

SELECT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Wednesday, 25th March, 2009 at 6.00 p.m. in Committee Room 2 at the
Council House, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Councillor Nottingham (Chairman)
Councillor Ms Boleyn (Vice-Chairman)
Councillors Mrs Dunn, Hill, Islam, J Martin, Ms Partridge, Southall, Stanley,
Wright; Mrs Cunneen, Mrs Roe, Mr Smith, Ms Verdegem and the Reverend
Wickens.

OFFICERS

Interim Director of Finance Designate (Lead Officer to the Committee), the
Interim Director of Children's Services, the Assistant Director for Performance
and Partnership (Children's Services), the Interim Assistant Director of
Children's Services (Early Years, Youth and Education Services) and Miss K
Fellows (Directorate of Law and Property)

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APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of
Councillors Crumpton, Hanif and Mrs Rogers; Mr J Jones, Mr Taylor and Mrs
Simms.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No member declared a personal or prejudicial interest, in accordance with the
members' Code of Conduct, in respect of any matter to be considered at this
meeting.

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MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 21st
January, 2009 be approved as a correct record and signed.

62 SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was reported that Councillor J Martin had been appointed as substitute for Councillor Hanif and Councillor Southall had been appointed as substitute for Councillor Mrs Rogers for this meeting of the Committee only.

63 COMMENTS OF THE CHAIRMAN

The Chairman welcomed Bill Baker to the meeting in his capacity as the new Lead Officer to the Committee.

64 THE LOOKING GLASS CENTRE

The Interim Director of Children's Services advised that tours would be arranged of the Centre and details would be made available to members in relation to dates and times.

The Chairman stated that he and Councillor Mrs Walker had attended the facility and encouraged other members to do so.

65 STANDARDS REPORT – PERFORMANCE DATA

A report of the Interim Director of Children's Services was submitted on the latest data available on the performance of schools in the Borough.

In presenting the report the Interim Assistant Director of Children's Services indicated that:-

- The Key Stage 2 data had not been validated, however it was likely to be either on the day of the Committee meeting or the following day by the latest.
- The Key Stage 3 information was extremely provisional, as following the national decision to replace pupil testing with teacher assessments in order to report upon the progress of pupils, Members were made aware that the data may not be a true assessment of the pupil's ability;

In presenting the report particular reference was made to the Key Stage 1 Early Years table, confirming that the number of children who scored six or more points would be ready for the next stage of learning.

It was stated that following an assessment of children accessing education systems, it had been evidenced that children who attended reception classes would be behind the national average in relation to communication, language and literacy skills and significant work was being undertaken to ensure that those children would be ready to enter into the Key Stage 1 of learning.

It was further stated that the table referred to upon page two of the report, indicated that 72% of Dudley Borough children had scored six points or more, which provided an increase of 13% of children that would be educationally ready to enter Key Stage 1 of learning within 2008, thus evidencing continuing improvements due to the substantial work undertaken.

In responding to several questions from members, the Interim Director of Children's Services indicated that the point scoring would be as a result of a range of criteria, revolving around observing children in learning; it had become evident that children entering nurseries and reception classes had not been interacting with children and other adults and they had been having far more contact with television, thus affecting their communication, language and literacy skills, however work had been undertaken with parents and children in order to encourage parenting skills to deal with children's interaction skills. There had also been the provision of Children's Centres and family support services. Following the inspection of all schools and nurseries, the reports indicated that staff were well equipped to support the needs of children and a 13% increase was a step forward in the right direction.

It was further reported that specific areas of the Borough had been targeted in relation to the provision of Children's Centres, and it was believed that this would provide a firm foundation for the future.

The Interim Assistant Director of Children's Services further indicated that in relation to science results, Dudley Borough was just slightly below the national average.

Reference was made to the "trends over time" tables, which evidenced that Dudley Borough had reached a plateau, in relation to the number of children who had reached Key Stage 2, although it was accepted that continuing work was being carried out in some areas of work, Teachers carried out assessments of children who began to have difficulties in moving their learning forward, to establish what help and assistance would be required in order that one to one tuition programmes could be embarked upon. The Key Stage 2 results were an improvement overall and these results would be further developed next year.

It was stated that children's skills were being addressed upon a more individual basis, and in relation to the percentage of children attaining level two and above in Key Stage 1, reading, writing and maths skills resulted in Dudley Borough rising to a higher position within the table.

The Interim Director of Children's Services stated that some of the Black Country Challenge funding continued to be allocated for the provision of further resources that would be utilised to enhance the pace of change in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1.

In responding to a question from a member, the Interim Director of Children's Services confirmed that work continued with all vulnerable groups and she would provide a breakdown to a future meeting on the Key Stage 1 and 2 activities being undertaken.

The Interim Assistant Director of Children's Services reported that the work undertaken had now begun to impact upon results, with these making a marked improvement in that Key Stage 2 results had now mirrored the national average of level 4 and above in English, Mathematics and Science.

It was indicated that schools where children started from low bases had progressed significantly with the trending data showing year by year improvements.

A member welcomed the positive change and congratulated those who had, and continued to, work hard, and the Interim Director of Children's Services confirmed that she would pass on this message to all of the schools involved.

In responding to comments made by another member, the Chairman indicated that he continued to be impressed with Dudley Schools, given the funding available to them and remained confident in both officers and teachers.

In responding to questions from members, the Interim Director of Children's Services indicated that:-

- As far as Key Stage 1 results were concerned, Dudley Borough did appear above Sandwell in some sections of the tables;
- Schools and staff continued to work hard which was evidenced by the best ofsted report received to date;
- Dudley Borough had a changing population with pupils moving in and out of schools and areas, which impacted upon the accuracy of results;
- In relation to the foundation stage teacher assessments these results were difficult to moderate across the country.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the information contained in the report submitted, on the latest data available on the performance of schools in the Borough, be noted.

- (2) That the Interim Director of Children's Services report to the next meetings on the Key Stage 1 and 2 activities being undertaken.

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DUDLEY'S PARENTING SUPPORT AND FAMILY LEARNING STRATEGY

A report of the Interim Director of Children's Services was submitted outlining the main strands of the Dudley Parenting Support and Family Learning Strategy.

Following presentation of the report by the Interim Assistant Director of Children's Services reference was made to The Dudley Parenting Map, and it was reported that tiers three and four would deal with complex needs where specialist support was required for example with homeless children and young families.

In responding to a question from the Chairman, the Interim Director of Children's Services advised that the incentives that would be offered to parents/families to access services offered by Children Centres would include family days together in order that they could undertake recreational activities that may not be otherwise available to them and this would encourage quality family time.

RESOLVED

That the information in the report submitted, outlining the main strands of the Dudley Parenting Support and Family Learning Strategy, be noted.

67

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ACTION PLAN 2009/10

A report of the Interim Director of Children's Services was submitted on the Equality and Diversity Action Plan for the Directorate of Children's Services for 2009/10.

In presenting the report, the Race Equality Officer, Early Years Youth and Education Services, made particular reference to the Equality Impact Statement, explaining the proposed actions for promoting equality and diversity by the Directorate of Children's Services during 2009/10.

It was reported that within the Equality Scheme, the directorate had identified overall equality and diversity priorities for its service areas linked to the three years of the Scheme, and the Equality Plan would be significant in every aspect of work completed in relation to children in the Dudley Borough.

It was indicated that the report addressed the areas that the Directorate were targeting, and further development work would be required, which had been included within the year's action plan, and that increasing specific targeting support would impact upon young children.

It was reported that the Pathfinder Initiative would maintain support to young people, in order to provide them with an understanding of their communities, to prevent them from harming communities in the future.

Support for the work included within the report was expressed and the Directorate was congratulated on the positive provision aspects of the work that had been and would be undertaken.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report submitted, on the Annual Equality and Diversity action plan for 2009/10 for the Directorate of Children's Services be noted.

DUDLEY GRID FOR LEARNING (DGfL) UPDATE.

A report of the Interim Director of Children's Services was submitted on the work that DGfL had been engaged in which helped to achieve the five outcomes of Every Child Matters and raised standards.

In presenting the report, the Education Improvement Adviser for ICT gave a powerpoint presentation on the Dudley Grid for Learning portal/Learning platform, advising that there had been a need for this, as learning for children had resulted in major changes, whereby most schools had interactive white boards that retained information in relation to lessons, and that information could be recalled.

It was reported that learning platforms provided secure access in order that children and young people could access online learning materials, and research had shown that children who utilised technology to learn had been performing better, and were more likely to remain at school and continue with their further education when they reached the age of sixteen.

The Education Improvement Adviser referred members to the Dudley Grid for Learning "My Page", illustrating the learning activities that would be available.

It was also indicated that the Dudley Grid for Learning Portal contained information in relation to health and safety required by schools.

Using Computers for Pupils Funding from DCSF enabled the Directorate to provide four hundred and forty disadvantaged secondary pupils, and all

secondary Looked After Children with a laptop computer to enable them to continue their learning at home and further funding had been acquired to provide home access to Information Communication Technology for targeted groups including year five and six looked after children, pupils in danger of becoming not in employment, education or training, (NEETS), Young offenders and teenage parents, and it was hoped in the future that the directorate could address other children's Information and Communication technology needs.

In responding to several questions from members, the Education Improvement Adviser indicated that:-

- Schools would be able to talk to each other and access all materials, information and services wherever they were;
- The Kingswinford School had not subscribed to the broadband and Learning Platform services and was not part of the fully managed Information and Communication Technology, however they continued to be offered the service, and were able to access some of the materials, however they did not receive the maintenance, support and training aspect of the service.

In responding to further questions from members, the Interim Director of Children's Services stated that options would continue to be investigated in order to continue to provide a managed service to all schools after January, 2011, and this had been an outstanding piece of work, that would lead on from the Standards Report presented earlier.

The Chairman congratulated the Education Improvement Adviser on this power point presentation and the report.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report submitted, on the Dudley Grid for Learning, (DGfL), update, and in the power point presentation given, be noted and that the development of DGfL be supported.

69

QUARTERLY CORPORATE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT.

The Quarterly Corporate Performance Management Report in relation to the activities relating to the terms of reference of the Select Committee on Children's Services for the third quarter of 2008/09 was submitted.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report submitted be noted.

CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION REGARDING PERFORMANCE IN PARTICULAR AREAS

A report of the Interim Director of Children's Services was submitted on performance measures, and factors affecting performance measures, in specific areas highlighted in the quarterly reporting process.

The Interim Director of Children's Services indicated that at the last meeting of the Committee it had been agreed that the instant report would be produced in order to update the Committee, and the Directorate would continue to bring further reports to the Committee in this regard.

In presenting the report, the Assistant Director of Children's Services for Performance and Partnership indicated that the report included details of actions and improvements undertaken that had been and would continue to be undertaken by the Directorate in order to improve performance.

In responding to comments and observations made, the Interim Director of Children's Services stated that it had been accepted that areas of improvement would be required, and the key performance indicators were improving, however in particular the target figure in relation to young people not in employment, education or training, (NEETS) would be challenging as it would be difficult to get these people back into work given the economic down turn, however notwithstanding this, the target figures had not been reduced by the Directorate.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report submitted be noted.

REMARKS OF THE CHAIRMAN

This being the last meeting of the Committee for the current municipal year, the Chairman thanked members and officers for their contributions to the meetings.

The Interim Director of Children's Services thanked the Chairman for his comments and indicated that she would take these back to the officers and schools. She confirmed that the Directorate would continue to be extremely committed in response to comments and recommendations made.

The meeting ended at 7.40 pm

CHAIRMAN