

## **SELECT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

Wednesday, 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 2011 at 6.00 p.m.  
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley

### **PRESENT:-**

Councillor Vickers (Chairman)  
Councillor Attwood (Vice-Chairman)  
Councillors Crumpton, Mrs Dunn, Mrs Greenaway, Hanif, Ms Harris, Mrs Rogers and P Woodall; Mr Tinsley, Mrs Verdegem, Mr Taylor, Mrs Ward and Reverend Wickens

### **OFFICERS**

The Assistant Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services (Learning Disabilities and Mental Health) - Lead Officer to the Committee, the Acting Director of Children's Services, the Assistant Directors of Children's Services (Education Play and Learning) and (Quality and Partnership), the Service Manager and the Divisional Manager (Children's Specialist Services/Children's Resources), the Senior Transport Manager (Children's Specialist Services/Transport), the Divisional Manager (Children's Specialist Services/Safeguarding and Review Unit) and the Democratic Services Manager (Directorate of Corporate Resources)

### **ALSO IN ATTENDANCE BY INVITATION**

Councillor Mrs Walker (Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services)

### **UNITED KINGDOM YOUTH PARLIAMENT**

Prior to the formal business, the Chairman gave an overview of the work of the UK Youth Parliament. The Chairman then introduced the four candidates who had been elected to represent Dudley for the next two years, as follows:-

- Sophie Carter from Coseley School
- Sammie Gallis from Castle High School
- Yusaf Akbar from Redhill High School
- Georgina Heeley from High Arcal School

The Committee congratulated the above representatives on their election to the UK Youth Parliament.

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### **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of Mrs P Roe and Councillor J Martin.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Declarations of Personal Interests, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, were made by Members in respect of the agenda items below:

Councillors Crumpton, Mrs Dunn and Vickers – Agenda Item No. 5 – As Members of the Appeals Panel (Children's Services Transport).

Councillor Ms Harris – Agenda Item No. 8 – As a School Governor.

Councillor Vickers – Agenda Item No. 10 – As Chairman of the Management Committee of the Short Stay School Service.

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MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 26<sup>th</sup> January, 2011 be approved as a correct record and signed.

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CHILDREN'S TRAVEL AND TRANSPORT TEAM

The Committee considered a report of the Acting Director of Children's Services on the work carried out by the Travel and Transport Team. It was noted that the Team had responsibility for assessing entitlement and arranging the transport for the following areas of work:-

- Pre-school assessment units
- Home-to-school – Special Educational Needs (SEN)
- Home-to-school (mainstream)
- Home and Hospital Tuition Service (Cherry Tree)
- Children's Social Care
- Home-to-school
- Supervised contact
- Secure accommodation
- Social activities
- Post 16 home-to-school/college
- Management of the Offsite Educational Visits and Journeys Service
- Promoting and enhancing Independent Travel Training Work in partnership with the Road Safety Section in the Directorate of the Urban Environment.

The services provided by the Team ensured that the Council complied with statutory duties relating to educational provision, disability rights, court orders, safeguarding, and improving children's educational and other outcomes. The report addressed the key issues and responsibilities of the Council, the process for dealing with cases, the appeals procedure and the financial issues associated with the overall provision of the service.

Members welcomed the report to promote a greater understanding of the work of the Team and referred in particular to the role of the Appeals Panel (Children's Services Transport). The Committee commented on the current financial climate and supported the ongoing work to ensure that available funding was allocated in the most cost effective way.

The Committee also welcomed the 'Travel Buddy' scheme, which was a new and developing initiative where a supervising adult was provided to travel on foot or public transport with a child who would otherwise need a taxi to attend school. The aim of the scheme was to prevent commissioning a taxi to meet statutory duties and reduce costs while promoting a healthier lifestyle.

#### RESOLVED

- (1) That the Committee note the report and endorse the work undertaken by the Travel and Transport Team of the Children's Services Directorate.
- (2) That the Committee support the promotion of the ongoing work to establish sustainable alternatives to taxi transport including Independent Travel Training and the Travel Buddy scheme as referred to in the report.

The Committee received a report of the Acting Director of Children's Services on safeguarding developments and the work of the Dudley Safeguarding Children Board for 2010/11.

The establishment of a Local Safeguarding Children Board was required under the Children Act 2004. The Board was the key statutory mechanism for agreeing how the relevant organisations in each local area co-operated to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and for ensuring the effectiveness of activity. The report set out the core objectives, role and scope of the work of the Safeguarding Children Board. It was noted that it was now a statutory requirement for the Board to publish an annual report and this would be presented to the Select Committee in due course.

The report contained an update in respect of national safeguarding developments, including the anticipated publication of the Government-commissioned Munro report on a national review of child protection in England. It was noted that the Government had also completed a review of the national Vetting and Barring Scheme and the Committee was informed of the key recommendations.

In regard to local safeguarding developments, the Committee noted the continued progress of the Dudley Safeguarding Children's Board in respect of the key priorities outlined in its annual report and business plan. The Board was reviewing its business plan for 2011/12 and the key priorities were likely to be:-

- A strengthened leadership role in supporting multi-agency learning concerning child protection practice and joint investigations in respect of child abuse and neglect.
- Improving inter-agency responses to children and young people who are vulnerable to experiencing sexual exploitation, internal trafficking and serious forms of bullying.
- Improving inter-agency responses to children who are likely to, or who have, suffered emotional abuse and neglect.

It was also noted that confirmation was awaited from the respective partners concerning the annual budget for the Safeguarding Board in 2011/12. In the context of budget pressures faced by all agencies, work had been undertaken to identify potential efficiencies, including the provision of training.

The Committee referred to the multi-agency approach to safeguarding and the implications of significant organisational changes involving the Council, the Primary Care Trust and General Practitioner (GP) Consortia, with particular reference to the implications for commissioning in Children's Services. The Acting Director of Children's Services reported on the ongoing work and discussions regarding the formation of the shadow Dudley Health and Wellbeing Board as a formal Committee of the Council and ongoing positive discussions with GP Consortia, the Primary Care Trust and the Director of Public Health concerning commissioning. The Council was committed to building on the working relationships that already existed with colleagues in the respective agencies concerning the safeguarding of children.

Reference was also made to the issues surrounding the tracking of children and families who moved across local authority boundaries. Although systems were in place, it was acknowledged that this was an area where some risks existed and there was a need for monitoring and ongoing work.

In relation to the statistical data presented in the report concerning young people at risk of sexual exploitation, a suggestion was made that, subject to confidentiality, more detailed information could be submitted to a future meeting to promote a better understanding for Members of the issues involved. This would be considered in the Committee's work programme for 2011/12.

Members also commented on the national review of the Vetting and Barring Scheme, which was considered by many to be overly bureaucratic in its current form, leading to questions over its effectiveness in view of duplication and the complexity of administrative arrangements.

#### RESOLVED

That, subject to the comments set out above, the report be noted and that the annual report from Dudley Safeguarding Children's Board be submitted to the Select Committee in due course.

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#### INSPECTION FINDINGS OF OFSTED IN RESPECT OF THE DUDLEY LOCAL AUTHORITY ADOPTION SERVICE

The Committee considered a report of the Acting Director of Children's Services on the inspection findings of Ofsted in respect of the Dudley Local Authority Adoption Service. The Inspection findings related to the National Minimum Standards for Local Authority Adoption Services published by the Secretary of State under the Care Standards Act 2000.

The Ofsted inspection had given the Council an overall quality rating of good, with the individual ratings as follows:

- Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe  
Ofsted Rating: The provision is good
- Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do  
Ofsted Rating: The provision is good
- Helping children make a positive contribution  
Ofsted Rating: The provision is good
- Organisation  
Ofsted Rating: The organisation is good.

The Adoption Service had not received any notice of requirement to improve against any standard as a result of this inspection. The inspection had identified four recommendations, however, these did not impact on the well-being and security of children. The recommendations related to the role of the panel advisor and recording issues and an action plan was being implemented to address the specific recommendations to further improve the service.

The Committee congratulated the Directorate on the outcome of the inspection report and thanked officers for the good work being undertaken by the Adoption Service.

#### RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

## SCHOOL PERFORMANCE ISSUES

### Standards Performance Data

The Committee received a report of the Acting Director of Children's Services on the performance of schools in the Borough in relation to:

- Early Years Foundation Stage
- Early Years Foundation Stage Ethnicity Report
- Key Stage 1 National Curriculum Assessment
- Key Stage 1 Ethnicity Assessment Data
- Key Stage 2 National Curriculum Assessment
- Key Stage 2 Ethnicity Data
- Key Stage 4 National Curriculum Data
- Key Stage 4 Ethnicity Assessment Data
- Key Stage 5
- Looked After Children Assessment Data – Key Stages 1, 2 and 4
- Trends Over Time – Key Stages 1, 2 and 4

In receiving the report, the Committee commented on the improvement in educational standards made in 2010, congratulated schools on their achievements where appropriate, and noted the areas where attention would be focussed to achieve continued improvement.

The Committee undertook a detailed discussion on the report. Reference was made to the impact of the Black Country Challenge, which was still being evaluated and areas for improvement had been recognised.

Concerns were expressed regarding the implications of the financial situation and the resultant impact this might have on the capacity for schools to achieve continued improvement in future years. Likely changes in national legislation would also have major implications for the management of schools and the Acting Director of Children's Services reported that consideration was being given to the future local authority support requirements. It was recognised that there were many uncertainties at the present time in view of the rapidly changing national context.

Members also raised the future scrutiny role of the local authority as a result of the proposed national legislation transferring greater responsibilities to schools and governing bodies. Further reports would be submitted on the future roles and responsibilities of the Council in the context of national legislation.

### Dudley Schools Ofsted Outcomes – April, 2010 to March, 2011

The Committee received a report of the Acting Director of Children's Services analysing the performance of Dudley Schools in Ofsted inspections.

The Committee noted that making valid and robust comparisons of performance needed to be undertaken with caution in view of changes to the national framework for inspections, which had effectively 'raised the bar' from previous years and introduced criteria for 'limiting judgements'.

In noting the information in the report, the Chairmen made positive comments concerning the overall inspection judgements received by special schools.

RESOLVED

That the reports on school performance issues be noted.

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#### QUARTERLY CORPORATE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT

A report of the Lead Officer of the Committee was submitted seeking consideration of the Quarterly Corporate Performance Management Report in relation to the review and scrutiny of the performance of the Council for the activities relating to the terms of reference of this Committee for the third quarter of 2010/11.

An accompanying report by the Acting Director of Children's Services containing contextual information regarding performance in particular areas of service was also considered, with specific reference to:-

- (a) The percentage of initial assessments for children's social care carried out in less than seven working days
- (b) Looked After Children cases which were reviewed within the required timescales
- (c) The percentage of young offenders engaged in suitable Education, Employment or Training (EET).

In response to a question concerning staff sickness levels, the Acting Director of Children's Services clarified that not all absence was stress related, however, support mechanisms were in place to address any identified issues, such as counselling or referral to Occupational Health in appropriate circumstances.

The Acting Director of Children's Services also updated the Committee on the reduced funding now received for the Youth Offending Team. All essential core activities, including those associated with Connexions, would continue to be provided within the scope of available resources.

In connection with (c) above, the Acting Director of Children's Services undertook to supply the requested information to Councillor Ms Harris concerning the actual number of young people classified as EET or NEET.

The Committee also noted that where figures were not yet available, these would be reported in the next financial year.

The Chairman also noted that the Acting Director of Children's Services had circulated a summary document on national decisions, announcements and other relevant publications associated with the Government's programme, which was available for all Members as a background document.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

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UPDATE REPORT ON THE PENSNETT EDUCATION CAMPUS

A report of the Acting Director of Children's Services was submitted on the progress of students at the Pensnett Education Campus.

The report addressed issues associated with teaching and learning, student behaviour, the progress of former students now attending other schools and various other matters.

The Chairman had held discussions with the Head of Campus and the Education Consultant. The Chairman was pleased with the ongoing performance and the parental support received and expressed his thanks to all those involved. The Committee would receive information on the academic results of leavers along with an end of year report and any associated issues in due course.

RESOLVED

That the work undertaken at the Pensnett Education Campus be noted.

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WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2011/12

The Chairman reported on potential improvements to the Council's scrutiny arrangements for the forthcoming municipal year. In particular, it was proposed to enable Members to conduct more in depth scrutiny with a consequent reduction in the number of reports presented to the Committee for information only.

A draft work programme for 2011/12 was circulated for any initial comments. The Committee noted that any future arrangements would need to retain sufficient flexibility to bring forward items for consideration, particularly in view of the changing national context affecting Children's Services.

Reference was made to the briefing information provided to elected Members and that this should also be made available to the non-elected co-opted Members of the Committee.



## RESOLVED

That the draft Work Programme for 2011/12, as circulated, be noted and that a further report be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.

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## THANKS

As this was the last meeting of the Select Committee in the municipal year, the Chairman thanked the Lead Officer, the Acting Director of Children's Services and the Assistant Principal Officer (Democratic Services) for their work in supporting the business of the Committee. He also thanked all Members and Officers who had contributed to the work of the Select Committee during 2010/11.

The Chairman also recorded his thanks for the contributions of Councillor J Martin and Mrs P Roe as they would be retiring from the Committee at the end of the municipal year. The Chairman recorded his personal appreciation of their service and noted that their contributions would be missed.

The meeting ended at 8.16 p.m.

CHAIRMAN