

Minutes of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 12th March, 2015 at 6 p.m.
In the Council Chamber, The Council House, Dudley

Present:

Councillor I Cooper (Vice-Chair) in the Chair.
Councillors M Attwood, P Bradley, Z Islam, L Jones, I Marrey, M Mottram, C Perks and K Shakespeare; Mr A Qadus and Mr D Tinsley.

Invitees:

Mrs L Coulter and Ms J Sinden.

Officers:

R Sims (Assistant Director of Housing Strategy and Private Sector, Directorate of Adult, Community and Housing Services) – Interim Lead Officer, P Sharratt (Interim Director of Children's Services), T Brittain and H Powell (Acting Assistant Directors, Education Services), C Ballinger (Divisional Lead-Social Work) and J Prashar (Divisional Lead-Looked After Children) - all Directorate of Children's Services and R Sanders (Assistant Principal Officer (Democratic Services))

30 **Chairmanship**

The Chair, Councillor Mottram indicated that the Vice Chair, Councillor Cooper, would chair this meeting of the Committee. Councillor Cooper thereupon took the chair.

31 **Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of Councillors N Barlow, C Billingham, R Scott-Dow and from Reverend A Wickens. Apologies for absence were also received from the invitees, Mr Lynch, Mr Nesbitt and Mr Ridney.

32 **Substitution**

It was reported that Councillor K Shakespeare was serving in place of Councillor N Barlow for this meeting of the Committee only.

33 **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, were made in respect of any matter to be considered at this meeting.

34 **Minutes**

Resolved

That subject to the inclusion of the name of Councillor Mottram in the list of apologies for absence, the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 21st January, 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed.

35 **Home to School Transport**

At this juncture, Councillor Cooper reported that the Cabinet Member for Children's Services had requested the establishment of a Working Group of Members and Officers to consider the issue of Home to School Transport and that the Interim Director of Children's Services was making the arrangements.

36. **Dudley Schools' OfSTED Outcomes**

The Committee considered a report of the Interim Director of Children's Services on the performance of Dudley schools and settings in OfSTED inspections during the calendar year 2014.

The report set out the outcomes for all Dudley schools inspected during the period. It was noted that the report did not include short thematic or subject inspections and nor did it include the outcomes of HM Inspectorate monitoring reports for schools which had been judged to "Require Improvement"; or "Serious Weakness" or "Special Measures" unless the visit was converted to full inspection to bring them out of category.

The report indicated the outcomes for schools in respect of the numbers of those schools judged as outstanding, good, requiring improvement or inadequate and compared Dudley's performance in respect of Good or Outstanding outcomes against national outcomes. Academies were included in the Dudley figures.

Further to the presentation of the information by the Acting Assistant Directors for Education Services responsible respectively for Secondary and Primary schools, Mr Powell and Ms Brittain, Members asked questions to which responses were given as indicated.

In response to a question on details of an inspection concerning a secondary Academy, Mr Powell indicated that, while the Council generally had a good and improving relationship with Academies, those establishments operated outside the local authority umbrella and the authority was not entitled to receive detailed information regarding the support they arranged. Academies were able to purchase local authority support, however, should they wish to do so.

A Member expressed concern about the quality of OfSTED inspections in so far as he considered that they placed disproportionate impetus on results in comparison with the quality of teaching. In response, Ms Brittain, reported that there had been some challenges to the way OfSTED inspections had been conducted and one complaint from Dudley had been made. Ms Brittain commented that changes to overall judgements rarely resulted from representations but that HM Inspectorate did take note for future reference. Meetings were held with HM Inspectorate three times a year and particular issues and views on particular inspectors were reported on. It was noted that OfSTED's arrangements would change in September, 2015 in that from then they would oversee all inspections in house.

A question was asked on the measures and services provided by the Council to assist schools in making improvements, in response to which a summary of the traded services available from the local authority was given by Ms Brittain. Ms Brittain also indicated that some support was provided free of charge if a school was in category, in order for it to improve more quickly. The point was made that lesser direct support was available to Secondary schools since specialist expertise was often employed.

A question was asked on the notice given by HM Inspectorate before an inspection was made. In response, it was indicated that, at most, half a day's notice was given and that sometimes there was no notice at all.

Upon allegations being made about practices employed by schools aimed at bringing only the more able staff and pupils to the attention of the Inspectorate when inspections were carried out, the Interim Director of Children's Services responded that this would be extremely difficult to achieve given the very short notice made regarding inspections. She stated, however, that should any evidence be produced, the school in question would be thoroughly investigated. On being advised by Members and an attendee of strong rumours that the sort of practices alluded to had in fact happened, a lengthy discussion ensued and it was agreed that the issue of protection for whistle blowers of this type of manipulation should be considered in the next municipal year.

The point was made that, in instances where manipulation was suspected, evidence was able to be supplied. The need to protect whistle blowers was emphasised. It was recognised that policies were in place to deal with the matter but that strong governing bodies were necessary to ensure that the policies were applied.

On the issue of safeguarding, Ms Brittain outlined the far more proactive approach by OfSTED to individual children whom were not in school and had appeared to have gone missing, and the actions of the Council in response.

Resolved

- (1) That the information contained in the report submitted and the questions asked and responses given, as indicated above, be noted.
 - (2) That the Committee support the inclusion of the protection of whistle blowers in relation to the school inspection issues described above in its work programme for 2015/16.
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37

Standards Report – Performance Data

The Committee considered a report of the Interim Director of Children's Services presenting an analysis of the performance of children and young people in Dudley schools and settings during the 2013/14 academic year..

The report indicated the expectations of OfSTED regarding pupil achievement at the end of each Key Stage and showed the proportion of children in Dudley schools whom had reached the Department for Education's (DfE) expected level and the average point score which reflected how well the cohort as a whole had achieved.

The report indicated current position with regard to Reading, Writing and Mathematics in each of Key Stages 1 to 4 in 2014 in comparison to the two preceding academic years. Regarding the Foundation Stage, the DfE's measure was stated as "a good level of development." The Acting Assistant Directors of Children's Services, Ms Brittain and Mr Powell, presented the information and gave details in respect of the Primary and Secondary sectors respectively.

In relation to the different Key Stages, the report noted the following:

- It was anticipated that Dudley would be below the national average in relation to "a good level of development" and the average point score in the Foundation Stage.
- Dudley was in line with the national average in Key Stage 1.
- In relation to Key Stage 2, Dudley was in line with the national average in achieving Level 4 in Mathematics, Reading and Writing. Whereas, with regard to progress from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2, Writing was above the national average and Mathematics in line, Reading was below the national average.
- In relation to Key Stage 4, Dudley was below the national average in all comparitors.

The report indicated that in 2014 Dudley was below the DfE floor standards in Level 4+ in all of Reading, Writing and Mathematics and two levels progress in those subjects.

The report stated the current position with regard to pupils receiving Pupil Premium in comparison with the picture nationally, in all Key Stages.

Following the presentation of the report, Ms Brittain, clarified the distinction between teacher accounts and tests, indicating that Writing was a teacher account, with pupils being assessed over a period, while Reading was a test with pupils examined with immediacy.

On being questioned on whether the performance in the Foundation Stage and in the later Key Stages represented a cause for concern, the Acting Assistant Director, Mr Powell, explained the changes in procedure where there was now a requirement for all courses to have a terminal examination; that early entry to examinations had ceased; and that vocational courses were not scored for GCSE, thus disadvantaging pupils who undertook vocational courses in terms of qualifications. The Acting Assistant Director, Ms Brittain asked the Committee to note that with level 4, Dudley had achieved national levels for the first time in 14 years and that with Mathematics, which had been problematical for some years, results were improving, albeit that this was not the case in Key stage 4.

The point was made by Mr Powell that the local authority could not make a direct impact on schools as it no longer had the necessary resources.

A question was asked on how Pupil Premium was being used, what happened in cases of poor use and whether best practice was shared, to which Ms Brittain responded, referring to meetings held between schools where information was shared and where Pupil Premium was a routine item.

Ms Brittain also indicated that, since the number of Pupil Premium children differed school by school, the finance allocated to each varied correspondingly. She pointed out that what worked for one school did not necessarily work for another. She confirmed that a review of Pupil Premium use was conducted as part of HM Inspections in which a look was taken at how the allocation was being spent and what lessons could be learned. Mr Powell then reported on the attainment levels of Pupil Premium pupils against other pupils in Secondary schools, stating that although the gap had narrowed, it had remained high in schools with high attainment levels.

On being asked about the action being taken by the local authority to narrow the gap in attainment between Pupil Premium and other pupils, Mr Powell indicated that this was a subject raised routinely at the respective Primary and Secondary Heads' training days and referred to bonding and monitoring letters sent to schools in this regard in which anticipated outcomes for Pupil Premium children was requested. Ms Brittain also indicated that the data regarding Pupil Premium children was looked at carefully and monitored.

Further information was requested by a Member on the floor standards pertaining to the two schools referred to in page 10 of the agenda papers. Mr Powell responded that one was an Academy that had declined support offered by the local authority and where the authority was empowered only to alert the DfE, which it had done. The other school was a maintained school which had only recently come out of category, for which the local authority was currently providing consultant support and was brokering support with other authorities.

In response to a question from a Member regarding the impact of the Key Stage 4 results on progress of pupils into 6th Forms, Mr Powell confirmed that the current position was not good since the benchmark for pupils to attend 6th form or College education for level 2 courses was 5 A*-C GCSE grades, therefore Dudley pupils were being disadvantaged. The point was made that some secondary pupils who started from a high level were only achieving a grade C in GCSE and thus the conclusion to be reached was that Dudley schools were not always pushing pupils capable of higher attainment. On being so requested, Mr Powell agreed to provide quantitative information indicating the number of Dudley children who proceeded to University education.

On being asked on whether Dudley received and compared statistical information on attainment by Colleges, Mr Powell indicated that there was no obligation for Colleges to share data, although all three Dudley Colleges did provide it. It was more difficult to share information involving Colleges from outside Dudley. Mr Powell made the point that the Connexions Service continued to operate and consequently was able to provide support for any young person requiring it in their transition to Post 16, particularly from Year 9 onwards, and that the number of young persons not in education, employment or training was declining.

In response to a question on whether schools worked in clusters to share expertise and ideas, Mr Powell indicated that Primary Schools were generally willing to work in this manner but that maintained Secondary schools were less inclined to do so. Academies, however, were joining together in this regard and Ellowes Hall and Crestwood schools were working together as were King Edward VI 6th Form College and Ridgewood High School. The trend nationally was for schools to work together and the DfE was encouraging this practice. Mr Powell indicated further that the relationship between the local authority and Academies was improving, in particular, the local authority kept in contact with Academies and Academies attended local authority meetings.

Resolved

- (1) That the information contained in the report, and the comments and responses recorded above, be noted.
- (2) That the information requested on how many Key Stage 4 children from Dudley proceed to University be obtained and reported to the Committee.

38

Child Neglect

An oral report on the issue of Child Neglect was given.

Following a brief introduction by the Interim Director of Children's Services, in which she made the point that a significant number of children with additional needs and whom were in social care, were in this position through Child Neglect, a presentation was given on the different issues which resulted in children being neglected. As part of the presentation, audio training interviews with children the subject of Child Protection Orders because of Child Neglect were shown.

In providing statistical information, the Divisional Lead – Social Work stated that, over the year 12630 contacts had been made to the local authority for children requiring a service from the Council during 2013/14. This was a rising number. Just over a third of the enquiries progressed to the need for Children's Social Care to provide a service. However, there is still a need to consider what support might be needed by the remaining two thirds of the cohort. An average of 80% of cases needing a service from Children's Social care were deemed to need an assessment.

On the issue of Domestic Violence, 2658 cases had been reported to the Police, an increase of over 40% over the year. The role of the local authority and its partners was to consider the support that needed to be provided for the children in the families.

Dudley's position was that there were now 314 children subject to Child Protection Plans, of whom 83% were subject to Plans for reasons of neglect and emotional harm.

On a comment being made that the statistical information represented an average of 35 contacts and one Child Protection Plan per day, in response to a question on whether sufficient resources were available, the Interim Director referred to the screening required in each case and the work being undertaken to secure earlier intervention through signposting. The challenge was to obtain improved partnership working. She did not consider the service sufficiently resourced.

In relation to Adolescent Neglect, the Divisional Lead – Looked After Children reported that this was more widespread than previously thought and referred to the impact this type of neglect could have on their adolescence. She referred particularly to the emotional effect of children who lived in accommodation far from home or who had run away from home, a feature of which being that they did not feel cared for. The Divisional Lead – Social Care indicated that, nationally, Child Neglect had been a factor in some 60% of Serious Case reviews and was a prominent feature in suicides among 11-15 year olds. There were concerns regarding the negative impact children suffering from neglect could have on their own future parenting skills.

A Member expressed disappointment that joint agency working was not currently effective in providing early intervention and it was agreed that partnership working in this regard was an area that should be scrutinised in the coming year.

On being asked about prosecutions on domestic violence and associated information, the Interim Director agreed to provide the invitee who raised the matter with the computer link.

In response to questions, the Divisional Lead-Social Care then explained the ways in which domestic abuse were reported and notified and confirmed that both verbal and physical abuse was included as domestic violence. The most serious cases were considered at a Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) which was chaired by the Police.

On the issue of case loads on Child Neglect matters, the Divisional Lead-Social Work indicated that this was 20-25 cases per Social Worker, allocation having regard to the complexity of the case. The Divisional Lead – Social Care then explained how cases were dealt with, including the impact on children when parents were not able to meet their needs. In reply to another question, the Divisional Lead – Social Care stated that figures relating to child abuse resulting from foetal alcohol consumption were not available as it was a complex syndrome with a range of symptoms and effects. She described that babies may need special care to deal with the effects of alcohol. She also described how parental problems could make a parent 'emotionally unavailable' to their children, and the impact of this at different stages of child development.

Regarding the Troubled Families Programme, a comment was made that the national initiatives such as this tended to be prescriptive at the outset but more flexible later. It was explained that our programme in Dudley had been positively evaluated, and that as an early adopter for the next stage we had the opportunity to develop some additional flexibility in service criteria. Alongside this work is being undertaken to mainstream the approach, linking with other services.

Reference was made to a particular case of child neglect and to the role of the school governor, in response to which the Interim Director asked the Member concerned to contact her.

In indicating that the purpose of the presentation at this stage was to alert the Committee to the issue of Child Neglect, The Interim Director offered Members the facility to visit the Council's Troubled Families Team.

Resolved

- (1) That the presentation be received and the comments made, as referred to above, be noted.
- (2) That the consideration by the Committee of Child Neglect, including partnership working in this respect, in the next municipal year be supported.

39 **Thanks to Committee**

This being the last meeting of the Committee in the current municipal year, the Vice- Chair thanked all Members for their work over the year.

40 **Pauline Sharratt**

This being the last meeting Ms Sharratt would be attending in her professional capacity pending her retirement from the Council's service, the Vice-Chair thanked Ms Sharratt for her outstanding contribution to children's services and child safety issues in Dudley over the years.

The meeting ended at 8.35 p.m.

CHAIR