

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD

Monday 20th January, 2014 at 6.00 p.m.
in Committee Room 2, The Council House, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Councillor Ridney (Chair)
Councillor Tyler (Vice Chair)
Councillors A Ahmed, Blood, Boleyn, Caunt, Hale, Islam, James, Kettle and Marrey.

Councillor Crumpton (Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Lifelong Learning) attended at the invitation of the Board

OFFICERS:-

R Sims, Assistant Director (Housing Strategy and Private Sector - Lead Officer to the Board), P Sharratt (Interim Director of Children's Services), C Russell (Divisional Lead – Family Support, Directorate of Children's Services), A Pope-Smith (Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services), V Little (Director of Public Health – Chief Executive's Directorate) and S Griffiths (Democratic Services Manager - Directorate of Corporate Resources)

PARTNER ORGANISATIONS:-

J Alexander (Dudley and Walsall Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust), N Bucktin (Dudley Clinical Commissioning Group), A Gray (Dudley Council for Voluntary Services) and L Writtle (Black Country Partnership NHS Foundation Trust)

OBSERVERS:-

Councillors Harley and Lowe.

15. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No Member declared an interest in any matter to be considered at this meeting.

16. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 26th November, 2013, be approved as a correct record and signed.

17. CHILDREN'S CENTRES IN DUDLEY

Further to Minute No. 14 of the meeting held on 26th November, 2013, the Board received a joint report of the Lead Officer and the Interim Director of Children's Services on children's centres in Dudley. An additional report had also been circulated on the outcome of the consultation process, which had ended on 10th January, 2014, together with a proposed draft model for the future provision of children's centres in the Borough.

Following introductions, the Chair outlined the procedure for the meeting and thanked the Chair and Members of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee for the scrutiny work previously undertaken in relation to children's centres.

The Lead Officer introduced the report and set the context for the scrutiny of the children's centres report. He thanked all the officers concerned for their work in producing the report and developing the additional proposals submitted to the meeting.

The Interim Director of Children's Services presented the report and indicated that, following the consultation, a revised model for children's centres provision had been drafted which proposed that all centres should remain open; the children's centres should be organised into 5 clusters across the Borough and that the Council should work with partners to maximise the use of the children's centre buildings.

The proposed model aimed to meet statutory obligations; maintain early years learning and development as a priority; ensure support to children and families in greatest need; focus resources on front line service delivery and ensure that the needs of localities were met. It was proposed to develop the integrated approach by working with partner agencies and organisations to ensure that children under 5 and their families received a range of services. The restructure of the service would also deliver budget savings.

Concerns were expressed as to why a decision had been taken to change the proposals part-way through the consultation exercise. Reference was made to meetings held at children's centres during the consultation period where no minutes had been taken. The Interim Director of Children's Services reported that the changes had been made as a result of the overwhelming initial public response indicating clear support for the centres and the need to allay concerns as soon as possible. Although it was acknowledged that minutes had not been taken at all meetings, all the feedback had been considered as part of the consultation process.

In relation to the extension of the consultation process until 10th January, 2014, the Lead Officer indicated that the consultation had a wider scope and an extensive amount of valuable feedback had been gathered on which to base future decisions. It was acknowledged that the consultation period had included the festive period and the extension enabled a full range of views to be submitted.

A Member queried whether a risk assessment had been undertaken before the initial proposals had been put out to consultation. Concerns were also expressed that site meetings had not taken place in all areas and that the overall effectiveness of the consultation exercise was questionable.

The Interim Director of Children's Services reported that an Equality Impact Assessment and a risk assessment had been undertaken in the context of the budget position and the need to maintain a reasonable level of service.

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Lifelong Learning indicated that he had attended a number of consultation meetings. Whilst it was acknowledged that some Members felt that certain meetings had not taken place, the overall view was that the consultation process had generated valuable feedback and ideas for further consideration. A view was expressed that children's centres should be viewed as 'family and well being' centres and that opportunities should be explored to strengthen the support offered to families.

In relation to the proposed future model, questions were raised about staffing levels and seniority of employees on duty at the centres in order for the services to run effectively. It was proposed that a manager would be responsible for a cluster of children's centres; there would be designated heads/deputy heads and a person on reception duty at each centre. There would be a consequential review of management, support and administration structures.

A Member queried the possibility of reduced opening hours at children's centres. Officers indicated that no decisions had been taken at the present time pending further research and analysis of usage, service needs and demands in each area. Consideration would also be given to the potential usage of centres by partner organisations and the future opening hours would reflect local needs. Attention was drawn to paragraphs 5 and 6 of Appendix 2 to the additional report, which made specific reference to staffing and the use of buildings.

It was noted that some children's centre buildings were already used by partner organisations, however, it was hoped that the examples of good partnership working could be extended and applied consistently across the Borough.

The Chair invited contributions from representatives of the other partner organisations who were present at the meeting.

The Director of Adult Community and Housing Services made reference to housing/libraries provision and the operation of services on a 'community hub' model. This required further consideration and the redesign of the children's centres offer and, whilst it would not be possible to replicate everything in every children's centre, further dialogue was encouraged to explore the opportunities.

In relation to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), it was acknowledged that essential work would need to continue and that discussions should focus on extending mental health support services where possible and to signpost services more consistently within centres. The Dudley and Walsall Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust acknowledged the need to capitalise on partnership working opportunities.

The Dudley Council for Voluntary Services indicated that a considerable amount of outreach activity was already undertaken and this varied depending on the size of each centre. There were some risks associated with competition for bookings and the possibility of charging for facilities. Further opportunities would be considered to extend services and to undertake more effective signposting, however, it was acknowledged that there would be some variations of usage on a centre by centre basis.

The key issue for Dudley Clinical Commissioning Group was the need to move to an integrated approach and that children's centres could be viewed as a key access point. Ongoing work concerning the integration of services was being undertaken with Adult, Community and Housing Services and the children's centres service redesign was seen as an opportunity to do further work to deliver health and social care at a local level with appropriate links to specialist services.

The Black Country Partnership NHS Foundation Trust also acknowledged the opportunities and the need for further partnership development work to meet long term aims. Reference was made to health visiting and services for children with additional complex needs. Future service delivery would need to reflect partnership working and exploit opportunities to move service delivery to a locally based model.

The Director of Public Health referred to the resource issues faced by the public sector generally and the need to exploit the opportunities for integrated service provision. This would require a fresh approach to integrated early years service provision, involve children's centres staff in improving the promotion of services and removing duplication. The 5 cluster model mirrored the service provision of other partners, which could enable further work to develop the integrated offer of services to children and families building on the strengths of local communities.

A Member commended the changing context of the debate to place a greater emphasis on improving service delivery for the future. A full review was required of the services provided, and how they were provided, to ensure the most effective future service provision through a jointly integrated approach.

A further question was raised concerning the required saving of £1.5m. A view was expressed that this level of saving could not be achieved without the investment of external resources. Attention was drawn to paragraph 4 of Appendix 2 to the additional report, which stated that the proposed model would deliver savings of £1.5m.

In relation to the extension of services available, a Member raised a concern about the possibility of overloading the children's centre environment and the need to ensure that arrangements were in place to measure ongoing effectiveness. The Cabinet Member for Children's Services reported that a range of services were already delivered and staff had a range of valuable experience. However, it was acknowledged that further work was necessary to gauge the service needs in particular areas. The Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services emphasised the need to ensure that services were 'joined up' and centred on the needs of families. This required more effective partnership working and community engagement activity.

Following the contributions from partner organisations, the Vice-Chair welcomed the firm commitment to working together to develop a more holistic approach to family support services. He recognised the commitment of the various agencies to engage in regular meaningful dialogue with all partners having an equal contribution to these discussions.

The Chair invited the Interim Director of Children's Services and the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Lifelong Learning to make final statements.

The Interim Director thanked the Board for their comments and emphasised the commitment to move forward with the proposals. The consultation exercise had generated valuable information on which to base decisions to develop a service that was fit for purpose and sustainable for the future.

The Cabinet Member acknowledged that this was a difficult period but recognised the value of the public response to the consultation process. He referred to the opportunities to engage with partner organisations and shape integrated and sustainable services for the future. A considerable amount of work was ongoing and further consultation on the redesign of the service would take place with managers and employees concerned. The Cabinet would consider the report on the Revenue Budget Strategy 2014/15 at its meeting on 12th February, 2014.

The Chair thanked all attendees for their contributions to the debate.

RESOLVED

- (1) That following the review of the consultation responses, the Cabinet be recommended to consider the draft proposed model for the children's centres offer in Dudley as set out in Appendix 2 to the additional report submitted to the meeting.
- (2) That the Cabinet be recommended to ensure that discussions with partner organisations are continued and enlarged with a view to developing a jointly integrated service that is fit for purpose, effective, viable and sustainable for the future.

The meeting ended at 7.35 p.m.

CHAIR