
CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

21ST MARCH 2013

Report of the Lead Officer

Scrutiny – a new approach for the Children's Services Committee

Purpose of Report

1. To introduce the new approach to scrutiny for the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee and the theme identified for this first session on "Journey to Improvement."

Background

2. The Cabinet have determined that a new approach to scrutiny be developed. Work to clarify the approach has been underway during 2012/13 led by meetings of Scrutiny Chairs. This new approach has been developed due to a sense that previous arrangements for scrutiny may not have allowed Committees to consider specific issues deeply enough.
3. Together with the Chair, I wrote to the Committee ahead of tonight's meeting to advise the Committee of the new approach so that full and active participation in the new approach might be encouraged.
4. The intention is that the new approach be positive and support the overall work to improve outcomes for children and young people in Dudley Borough. It is understood that this deeper focus may raise some challenging issues but it is believed that any such issues can be responded to in the context of an overall positive approach.
5. To help develop the approach for the Council overall, the Chair has offered this evening's meeting as a 'pilot' for the new approach. The intention is that all Committees should be able to focus more deeply on identified themes. For the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee, this can be seen as a development of its practice over recent years, where deeper focus has been given to more focussed issues.
6. At this time of year, the Committee usually considers a report on the validated school examination outcomes in Dudley Borough of the previous year. This issue is carried forward this evening under the heading of "Journey to improvement." It is set alongside a wider consideration of the changes that have occurred in the linkages between schools and the Council, the development of academies and the influence of these factors on the "journey to improvement" for children and young people in Dudley Borough. To support their consideration, a number of

“witnesses” have been invited to share their views and experience overall on the theme identified.

7. From discussion with the Chair and Vice-Chair, three practical points are carried forward as the new approach is developed:
 - Committee members remain free to pursue specific questions with the Cabinet Member, the Director and her colleagues outside of the formal Committee meeting e.g. concerns about named individuals, institutions or issues
 - the principle that scrutiny is not about named individuals or institutions remains. The right level of debate / discussion has to be found which helps support improvement overall
 - it is acknowledged that the Committee will need to find an appropriate mechanism to assure itself about key issues such as safeguarding of children and young people including the Safeguarding Inspection Action Plan. It is suggested that the adoption of a “life course” approach for the work programme in 2013/14 will enable such themes to be considered.
8. In developing the approach, it is recognised that there will inevitably be “learning by doing.” The Committee may find that some issues may be relatively easier to explore than others which on reflection might appear to have been too narrow in scope. To create an approach which is right for Dudley, it believed that learning about scrutiny as a process can also be gained from other areas where there has been developed thinking e.g. concerning health scrutiny or the parliamentary model. Finally, ensuring that the “right people” can attend to support the scrutiny of particular issues will remain important.

Finance

9. Any financial implications arising from the content of this Report will be met from within existing budgets.

Law

10. The legislation and guidance which relates both generally and specifically to looked after children and care leavers is the Children Act 1989, the Children Leaving Care Act 2000, Adoption Children Act 2002, the Children Act 2004, the Children and Young People’s Act 2008.
11. The law governing the Local Authorities duties in respect of referrals of a child protection nature, is set out primarily in the Children Act 1989, with further guidance under The Framework for the Assessment of Children In Need and their Families 2000 and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2010.
12. Under section 11 of the Children Act 2004 there is a duty on the LA and its partners to safeguarding and promote the welfare of children.
13. The Council can do anything incidental, conducive thereto, or which facilitates the discharge of this function under section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972.

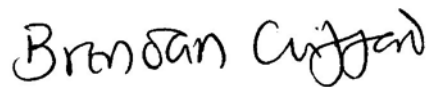
Equality Impact

14. The Children's Services Scrutiny Committee can ensure through its work programme that equality issues are addressed throughout its scrutiny process.

Recommendation

15. That the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee:

- Note the overall approach and shape accordingly
- Agree to using a life-course approach in determining its work programme for 2013/14



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Lead Officer to the Committee