

SELECT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Thursday, 13th November, 2008 at 6.00 p.m.
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Councillor Nottingham (Chairman)
Councillor Ms Boleyn (Vice Chairman)
Councillors Mrs Coulter, Crumpton, Mrs Dunn, Hanif, Hill, Ms Partridge, Mrs Rogers, Stanley and Wright; Mrs Cunneen, Mr Jones, Mrs Simms, Mr Taylor and Reverend Wickens.

OFFICERS

The Director of Finance (Lead Officer to the Committee), the Director of Children's Services, the Assistant Directors of Children's Services (Without Portfolio), (Performance and Partnership) and (Children's Specialist Services), Acting Assistant Director for Early Years, Youth and Education and Mr J Jablonski (Directorate of Law and Property)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Ms H Ellis – Manager of the Connexions Service

29 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillor Islam, Mrs Roe and Mr Smith.

30 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The following declarations of interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, were made by the members indicated in respect of Agenda Item 9 – Update of the Council's Capital Strategy:-

Councillor Nottingham – personal interest as the Chair of Governors of Crestwood School which would probably become an Academy – in so far as there were references to Academies in the report.

Reverend A Wickens – personal interest as a Trustee of the Castle High School – in so far as there were references in the report which may involve the school.

31 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Committee held on 9th September, 2008 and of the meeting of the Committee held on 15th September, 2008 be approved as correct records and signed.

32 SUBSTITUTE MEMBER

It was reported that Councillor Mrs Coulter had been appointed as a substitute member for Councillor Islam for this meeting of the Committee only.

33 LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE DIRECTORATE OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on changes to the leadership and the management of the Directorate as a consequence of the Director leaving his post on 31st December 2008, to take up a senior post with the Local Government Association.

Jane Porter had been appointed as the Interim Director of Children's Services from 1st January 2009, pending a selection process for a permanent Director and as from 1st November 2008, she had been working with the Director as Assistant Director "without portfolio".

Also from 1st November 2008, David Perrett had been appointed as Acting Assistant Director for Early Years Youth and Education. This appointment would continue until a permanent Director was appointed.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report submitted, on changes to the leadership and management of the Directorate of Children's Services, be noted.

34 COMMENTS MADE BY THE CHAIRMAN

Arising from the presentation of the foregoing report the Chairman welcomed the Officers named to the meeting in their new capacities and thanked the Director for the service given by him to the Authority over the preceding seven years. In particular he referred to the improvements made to the service during that period and to the awarding by Ofsted of a "good" rating. The turnaround had been largely due to the leadership of the Director and his team of Officers and he was thanked for the loyal service given and wished well in his new appointment.

Councillor Crumpton echoed the words of the Chairman in wishing the Director well, success in his new post and thanks for the service given.

The Chairman also informed Members that the Special Meeting of the Committee to consider the calling of the Cabinet decision on Building Schools for the Future and Academies would now be held on Tuesday 25th November 2008 at 6.00 p.m.

35

DUDLEY CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S TRUST INCLUDING THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PLAN

A report of the Director of the Children's Services was submitted on the remit, membership and activities of the Children's Trust within Dudley, including the development of the Council's Children and Young People's Plan. Attached as Appendices to the report were, as Appendix 1, the structure of the Children and Young People's Trust and, as Appendix 2, a copy of the draft Constitution of the Children's Trust Board.

Arising from consideration of the content of the report, and Appendices to the report submitted, it was requested that when further reports were submitted to this Committee the details include a list of attendees at meetings of the main board and the contribution of the partners to the work of the board.

The Board was also requested to consider the appointment of the Labour Group Spokesperson on this Committee, or another member of the opposition, as a member of the Trust Board.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the information contained in the report, and Appendices to the report, submitted on the remit, membership and activities of Children's Trust within Dudley, including the development of the Council's Children and Young People's Plan, be noted and that further reports on future progress be submitted to meetings of this Committee and that such reports include details of attendees at meetings of the main board and on the contribution of the partners to the work of the board.
- (2) That the Director of Children's Services be requested to arrange for consideration to be given by the Trust Board to the suggestion made at this meeting that the Labour Group Spokesperson, or another member of the opposition on the Committee, be appointed to serve on the Children's Trust Board.

36

UPDATE ON PROGRESS OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE ACTION PLAN IN RESPONSE TO AN OFSTED INSPECTION

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on progress of actions taken in response to an OFSTED Inspection in respect of Dudley Local Authority Fostering Service.

During the presentation of the content of the report submitted by the Assistant Director of Children's Specialist Services reference was made to the content of Appendix 1 to the report submitted which set out the robust actions that had been taken in response to the inspection held. Monitoring of the plan was taking place at regular intervals to ensure progress was made and additional support would be made available if required.

Reference was also made to work being undertaken in respect of looked after children so that they could be supported on a cross agency basis whether or not they stayed with their birth families.

The Director of Children's Services also reported that there was no evidence that any child had been put at risk as a result of the issues raised by the inspection.

Although a date for a reinspection of Fostering Services was not yet known the annual inspection of the service would be in the Spring of 2009. In response to a query raised it was reported that the Authority were confident that the service would achieve at least a "satisfactory" rating.

RESOLVED

- 1) That the information contained in the report, and Appendix to the report, submitted on the progress of actions taken in response to an OFSTED inspection in respect of Dudley Local Authority Fostering Service, in particular the future investment required to maintain and develop the service provision, be noted.
- 2) That a further report be submitted to the Committee at a future meeting regarding the outcome of the reinspection of the Fostering Service.

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on the current position and activity being undertaken regarding 16 to 18 year old people not in education, employment or training (NEETS).

The Assistant Director for Performance and Partnership, in his presentation of the report submitted, referred to the position whereby, although the Council was not meeting the NEETS stretch targets, performance was better than the national average and that of the Council's statistical neighbour authorities. Since November 2004 the proportion of 16 to 18 year olds who were NEETS had fallen from 9.6% to 5.5%.

Reference was also made to the work being undertaken with schools and post 16 colleges in particular re-engaging with those people who dropped out of education or training. It was also emphasised that the Council was seeking to develop an action plan to further reduce the number of NEETS to be embedded in the target youth support plan.

Helen Ellis – Manager of the Connexions Service was welcomed by the Chairman to the meeting and reported in particular on the work being undertaken in respect of 16, 17 and 18 year old people with particular emphasis on those 17 years of age. Each cohort was sectioned and their particular issues looked at.

In response to a query as to whether the guarantee of a place (the September Guarantee) in education or training for every 16 and 17 year old in the Borough had been met, the response was that it had not been met in the absolute sense of the terms of the guarantee with reference being made to the small number of people who had special educational needs. Although the majority had found a place, some places were out of the Borough's area.

Arising from queries raised in respect of the Education Maintenance allowance it was reported that there had been problems with payment of these grants and that details as to how many young people accessed grants could be obtained and reported to the Committee in due course. It was also reported that where there had been delays colleges had made interim payments. The position would be investigated and reported on in due course to the Committee.

In response to a query regarding the effect of the grants it was considered that their provision had made a difference to a proportion of the young people in question, however, for some it was considered that it had not made a difference at all.

In response to a further query regarding the September Guarantee in respect of young people who may have learning/physical disabilities and had been placed outside of the borough and had returned it was agreed that a report would be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee on the position and provision for such young people.

In response to a query regarding people in the 19-25 age range it was reported that the 13-19 year group also looked at people up to the age of 25, particularly those with the disabilities timeline and each partner within that group was looking to work together so that there was an holistic approach and early intervention.

In response to a query regarding the 4,456 young people – year 11 2008 School Leavers – referred to in paragraph 8 of the report submitted, it was requested that the overall figure be broken down so that an indication was given of those entering further education or employment and their ethnic background. It was agreed that the information requested would be included in a future report to the Committee.

RESOLVED

- 1) That the information contained in the report submitted, on the current position and activity regarding 16 to 18 year old young people not in education, employment or training, be noted together with the arrangements referred to regarding the full engagement with partners to both prevent and reduce the number of young people not in education, employment or training and to achieve the Council's stretch targets.
- 2) That the Director of Children's Services be requested to submit a report to a future meeting of the Committee on the position regarding the guarantee of a place in education and/or training for every 16 and 17 year old in the Borough (the September Guarantee) in respect of young people who may have learning/physical disabilities and were placed out of Borough and returned to the Council's area.

38

UPDATE OF THE COUNCIL'S CAPITAL STRATEGY

A report of the Director of Finance was submitted on the update of the Council's Capital Strategy, a copy of which was attached as an Appendix to the report submitted.

The Director of Finance, in his presentation of the content of the report, and Appendix to the report submitted, referred in particular to the content of paragraphs 12 and 13 of the Appendix which related to the terms of reference of this Select Committee.

Arising from the presentation given and comments made with particular reference to the Building Schools for the Future programme and the need for consideration to be given to the revenue consequences of such significant capital investment not supported by Government, it was:-

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report, and Appendix to the report, submitted on the Update of the Council's Capital strategy, be noted and that the Cabinet be informed that there were no issues that this Committee wished to be taken into account when the Strategy was considered by full Council.

39

YOUTH SERVICE CONSULTATION

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on the Youth Service consultation document that had been published on 7th October 2008. A copy of the consultation document was attached as an Appendix to the report submitted and it was noted that the consultation period ran until 6th January 2009.

Arising from the presentation of the report, and Appendix to the report, submitted, by the Assistant Director Without Portfolio, members made a number of comments and queries regarding, in particular:-

- The position regarding youth services in parts of the Cradley and Foxcote Ward which it was considered fell between the current Stourbridge and Halesowen teams. A request was made that details be given as to the provision that should be available and current provision for all wards and that there be regular reports back to the Committee on Youth Service provision. It was also suggested that consideration be given as to how members could be further involved.

In response it was requested that the comments made be included in a response to the consultation document. The Assistant Director could also speak to the Member concerned regarding the current provision in his ward.

Regarding the consultation document this related to what was being offered with responses being requested on those services.

Following the consultation period, plans in respect of universal youth work would subsequently be drawn up in the period January to April 2009, relating to provision in the five area committee areas and developed through those committees in conjunction with other bodies and services such as the Police and Community Renewal.

- In response to a query it was reported that provision would be targeted to need and that following an initial period, provision would be reviewed and adjustments made, if required. The plan would therefore be monitored so that flexibility was maintained although different pressures in one area would mean that there was less provision in another area.
- Regarding the consultees listed in the consultation document it was reported that, although not specifically listed, visits had been made to many of the Borough's ethnic minority communities including the Yemeni community, however, in respect of this group, it was agreed that they be approached as formal consultees. A similar point was made in respect of Mosques and other faith groups.

It was noted that youth centres and schools had also been approached.

If members were aware of any group that had not been contacted they were asked to inform the Assistant Director.

At the conclusion of points made the Chairman thanked the Assistant Director and her team for the detailed work that had been carried out.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report, and Appendix to the report, submitted on the Youth Service Consultation document published on 7th October 2008 in respect of consultation on the Youth Service to run until 6th January 2009, be noted.

40 YOUTH PROVISION WORKING GROUP – TERMS OF REFERENCE

A Report of the Lead Officer to the Committee was submitted in respect of terms of reference for the Youth Provision Working Group of this Committee. The draft terms of reference were attached as an Appendix to the report submitted.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report submitted be noted and that the draft Terms of Reference for the Youth Provision Working Group, as set out in the Appendix to the report submitted, be adopted.

41 CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE OF THE ETHNIC MINORITY ACHIEVEMENT SERVICE – AMENDED OCTOBER 2008

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on an amended consultation on the future of the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service published on 8th September 2008, and amended on 23rd October, 2008 which would run until 8th December 2008.

Arising from the presentation of the content of the report, and Appendices to the report, submitted, which contained the consultation document, as amended, attached as Appendix A, and the Equality Impact Assessment, attached as Appendix B to the report submitted, it was clarified that the consultation, arising from the judgment received from the High Court decision related only to the financial support for the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service for the future financial year, i.e. 2009/10.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report, and Appendices to the report, submitted on the amended consultation document on the future of the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service, be noted and that no additional representations be made by this Committee to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services as part of the consultation process.

The meeting ended at 7.30 p.m.

CHAIRMAN