

Select Committee on Children's Services – 14 September 2009

Report of the Director of Children's Services

Dudley Children's Trust including the Children and Young People's Plan

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to inform the committee of progress on the activities of the Children's Trust within Dudley, including the development of our Children and Young People's Plan.

Background

Children and Young People's Trust

2. Children's Trusts are a response to Lord Laming's report of the inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié, which highlighted the extent to which better working together and improved communication are crucial to improving children's services.
3. Children's Trusts have been created to address the fragmentation of responsibilities for children's services. They build upon, bring together and formalise the joint work that has already taken place in many local areas.
4. Section 10 of the Children Act 2004 requires local authorities to make arrangements to promote co-operation to improve well-being for children and places a duty on named 'relevant partners' to cooperate with those arrangements. This is the statutory underpinning of the Children's Trust, which is not named or defined in legislation. The essential features of a Children's Trust are set out in 'Statutory Guidance on Interagency Cooperation to Improve Well-being for Children' issued in 2005 and still extant. But beyond that, the precise structure or name of the Children's Trust is a matter for local determination so it can best fit with local circumstances.
5. The Children Act of 2004 and subsequent statutory guidance makes it clear that Local Authorities and Directors of Children's Services have a leadership role in the development of Children's Trusts. However the genuine collaboration of all partner agencies is vital because the local authority cannot for children alone.

6. In collaboration with our partners we established Dudley Children's Trust in 2007. The Board of the Trust is part of the Dudley Community Partnership and is currently comprised of the following members:

An Independent Chair
Chief Officer, Dudley Council for Voluntary Services
Chief Executive, Dudley Primary Care Trust
Chief Officer, Dudley Community Partnership
Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Dudley MBC
Chief Executive, Black Country Connexions
Director of Children's Services, Dudley MBC
A representative of the Black Country Learning Skills Council
Director, Action for Children
Chief Superintendent West Midlands Police Dudley
A Post 16 College Principal
Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services, Dudley
Assistant Director, Children's Specialist Services, Dudley MBC
Assistant Director of Children's Services, Barnardos
Non-Executive Director, Dudley Primary Care Trust
District Manager, Probation Service
An elected Primary Head Teacher
An elected Secondary School Head Teacher
An elected Special School Head teacher
Joint Director of Public Health
A General Practitioner nominated by the PCT Commissioning Clusters
Director of Partnerships and Service Development, Dudley Primary Care Trust
Assistant Director, Early Years, Youth and Education Services, Dudley MBC
Associate Operations Director, Dudley Group of Hospitals
Assistant Director, Performance and Partnership, Children's Services, Dudley MBC
The Chairs of the three age related Children's Trust Sub Groups (if not already included in the list above)
The Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board
A governor or representative of the Dudley Group of Hospitals
Operations Commander, West Midlands Fire Service
The Head of Children's Trust Support (to be in attendance)

7. Members represent their agencies and also bring experience and knowledge about other sectors and organisations. However, their primary duty is to act in the interest of children and young people in Dudley.
8. In addition to the Board the Trust is comprised of a range of other age related and theme groups. The accountability arrangements for the groups are attached to this report as Appendix 1.

9. The Trust Board has an agreed constitution to govern its affairs. The constitution was reviewed and updated in May 2009. The document is attached as Appendix 2. Membership and attendance at Executive Board meetings is shown in Appendix 3.
10. The work of the Children's Trust is having a positive impact on a number of corporate priorities e.g. neighbourhood management, the health and well being of children and young people, corporate parenting and risk assessment/management by ensuring that we are working in a consistent and integrated manner with key partners.
11. The DCSF is placing an importance of Children's Trusts with specific reference to arrangements for:
 - Integrating services.
 - Safeguarding.
 - Early intervention and preventative action through universal services.
 - Reducing child poverty.

Children and Young People's Plan

12. The vision of the Children's Trust, and how it intends to achieve that vision, are set out in the current Children and Young People's Plan (2009 – 2011). The plan was developed in the spring of 2008 and updated in 2009. It is based upon a wide range of information about the needs of young people e.g. the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment prepared by the Primary Care Trust and the Council, recent Annual Performance Assessments and the 2006 Joint Area Review, and a range of surveys and activities that were conducted to collect the views of young people and community groups.
13. The key priorities for action within the plan are to
 - Support all children to be and feel safe
 - Raise standards and improve outcomes for children in care
 - Support children and young people to become and remain healthy
 - Support children and young people to enjoy growing up in Dudley and to acquire the skills to live successful lives
 - Support children, young people and families to make a positive contribution to their communities and the environment
 - Support children and young people to achieve economic and social well being
 - Continue to strengthen Dudley Children's Trust and joint commissioning. The Children's Trust Executive Board will provide effective leadership within the partnership.

- Produce an effective children's workforce development strategy, agreed by all partners by December 2009
- Implement and monitor the impact of the parenting strategy on a quarterly basis from April 2009
- Develop the effectiveness of multi agency working in localities
- Embed and improve the effectiveness of the common assessment framework
- Develop our integrated information strategy
- Narrow the gaps between the performance and outcomes achieved by under performing and under privileged groups in Dudley and the national average
- Increase the effectiveness of transition arrangements from children's to adult services

Finance

14. Funding for the Children's Trust and the Children and Young People's Plan is based upon existing budgets, with the potential for some additional grants to be secured through the achievement of targets within the Local Area Agreement. Our work in this area is dependent upon collaboration between the representatives of the partner agencies. Partners have pooled funding in the area of integrated service management and the Children's Fund.
15. The financial strategy for our plan is based on the following principles:
 - investment decisions are focused on the extent to which activities contribute to better outcomes for children and young people
 - resources should be focused on preventative service delivery wherever possible, which in turn will reduce budget pressures
 - capital investment will support inter-agency working to promote and support high quality learning and working environments
 - resource decisions are based on agreed priorities within the Children and Young People's Plan and need

Law

16. Section 10 of the Children Act 2004 requires local authorities to make arrangements to promote co-operation to improve well-being for children and places a duty on named 'relevant partners' to cooperate with those arrangements.
17. The Government intends to extend the duty to co-operate to include maintained schools, academies, further education and sixth form colleges and Job Centre Plus to bring key delivery partners into the strategic planning role of the Children's Trust.

Equality Impact

18. Children and Young People are consulted and involved extensively as part of the work of the Children's Trust and the development of the Children's Plan. The vision of the Trust and the Plan is to ensure that children and young people in Dudley are happy, healthy and fulfilled.
19. A Children and Young People's Board is currently being established to work closely with the Executive Board. This will help ensure that the views of children and young people are heard, understood and acted on within the partnership.

Recommendation

18. It is recommended that the Committee note and approve this report and the work it describes and request reports on future progress.



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Mark Wyatt
Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Ian McGuff, Assistant Director for Performance and Partnership
Telephone: 01384 814387
Email: ian.mcguff@dudley.gov.uk