

**Select Committee on Children's Services – 23 March 2011**

**Report of the Acting Director of Children's Services**

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

1. Percentage of initial assessments for children's social care carried out in less than 7 working days
2. Looked After Children (LAC) cases which were reviewed within the required timescales
3. Percentage of young offenders engaged in suitable education, employment or training (EET)

**Purpose of Report**

1. To inform members of the committee about performance measures, and factors affecting performance measures, in a small number of specific areas highlighted in the quarterly reporting process where performance is below target. To inform members of actions being taken and which are planned, to improve performance.

**Background**

2. The Directorate of Children's Services reports regularly to Select Committee on issues where we are performing below target in order to help members understand why this is the case, and what the Directorate of Children's Services and the Children's Trust is doing to improve. This report is based upon the performance measures within our Directorate Strategic Plan. In some cases performance measures have not changed since last time as they are based upon data that is only reported annually e.g. examination results.
3. It should be remembered that these matters are reported in the overall context of Children's Services having been judged as good in the 2009 Comprehensive Area Assessment.

**Percentage of assessments of social care referrals carried out within 7 days of referral**

**Actual performance**

Actual performance has improved from 55.9% in quarter 1 to 62.6% in quarter 3 but remains below target. Two recent OfSTED inspection of safeguarding have indicated that where children are at risk of significant harm action is taken promptly to safeguard them and this was identified as a strength. The Safeguarding Board continues to work

effectively with all partner agencies. However there has been a rising trend of referral to children's social care which has affected our ability to respond to initial assessments and therefore there remains the potential for some children to not receive services in a timely way to meet their needs. This is particularly affected by the police notifications for domestic abuse. A new process has been put in place to deal with these referrals more effectively and this is now leading to improved performance against this indicator.

Key elements of our Improvement Plan are:

- Increased use of the common assessment process in order to safely reduce the numbers of children being referred for social care assessment
- Taking steps to ensure that domestic abuse notifications can be dealt with as "contacts" rather than referrals – this should reduce the conversion rate to initial assessments by 20% and reduce the amount of admin work
- Re designation of roles and responsibilities to establish a Domestic Abuse Response Team
- Development of regional and local protocols in relation to class A drugs and substance misuse in order to ensure appropriate referral practice
- Extending the Team Around the Child school pilot which is proving successful in meeting early need without referral to Children's Social Care (CSC)
- Working with senior managers in other agencies to improve referral practice
- Developing multi-agency teams to work with young people and families at an early stage to help prevent the need for referral to Children's Social Care, and to increase capacity by workers in these teams remaining engaged should referral become necessary
- Appointing additional agency workers to the Assessment Teams to provide capacity to deal with the volume of work

**Looked after Children cases which were reviewed within the required timescales**

Performance has improved slightly since quarter 2. High numbers of Looked After Children continue to have a significant impact on our performance in this area. In addition there are high levels of sick leave among our Independent Review Officer team. Our Independent Review Officers have an average case load which is much higher than the recommended position nationally. As a service we have been operating above our establishment of 5.1 Independent Reviewing Officers with two Independent Reviewing Officers undertaking an additional ten hours between them, and through the engagement of a sessional Independent Reviewing Officers averaging two days per week. We have recently invited a consultancy review from the Council's Audit Services team to explore other steps that might help and we are awaiting our initial feedback from this. The findings will be incorporated into an overarching improvement plan for the Independent Reviewing Officer service. We have recently changed the management arrangements for the Reviewing Officer service to

provide more frequent supervision and support for the team than the previous system allowed.

### **Percentage of young offenders in education, employment or training**

At the time of the drafting of this report quarter 3 data was not available. All cases of young people not engaged in education, employment or training have been analysed on an individual basis from which no general cause has been identified for this current rate of performance.

The Youth Offending Service has continued to support young people, to engage and remain in employment, education or training.

Young Offenders are a priority group within our Targeted Youth Support Plan. Our Youth Offending Service (YOS) treat young offenders who are in danger of becoming not in education, employment or training as a priority. There are monthly meetings attended by Youth Offending Service staff, Connexions Personal Advisers and others to analyse data and to discuss action plans for individual “hard to engage” cases. Systems are in place with Connexions to support any young person who has completed their order and is still not in education, employment or training. Advice and Guidance is offered to all not in education, employment or training young people. A weekly job club has been developed specifically for young offenders. This has enabled some of the obstacles, which prevent engagement to be addressed. Post 16 providers meet young people face to face in order to support them into provision.

### **Finance**

5. There are no direct financial consequences arising from the information contained within the report. The work in relation to monitoring performance information for the Directorate is met from existing budgets.

### **Law**

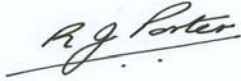
6. The main pieces of legislation governing these aspects of our work are the Children Act 2004 and the Education and Inspections Act of 2006.

### **Equality Impact**

7. OfSTED judges that Dudley’s Services for all children and young people are good but agrees with our self assessment that the progress of children in care and those with learning difficulties/disabilities should continue to be seen as priorities for improvement.

### **Recommendation**

8. That the report and the actions being taken be noted by the committee.



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**Jane Porter**  
**Acting Director of Children's Services**

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

**List of Background Papers; Percentage of Children in Poverty from NI 116 (2007) by Ward; HMRC September 2010.**