

SELECT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Thursday 19th June 2008, at 6.00pm
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Councillor Nottingham (Chairman)
Councillor Ms Boleyn (Vice Chairman)
Councillors Crumpton, Mrs Dunn, Hanif, Islam, Ms Partridge, Mrs Rogers, Southall, Stanley and Wright; Mrs Cunneen, Mr Jones, Mr Smith, Mr Taylor, Mrs Verdegem and Reverend Wickens

OFFICERS

The Director of Finance (as Lead Officer to the Committee), the Director of Children's Services, the Assistant Directors of Children's Services (Early Years, Youth and Education Services) and (Resources), the Race Equality Officer (Directorate of Children's Services) and Mr Sanders (Directorate of Law and Property)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Mr Hamill (Department for Children, Schools and Families)

1 **WELCOME**

The Chairman introduced and welcomed new Members of the Committee and Mr Hamill from the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

2 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of Mrs Roe and Mrs Simms.

3 **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.

4

MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 26th March, 2008 be approved as a correct record and signed, subject to the following:-

- The addition of the name of Councillor Mrs Rogers in the list of apologies for absence in Minute number 49.
- Reference to Reverend Wickens being made as a Trustee, rather than a Governor, in relation to his involvement with Castle High School and the substitution of the name of Red Hall Primary School for Redhill School regarding the declaration made by Mr Jones, both in Minute number 50.

In addition, Councillor Wright wished his name to be added to the Declarations of a personal interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, made in Minute number 50, in view of his Governorship of Ellowes Hall Sports College and Straits Primary School

5

SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was reported that Councillor Southall was serving in place of Councillor Hill for this meeting of the Committee only.

6

TERMS OF REFERENCE AND RULES OF PROCEDURE OF THE COMMITTEE AND ASSOCIATED MATTERS, INCLUDING THE WORK PROGRAMME AND WORKING GROUPS OF THE COMMITTEE FOR 2008-09

A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee was submitted setting out the Terms of Reference and Procedural Rules in relation to the Committee and seeking consideration of the work programme proposed for 2008-09. The report also sought consideration of the Working Groups to be appointed in 2008-09. Reference was also made in the report to other bodies with which the Committee was associated that impacted on Children's Services.

In presenting the report, the Lead Officer to the Committee drew attention to the categories of co-opted membership provided for in respect of the Committee and indicated that vacancies for non-elected voting Members currently existed for a nominee of the Archdiocese of Birmingham and a Parent Governor representative for the Special Education Sector. In addition, the period of office of the current Parent Governor representative for the Primary Education Sector would expire on 9th July 2008, and no nominations had been received for a successor in the electoral arrangements. Action would therefore be taken to make fresh electoral arrangements for parent governor representatives in those categories.

In relation to the work programme for 2008-09, areas other than those proposed in the report were suggested for consideration, including Safer Routes to Schools, Autism, Youth Facilities and Youth Working. Regarding items already included, certain Members advocated that Education Support for Ethnic Minority Pupils should be considered earlier than proposed. It was also suggested that a special meeting of the Committee, rather than a Working Group, be held to consider the issue of Building Schools for the Future, but the Director of Children's Services advised that a Working Group was a more appropriate mechanism for detailed discussion.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the Terms of Reference, Rules of Procedure and Protocol relating to the Select Committee be received and noted, together with the associated information referred to in paragraph 6 of the report submitted.
- (2) That the current position with the non-elected, voting, membership of the Committee, as reported orally by the Lead Officer to the Committee and described above, be received and noted.

- (3) That, subject to further issues for consideration being referred to the Lead Officer to the Committee by Members, and the inclusion of such items at the discretion of the Chairman and Vice Chairman, in consultation with the Lead Officer, the Work Programme for the Committee for 2008-09 be approved as set out below, with the issues indicated being referred to the respective meetings of the Committee stated:-

15th September, 2008

Building Schools for the Future

Fostering Service

Raising Expectations

Review of Operation of School Improvement Partners and School Improvement Policy

13th November, 2008

Children's Trust

Children and Young People's Plan

21st January, 2009

Educational Support for Ethnic Minority Pupils

Annual Performance Assessment Improvement Plan

Reducing Teenage Pregnancy

Budget 2009/10

25th March, 2009

Outcomes for Looked After Children

School Performance and Support for Schools.

- (4) That the following standing Working Groups be appointed in 2008-09, for the purposes indicated, and that the Lead Officer to the Committee, in consultation with the Chairman, be authorised to determine the composition and Membership of the respective Working Groups in the light of preferences expressed by Members as to the Working Group(s) they would wish to serve on:-
- (a) Listening to Children and Young People Working Group – an informal group including a Children's representative and the Cabinet Member for Children's Services to meet across the Borough and engage with and consult young people on an ad-hoc basis.
 - (b) School Support Working Group – to ensure schools receive appropriate support and advice from the Local Authority;
 - (c) Youth Provision Working Group - to look at matters relating to the area of youth provision;

- (d) Building Schools for the Future Working Group – to consider particular issues relating to Building Schools for the Future.

7

DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE REVIEW OF THE 2007-08 YEAR

The draft Annual Report for the Committee for the review of the 2007-08 year was submitted.

In relation to Building Schools for the Future a discussion ensued on the content of the Dudley bid and the consultation process that had been engaged in. The Director of Children's Services referred to a meeting with the Department for Children, Schools and Families that would be held in the following week, at which the Council's bid would be determined. He indicated that, following the meeting, a letter would be sent to all Members of the Committee stating the outcome of the bid.

Reference was also made to the intention of certain schools to apply for Trust status and the Director of Children's Services outlined the consultative and statutory mechanisms that would be engaged in should the proposals be proceeded with, and the timescales involved.

A question was asked by a Member on whether or not the Council's Admissions Policy had been reviewed, in response to which, the Director of Children's Services confirmed that the Council complied with the statutory requirement for the policy to be reviewed annually.

Reference was also made by a Member to the performance of certain schools in the Borough, in the light of the recent statement by the Schools Minister of the intention of Government to close failing schools. In relation to the four schools in Dudley, which had been named as being in this category, the Director of Children's Services indicated the measures being taken to improve academic achievement at the same time as pointing out that, in recent Ofsted reports, all of the schools named had received a rating of either satisfactory or good.

RESOLVED

That the draft Annual Report be approved for submission to the Council.

8

DIRECTORATE OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ACTION PLAN FOR 2008-09 AND ANNUAL REPORT OF THE EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ACTION PLAN FOR 2007-08

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted, under cover of which was set out the Directorate's Equality and Diversity Action Plan for 2008-09 and its annual report on the Equality and Diversity Action Plan for the Directorate for 2007-08.

In the discussion that ensued, the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Early Years, Youth and Education Services) gave details of the partnership mechanisms in force to achieve the objective of reducing rates of teenage pregnancy and the incidence of sexually transmitted infections, and how the work of the different agencies involved was co-ordinated. In so doing, the Assistant Director explained the role of the Targeted Youth Plan under the Children's Trust and indicated the priority given in the Plan to the teenage pregnancy issue.

A more meaningful agenda for involvement by Youth representatives at Area Committees was advocated by one Member, but it was suggested by the Director of Children's Services that Area Committees would not normally be the type of setting that young people usually were comfortable in engaging in. However, it was accepted that, in instances where a particular issue was at stake, for example, skate boarding provision, youth representatives had attended Area Committees and had made their case understood very clearly.

In response to a question on the manner in which the Council's objective of promoting social cohesion and reducing community tension impacted on young people, the Director of Children's Services explained the duty placed on Governing Bodies in this regard under the Education Inspection Act and stated that much of the work necessary was achieved through monitoring processes. Concern was expressed by one Member at the danger in inadvertently promoting extremism as a result of alienating some minority communities by way of certain events and actions perceived by those groups as being an overreaction and unfair.

In response to a question on Performance Indicators applicable in respect of social cohesion, the Race Equality Officer confirmed that none existed but undertook to advise the Committee of projects in force with the aim of promoting social cohesion.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the Directorate of Children's Services Equality and Diversity Action Plan for 2008-09 be accepted and that the Annual Report on the Equality and Diversity Action Plan for the Directorate for 2007-08 be noted.
- (2) That the Director of Children's Services arrange for the Committee to be notified in writing of the projects in operation in relation to social cohesion in which the Council is involved.

EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

A report of Director of Children's Services was submitted drawing attention to changes taking place currently, in relation to the provision of Early Years Education Stage education, in consequence of that stage becoming statutory in September 2008, and indicating Dudley's current position on the issue.

The report set out the priorities of the Council for the period from 2008 to 2011, together with individual objectives under the Children's Plan and the measures and indicators that would be applied.

The requirement under the Child Care Act 2006, to ensure that all children up to five years would have high quality early learning and care and better access to services to give them the best start in life would be achieved through the Early Years Outcome Duty, which would include:-

- A children's centre in every community;
- The Council working with partner organisations to improve the Every Child Matters Outcomes for all children up to five years of age and to reduce inequalities between them;
- Parents' entitlement to free integrated care and learning for three to four year olds increasing from twelve and a half to fifteen hours per week becoming more flexible as to when those hours might be taken.

The new Early Years Foundation Stage would sit with the Duty, giving a statutory framework for providers bringing together the Birth to Three Framework, the Foundation Stage Curriculum Guidance and elements of the Day Care National Standards, thus covering the age range from birth to the end of the Foundation Stage.

Reference was made in the report to the areas of learning the Framework would accommodate, the inspection framework that would be applicable, current levels of academic achievement for pupils in the relevant Key Stages, the position regarding teachers and the training programme involved, the concentration under the Framework on the personal, social and emotional development of the child and on communication, language and literacy, and also summarised certain projects in the field that were currently in operation.

In response to a request made by a Member, the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Early Years, Youth and Education Services) agreed to circulate the results referred to in paragraph 12 of the report but cautioned that the figures would not be validated until September 2008.

RESOLVED

That the report, and the position regarding the Early Years Foundation Stage, be noted and that the development of the work be supported..

10

14 – 19 UPDATE

A report of the Director of Children’s Services was submitted updating the Committee on work taking place for children and young people aged 14 – 19, in the light of the recent Government reforms in this category.

The report covered the areas of standards of achievement, take-up of post-16 education and training and the collaboration arrangements in force with Colleges of Further Education. It was indicated that the next steps for the Council would be to continue working with secondary schools to make the curriculum more interesting and relevant to the workplace, in order to encourage more young people to stay in education post-16; to develop systems that made staying on post-16 easier for young people and to continue to target young people in vulnerable groups in specific areas of the Borough, in order to provide as much support and encouragement as possible to continue in education and training post-16.

In response to a question, it was reported that approximately 6% of young people in the 16 – 18 age range were either not involved in education or training or in full time employment. In relation to the drop out rate, this fluctuated between institutions and Officers were currently working with institutions to ascertain reasons for drop out, with a view to taking rectifying action.

In response to a question on funding, the Director of Children’s Services reported that the monies currently allocated to the Learning and Skills Council for Tertiary Education would transfer to the Council with effect from 2010. The Council was currently in discussions with the Learning and Skills Council and Colleges of Further Education, with particular reference to provision in the North of the Borough. In response to a further question, he indicated that Officers were currently working with colleges to identify disadvantaged and under-performing groups, with a view to then making the necessary adjustments to educational and vocational provision in order to work with them to raise standards. In this connection, he outlined the role of the Aim Higher Project currently in operation.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted and that the development of the work be supported.

11

NATIONAL YEAR OF READING.

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted setting out the background to this initiative and outlined the programme that would be taking place in Dudley.

A question was asked on the publicity being given to the initiative, in response to which the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Early Years, Youth and Education Services) confirmed that the Council was working in conjunction with the local press on the issue.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted and that development of work in connection with the scheme be supported

12

PRIMARY CAPITAL PROGRAMME

An report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on progress with the Primary Capital Programme.

Under this Government initiative, Dudley had been allocated £4.2m in 2009-10 and £6.5m in 2010-11 and it was expected that funding at these levels would continue for the whole 14 years of the programme, subject to future decisions on public spending. Dudley had been required to set a Primary Strategy for Change to the Department for Children, Schools and Families by 16th June 2008, approval of the Strategy being essential to further progress within the programme and the release of funds from April 2009.

The Assistant Director of Children's Services (Resources) now reported on consultations being engaged in with schools, Dioceses and the Primary Care Trust; consultation with the schools undertaken previously; Dudley's long term aims in relation to buildings and design, with particular reference to the education and pupil issues considered necessary to be facilitated; the initial investment priorities proposed and the next steps envisaged.

In the discussion on the report, Councillor Crumpton reported concerns expressed by parents of pupils at Northfield Road Primary School on dangers perceived in relation to the proposed replacement of the School on the Hillcrest site. Councillor Crumpton agreed to refer correspondence he had received in this respect to the Director of Children's Services.

In response to questions, the Assistant Director of Children's Services confirmed that medical facilities would be provided for in replaced or refurbished school premises; that consultation on community facilities would be undertaken and that the range provided for would depend on the nature of demand. All schools would be required to produce a Building Plan, which would be linked in to the Council's Asset Management Plan.

The Assistant Director confirmed that children and young people had been consulted on their priorities for inclusion in replaced or refurbished schools and he reported on their priorities in this regard.

RESOLVED

- (1) That progress to date with the Primary Capital Programme, as referred to in the report of the Director of Children's Services and the presentation given by the Assistant Director, be noted.
- (2) That it be noted that further reports will be submitted to this Committee.
- (3) That the Director of Children's Services arrange for the Strategy document submitted to the Department for Children, Schools and Families by 16th June 2008 to be circulated to all Members of the Committee.

13

QUARTERLY CORPORATE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT

A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee was circulated under cover of which the Quarterly Corporate Performance Management Report for the fourth quarter of 2007-08, in relation to the activities under the Terms of Reference of this Committee, was circulated.

The Director of Children's Services drew particular attention to Appendix 2 to the report, which set out the Placements of Looked After Children, which currently numbered 512 in total.

RESOLVED

That the Quarterly Performance Management Report for the fourth quarter of 2007-08, in respect of the matters under the responsibility of this Committee, be noted.

The meeting ended at 8.30 pm

CHAIRMAN