

Meeting of the Council – 14th July, 2008

Report of the Select Committee on Children's Services

Annual Report for the Review of the 2007/08 Year

Purpose

1. To submit to the Council the annual report of the Select Committee on Children's Services to the Council for 2007/08, as set out below.

Background

2. Article 6 of the Council's Constitution requires Select Committees to report annually to the full Council on their workings and to make recommendations for future work programmes and amended working methods if appropriate. It has previously been agreed that the annual report of the Select Committee on Children's Services should be made to the July meeting of the Council.
3. The work of the Select Committee on Children's Services is governed by the following Terms of Reference:-

"To fulfil all of the overview and scrutiny functions of a Select Committee as they relate to Children's Services and, in particular, the functions and responsibilities of the Council under the Children Act 2004 and associated regulations and guidance, including:-

- (a) The roles and responsibilities of relevant partners;
- (b) Listening to and involving children.

With the objective of improving the well-being of all children in the Council's area by developing the "Every Child Matters" outcomes."

4. Given the size and makeup of its membership, the Select Committee continued the practice of appointing dedicated Working Groups to undertake detailed scrutiny and review. The following Working Groups met several times during the year:-

Youth Provision – to look at matters relating to the area of youth provision.

School Support – to ensure schools receive appropriate support and advice from the Council.

5. The Committee and its Working Groups were particularly concerned to ensure that their work focused specifically on the five “Every Child Matters” outcomes, viz:-

Be Healthy
Stay Safe
Enjoy and Achieve
Make A Positive Contribution
Achieve Economic Well-Being

and the following Key National and local issues:-

- Improving Outcomes for Looked After Children;
- Reducing Teenage Pregnancies;
- Improving education standards.

6. The Committee’s work programme for the 2007/08 Municipal Year included:-

- Annual Performance Assessment
- Children’s Trust and Young People’s Plan
- Transforming Secondary Education / Building Schools for the Future
- Primary Capital Programme
- Teenage Pregnancy Strategy and Action Plan 2007-2009
- “Care Matters” White Paper
- Personal Education Plans
- Fostering Service Inspection Report
- Adoption Service Inspection Report
- Safeguarding Children Board
- Respect Agenda
- Dudley Play Strategy
- Revenue Budget Strategy
- Youth Provision
- Children’s Social Care
- Standards Report – Performance Data
- Quarterly Performance Monitoring

7. The following issues from the Committee’s Work Plan are worthy of specific mention:-

(a) Annual Performance Assessment (APA)

Every year, Ofsted is required to undertake a review of each Local Authority Children’s Service and to award a performance rating. For 2007, this was based on a self- assessment of progress against the Children’s and Young People’s Plan. The Committee was pleased to hear from Ofsted that the Authority was considered to be performing well and there had been improvement since the Joint Area Review in 2006. Some further areas for improvement were identified and the Committee will monitor these as appropriate.

- (b) Improving the School Estate
Detailed consideration was given to the proposed capital investment in Primary Schools and the national Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme in secondary education. The Committee contributed to developing Dudley's vision for Transforming Secondary Education and looks forward to exciting developments, focused on meeting the needs of learners and improving outcomes for all. Having previously been notified by the (former) DfES that the Council was likely to be included in Waves 7, 8 or 9 of BSF, we learned towards the end of the municipal year that the Council had been invited to complete the necessary submissions to enter Wave 6a. We were disappointed to hear subsequently that the submission had not been approved and will review the situation as more details become available.
- (c) Children's Trust and Children and Young People's Plan 2008/11
Under the auspices of the Children and Young People's Partnership, arrangements for developing and implementing the Dudley Children's Trust were completed during the year. The Children's Trust provides the mechanism for robust, inter-agency governance arrangements and effective partnership working in commissioning services to meet the needs of all children and young people aged 0 – 19 (up to 25 for those with additional needs and looked after children). A new Children and Young People's Plan 2008/11, aligned with partner agency planning processes and the revised Local Area Agreement has also been produced. We will continue to monitor the work of the Children's Trust and through our performance monitoring arrangements, progress against the targets and performance indicators set in the Children's and Young People's Plan.
- (d) Teenage Pregnancy
Both Central Government and the Children's and Young People's Partnership have set ambitious and challenging targets to reduce the levels of teenage pregnancy by 2010. We scrutinised the work of the Teenage Pregnancy Partnership Board and, although the stretched targets are indeed very challenging, were reassured that realistic strategies and plans are in place. Given the importance of this issue, we will return to it in our work plan for 2008/09.
- (e) School Performance in 2007 and Key Stage Results
Although Dudley continues to achieve at or just above the national average in most measures, Key Stage 3 results in 2007 show increases in Dudley's value added scores indicating that pupils aged 11-14 years in Dudley are making better progress than geographical neighbours.
- (f) Support for Schools
Through its Working Group on School Support, the Committee continued to monitor and review the support provided to schools, focusing on the outcome of the school Ofsted reports and feedback from headteachers and governors. Out of a total of 45 school Ofsted reports considered, 24 schools were judged "Satisfactory", 14 schools were judged "Good" and 4 schools were judged "Outstanding". The Working Group monitored progress on the 2 schools issued with Notices to Improve and the 1 school in Special Measures. Overall the Working Group were pleased to congratulate the

schools concerned on their performance levels and noted generally excellent support for schools from the local authority.

(g) Inspection of Adoption Service

This inspection took place in June 2007, with some additional time to observe an adoption panel and meet with service users and adopters. The inspection gave an overall quality rating of good and the inspectors issued notice to improve with regard to one particular standard, which has now been addressed. We noted that there had been considerable improvement across the whole service since the previous inspection in 2004.

(h) Personal Education Plans

As part of our regular performance monitoring activity, we have expressed concerns about the continuing underperformance against the local targets for the provision of Personal Education Plans (PEPs) for Looked After Children. PEPs ensure access to services and support, contribute to stability and minimise broken schooling and disruption. We noted action which had been taken, including additional funding for a Virtual School Headteacher for Looked After Children and approved an improvement action plan, which we will continue to monitor.

(i) Care Matters White Paper

The White Paper "Care Matters – Time for Change", which was published in June 2007 sets out a new and wide ranging agenda for change to improve outcomes for children and young people in care and will, of course, have significant implications for delivering services to looked after children, who are the responsibility of this Council.

(j) Play Strategy

Following a wide ranging consultation programme with local, regional and national stakeholders, including over 6,000 children, young people and members of the public, the Dudley Play Strategy was formally adopted in December 2006. It then formed the cornerstone of an application to the Big Lottery Fund, who awarded a grant of nearly £0.7m for a programme of revenue and capital projects. Subsequently, the Council was invited to bid to become one of 15 national Play Pathfinders, the successful outcome of which provides significant increased capital and revenue funding for the next three years.

We are pleased to report that the success of this programme has been widely recognised and praised.

(k) Youth Provision

Through its working group on Youth Provision, the Committee reviewed the national requirements for youth services, these included:-

- Integrated Youth Support
- Targeted Youth Support (TYS)
- Information advice and guidance
- 14 – 19 diplomas
- Positive Activities
- Youth engagement, participation and empowerment
- Workforce development

It monitored the current working practice of the youth and community service and discussed the outcomes of the Peer Review. The working group also received a presentation on the restructure of the Youth Service and commented upon the Targeted Youth Support Plan.

8. Conclusion

2007/08 has been another busy, but extremely interesting year for the Select Committee. Whilst maintaining our focus on the important General Education and Schools issues, we have significantly developed our involvement with and input to the broader children's issues and the "Every Child Matters" outcomes. Improving outcomes for all children and young people in the Borough is our overriding objective, but in our role as corporate parent, improving outcomes for Looked After Children remains a key priority.

9. The Committee's Work Plan for 2008/09 will therefore include:-

- APA Improvement Plan
- Transforming Secondary Education and Building Schools for the Future
- Youth Provision
- Reducing Teenage Pregnancy
- Improving Outcomes for Looked After Children
- School Performance and Support to Schools

In approving its detailed Work Plan for 2008/09, the Select Committee, at its meeting held on 19th June, 2008, invited its members to submit to the Lead Officer to the Committee for consideration additional items they wished to have included.

Finance

10. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report at this stage.

Law

11. The requirement for the Committee to make an annual report to the Council is contained in Article 6 of the Constitution.
12. The relevant statutory provisions regarding the Council's Constitution are contained in Part II of the Local Government Act 2000, together with Regulations, Orders and Statutory Guidance issued by the Secretary of State.

Equality Impact

- 13. The Committee has taken equality and diversity issues into account whilst scrutinising the areas of work described, particularly in relation to front-line service delivery and issues such as attendance and exclusion and engagement of potentially disenfranchised groups in normal service delivery.
- 14. The work of the Select Committee in 2007/08 was targeted at services for children and young people and their views were heard and considered in the Committee's deliberations.

Recommendation

- 15. That the annual report of the Select Committee on Children's Services, as set out above, be approved and adopted.



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Chairman of the Select Committee on Children's Services