

SELECT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Thursday, 18th June, 2009 at 6.00 pm
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Councillor Vickers (Chairman)
Councillor Ms Boleyn (Vice-Chairman)
Councillors Mrs Coulter, Mrs Dunn, Mrs Greenaway, Hanif, J Martin, Nottingham, Mrs Rogers and Wright; Mr Jones, Mrs Lees, Mrs Roe, Mr Taylor, Mrs Verdegem, Mrs Ward and Reverend Wickens.

OFFICERS

Interim Director of Finance (as Lead Officer to the Committee), Director of Children's Services, Assistant Directors of Children's Services (Mr McGuff, Ms Porter and Ms Sharratt), Interim Assistant Director of Children's Services (Mrs Rushen) and Mr Sanders (Directorate of Law, Property and Human Resources)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Councillor Mrs Walker – Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services
Mrs Hayward – Buildings and Estates Manager, Directorate of Children's Services
Mrs Wylie – Headteacher of Wrens Nest Primary School (for agenda item number 7)
Mr Silvera – Race Equality Officer, Early Years, Youth and Education Services, Directorate of Children's Services (for agenda item number 10)

1 INTRODUCTIONS

The Chairman and members of the Committee introduced themselves, following which the Chairman introduced and welcomed the newly-appointed Director of Children's Services, Mr Wyatt. The Chairman also thanked the Assistant Director of Children's Services, Ms Porter, for her excellent service during her period as Interim Director.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Crumpton and Ms Partridge and from Mrs Simms.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, were received 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 25th March, 2009, be approved as a correct record and signed.

5 SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was reported that Councillor J Martin was serving in place on Councillor Crumpton 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 THE 2009/10 MUNICIPAL YEAR

A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee was submitted setting out the terms of reference and procedure rules applicable to the Committee which also gave details of other bodies associated with Children's Services issues. The report also sought consideration of the work programme of the Committee and the appointment of Working Groups for the 2009/10 year.

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 now submitted.
- (2) That the work programme set out in paragraph 7 of the report be approved.
- (3) That the following Working Groups be appointed for 2009/10 and that the Lead Officer to the Committee, in consultation with the Chairman, be authorised to appoint the membership of the respective Working Groups from preferences to be expressed by members of the Committee:

Youth Working Group – to consider integrated youth support and youth priorities

Social Care Working Group – to consider child safeguarding and social care

Education Provision for Pupils (3 years to 19 years) Working Group – to consider particular issues relating to education provision, Capital Programme planning (including Building Schools for the Future)

- (4) That it be noted that it may be necessary to appoint further time limited Working Groups from time to time to consider particular issues as and when they occur.

7 DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE REVIEW OF THE 2008/09 YEAR

A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee was submitted setting out the Draft Annual Report to the Council for the review of the 2008/09 year.

RESOLVED

That the Annual Report be approved for submission to the Council, at its meeting to be held on 13th July, 2009.

8 PRIMARY CAPITAL PROGRAMME

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted providing an overview and update of progress made by the Council on the government's Primary Capital Programme.

The programme involved the rebuilding or refurbishment of primary schools and a presentation was given by the Headteacher of Wrens Nest Primary School on the Targeted Capital Funding Project under which the school had been re-provided. This had involved a mixture of new build and refurbishment and, in the presentation, the Headteacher indicated and explained the nature and extent of the accommodation facilitated both internally and externally.

Further to the presentation, the Buildings and Estates Manager in the Directorate of Children's Services reported on the details of the Primary Schools Building Programme, explaining the background to the government initiative, its financing, the criteria for expenditure, the time scales involved and the priorities for Dudley for construction in the first five years of the programme.

A question and answer session followed in which the Buildings and Estates Manager explained the rationale behind the selection of the priority schemes, which involved not only the criteria laid down by government but also factors regarding deliverability, including land availability and complications regarding land use, for example in respect of rights of way. Certain members asked questions relating to particular schools, to which the Buildings and Estates Manager responded.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the report, together with the information regarding the aims of the programme, the criteria for inclusion of projects, the financial arrangements and the priorities identified, be noted.
- (2) That the Headteacher of Wrens Nest Primary School be thanked for her presentation on the rebuild and refurbishment of the school.

9

BLACK COUNTRY CHALLENGE – END OF YEAR 1 REVIEW

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted advising the Committee of the work and progress made in relation to the Black Country Challenge activity highlighting the resources and activity directly impacting on schools in Dudley; and indicating areas of success and slippage and the implications for years 2 and 3 of the programme.

In presenting the report, the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Ms Porter) summarised the current position against each Challenge Programme, these being referred to in Section 4 of the report now submitted. The report also referred to the work being carried out to identify additional programmes for years 2 and 3 of the Challenge, which included the establishment of base line data for goals set; the scrutiny of current activity against goals and objectives to identify potential gaps or overlap; evidence gathering around year 1 activity and its potential roll out; and budget analysis. Priorities for the future which had emerged included recruitment and retention issues, parent and community engagement linked to raising aspirations, work to support the performance of underachieving groups, leadership development and business engagement. It was indicated in the report that funding for year 2 of the project would support those priorities.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

FINDINGS OF AN OFSTED INSPECTION IN RESPECT DUDLEY'S FOSTERING SERVICE

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on the findings of an OFSTED inspection in respect of Dudley's Fostering Service.

The inspection had been undertaken in March 2009 and looked at progress made in meeting the recommendations of the previous inspection in January, 2008, when the overall rating of the service had been judged inadequate with a notice of action to improve.

It was now reported that the service had been rated against the outcomes as follows:

- Being healthy – satisfactory
- Staying safe – satisfactory
- Enjoying and achieving – good
- Making a positive contribution – good
- Achieving economic wellbeing – satisfactory
- Overall judgement – satisfactory

The Inspection Report set out actions which the Council should take to comply with legislative requirements and made a number of recommendations to improve the quality and standards of care further. The five statutory requirements and the action taken by the Council to address them were set out at Appendix 1 to the report of the Director of Children's Services now submitted. In addition, ten good practice recommendations had been made and it was stated in the report that these would form the basis of an improvement plan for the Fostering Service which would consolidate the improvement made over the previous twelve months and move the service forward to achieve excellence in delivering high quality services to looked after children and in preparation of future OFSTED inspections.

In the discussion, the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Children's Specialist Services) indicated the manner in which the Inspectorate had monitored the Fostering Service and described the manner in which the Placement Team operated.

RESOLVED

That the report be received and noted, and that the actions which had been taken to achieve an improved rating for the Fostering Service be noted.

11 DIRECTORATE OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY
ANNUAL REPORT 2008/09

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted, under cover of which the draft Equality and Diversity Annual Report of the Director of Children's Services for 2008/09 was set out.

RESOLVED

That the Directorate of Children's Services Equality and Diversity Annual Report for 2008/09, as attached to the report now submitted, be received and noted.

12 ANNUAL REPORT 2008/09 – CHILDREN'S STATUTORY SOCIAL CARE
COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted under cover of which the statutory complaints, comments and compliments annual report for Children's Social Care Services for the period from 1st April, 2008 to 31st March, 2009 was set out.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services be recommended that the Annual Report on Complaints, Comments and Compliments for Children's Social Care Services for the period from 1st April, 2008 to 31st March, 2009 be approved.
 - (2) That the Cabinet Member be also recommended that the report be made a public document as required by legislation and guidance.
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13 PROTECTION OF CHILDREN IN ENGLAND – LORD LAMING'S REPORT
AND GOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted advising the Committee of the outcomes and recommendations of Lord Laming's Child Protection Review in consequence of the baby Peter case; the action taken by the government in response to Lord Laming's recommendations and Dudley's current position and the actions taken to date by the Council against the key actions identified.

The report indicated that the government's Action Plan had committed to greater openness and public scrutiny of local child protection arrangements as well as more investment in training and support of front line social workers, and referred to the £58m six point plan provided for by government to transform the social work profession. The specific actions in this regard which related to social work training and retention and the role of ICT; inspection and statutory targets; and political and professional accountability, leadership and governance were indicated in the report now submitted.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

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QUARTERLY CORPORATE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT

The Quarterly Corporate Performance Management report on the activities relating to the terms of reference of the Select Committee on Children's Services for the fourth quarter of 2008/09 was submitted.

A report of the Director of Children's Services containing contextual information regarding performance in particular areas of service, was also submitted.

RESOLVED

That the quarterly corporate performance management report, together with the report of the Director of Children's Services giving contextual information in that regard, be noted.

The meeting ended at 7.15 pm

CHAIRMAN