Executive, Dudley Primary Care Trust,
 The Lead Councillor for Older People's Services, Dudley MBC,
 The Chief Officer, Dudley Community Partnership,
 The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Dudley MBC,
 The Chief Executive, Black Country Connexions,
 The Director of Children's Services, Dudley MBC,
 A representative of the Black Country Learning Skills Council,
 The Deputy Director, National Children's Homes,
 A Post 16 College Principal,
 The Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services, Dudley MBC,
 The Chief Superintendents, West Midlands Police Dudley South and North
 The Assistant Director, Children's Specialist Services, Dudley MBC,
 The Assistant Director of Children's Services, Barnardos,
 A Non-Executive Director, Dudley Primary Care Trust,
 The District Manager, Probation Service,
 A Primary Head Teacher,
 The Joint Director of Public Health,
 A Secondary School Head Teacher,
 The Director of Patient Experience and Service Improvement, Dudley Primary
 Care Trust,
 The Director of Partnership Development, Dudley Primary Care Trust
 The Assistant Director, Early Years, Youth and Education Services, Dudley MBC,
 The Head of Development, Children's Services, Dudley MBC,
 The Associate Operations Director, Dudley Group of Hospitals,
 The Assistant Director, Performance and Partnership, Children's Services,
 Dudley MBC,
 The Head of Children's Trust Support, Dudley MBC,

7. Members represent their agencies and also bring experience and knowledge about other sectors and organisations. However, their primary duty is to act in the interest of children and young people in Dudley.
8. In addition to the Board the Trust is comprised of a range of other age related and theme groups. The overall structure of these groups is attached to this report as Appendix 1. However the current structure of the Trust is under review. This committee will be informed of any changes in future reports.
9. The Trust Board is currently discussing a draft constitution to govern its affairs. The document is attached as Appendix 2. It is the intention that the Board will agree the final wording of the constitution at its next meeting in December and this will be reported, along with other activities of the Trust, to the subsequent meeting of this Select Committee.
10. *The work of the Children's Trust is having a positive impact on a number of corporate priorities e.g. neighbourhood management, the health and well being of children and young people, corporate parenting and risk assessment/management by ensuring that we are working in a consistent and integrated manner with key partners.*
11. The DCSF is consulting on additional guidance to help Children's Trusts "raise their game". Improving children's lives is a huge and challenging task - it needs an effective Children's Trust partnership - and the 'Children's Plan: Building Brighter Futures' raises the bar on what is expected. The proposed additional legislation and guidance reflects the experience of developing Children's Trusts

so far and the development of new policies and programmes to support the drive for better outcomes. In particular it stresses the importance of robust and effective arrangements under the section 10 'duty to cooperate' in implementing the vision of the Children's Plan. Most of the new arrangements are already in place in Dudley. If enacted the new legislation should provide relatively few challenges.

Children and Young People's Plan

12. The vision of the Children's Trust, and how it intends to achieve that vision, are set out in the current Children and Young People's Plan (2008 – 2011). The plan was developed in the spring of 2008 and is based upon a wide range of information about the needs of young people e.g. the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment prepared by the Primary Care Trust and the Council, recent Annual Performance Assessments and the 2006 Joint Area Review, and a range of surveys and activities that were conducted to collect the views of young people and community groups.
13. The key priorities for action within the plan are to
 - Improve outcomes for children and young people in care
 - Improve outcomes for children and young people with learning disabilities

And to ensure that all children and young people

- Have the best possible start in life, are encouraged to follow healthy lifestyles, and be as sexually, mentally and emotionally healthy as possible
- Feel safe and are protected from bullying and discrimination
- Achieve stretching educational standards at primary and secondary school
- Have support, and take responsibility for engaging in law abiding and positive behaviour in and out of school, and engage in decision making and supporting the community and environment
- Engage in further education, employment or training on leaving school

We will report to the Select Committee about progress against these priorities at future meetings. Dudley's quarterly reporting arrangements already contain much data that is relevant to these priorities.

Finance

14. Funding for the Children's Trust and the Children and Young People's Plan is based upon existing budgets, with the potential for some additional grants to be secured in future through the achievement of targets within the Local Area Agreement. Our work in this area is dependent upon collaboration between the representatives of the partner agencies. Agreements have been reached by partners to pool funding in the area of integrated service management and the Children's Fund.
15. The financial strategy for our plan is based on the following principles:
 - investment decisions are focused on the extent to which activities contribute to better outcomes for children and young people
 - resources should be focused on preventative service delivery wherever possible, which in turn will reduce budget pressures

- capital investment will support inter-agency working to promote and support high quality learning and working environments
- resource decisions are based on agreed priorities and need

Law

16. Section 10 of the Children Act 2004 requires local authorities to make arrangements to promote co-operation to improve well-being for children and places a duty on named 'relevant partners' to cooperate with those arrangements. This is the statutory underpinning of the children's trust, which is not named or defined in legislation. The essential features of a children's trust are set out in 'Statutory Guidance on Interagency Cooperation to Improve Well-being for Children' issued in 2005 and still extant. But beyond that, the precise structure or name of the children's trust is a matter for local determination so it can best fit with local circumstances.

Equality Impact

17. Children and Young People are consulted and involved extensively as part of the work of the Children's Trust and the development of the Children's Plan. The aim of the Trust and the Plan is to improve outcomes and well being for all children and young people, and our work in this area is having a positive impact e.g. the Annual Performance Assessment for Children's Services in Dudley in 2007 judged that the overall contribution of services from both the Council and all other partners is good.

Recommendation

18. It is recommended that the Committee note and approve this report and the work it describes and request reports on future progress.



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