

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

THURSDAY 13th SEPTEMBER, 2012

**AT 6.00 PM
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2
AT THE COUNCIL HOUSE
DUDLEY**

If you (or anyone you know) is attending the meeting and requires assistance to access the venue and/or its facilities, could you please contact Democratic Services in advance and we will do our best to help you

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Your ref:

Our ref:
SG

Please ask for:
Steve Griffiths

Telephone No.
(01384) 815235

5th September, 2012

Dear Member

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
THURSDAY, 13TH SEPTEMBER, 2012 AT 6.00PM

You are requested to attend a meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee to be held on Thursday 13th September, 2012 at 6.00 pm in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley, to consider the business set out in the Agenda below.

The agenda and reports for this meeting can be viewed on the Council's internet site www.dudley.gov.uk and follow the links to Meetings and Decisions.

Yours sincerely



Director of Corporate Resources

A G E N D A

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

To receive apologies for absence from the meeting.

2. SUBSITUTE MEMBERS

To report the appointment of any substitute members serving for this meeting of the Committee.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

To receive declarations of interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct.

4. MINUTES

To approve as a correct record and sign the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 21st June, 2012 (copy attached).

5. ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION REPORT FOR THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2011/2012 (PAGES 1 - 11)

To consider a report of the Director of Children's Services

6. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DUDLEY LOCAL AUTHORITY ADOPTION SERVICE 2011/12 (PAGES 12 - 34)

To consider a report of the Director of Children's Services

7. FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT (PAGES 35 - 50)

To consider a report of the Director of Children's Services

8. ACTION PLANS IN RESPONSE TO OfSTED INSPECTION OF SAFEGUARDING AND LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (PAGES 51 - 54)

To consider a report of the Director of Children's Services

9. 'TROUBLED FAMILIES' IN DUDLEY (PAGES 55 – 59)

To consider a report of the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Officer

10. YOUTH OFFENDING SERVICE INSPECTION

The Director of Children's Services to give an oral update to the Committee

11. TO ANSWER QUESTIONS UNDER COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 11.8 (IF ANY) AND QUESTIONS ON THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION ITEMS AVAILABLE ON THE COMMITTEE MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM (CMIS).

Information Items

- (a) Responses to Questions from the Previous Meeting.
- (b) The Academies Programme in Dudley.
- (c) Quarterly Corporate Performance Management Report and Contextual Information.
- (d) Draft Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

Members are asked to email steve.griffiths@dudley.gov.uk (at least three working days before the meeting) with details of any questions they wish to raise on the information items.

This will enable responses to questions to be circulated prior to the meeting.

Questions on information items raised at the meeting will receive a written response following the meeting.

To: All Members of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee:

Councillor S Turner (Chair)

Councillor Boleyn (Vice-Chair)

Councillors Arshad, Attwood, Mrs Billingham, Bills, Casey, J Jones, Marrey, Mrs Simms and Mrs Walker.

Mrs Ward, Reverend Wickens; Mr Songole, Mr Tinsley; Mrs Verdegem; Mr Taylor; Mrs Coulter, Mr Ridney

cc: Councillor Crumpton (Cabinet Member for Children's Services)

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 21st June, 2012 at 6.00pm
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Councillor S Turner (Chair)
Councillor Boleyn (Vice-Chair)
Councillors Arshad, Mrs Billingham, Bills, Casey, J Jones, Marrey, Miller, Mrs Simms and Mrs Walker; Mrs Ward, Mrs Verdegem, Mrs Coulter and Mr Ridley.

OFFICERS

Assistant Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services (Policy, Performance and Resources) – Lead Officer to the Committee; Acting Director of Children's Services, Assistant Directors of Children's Services (Children and Families) and (Quality and Partnership), Head of Youth Service, Targeted and Service Improvements Manager, Head of Service (Safeguarding and Review Unit) and the Democratic Services Manger.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Detective Chief Inspector R Jones (West Midlands Police – Public Protection Unit), S Marshall (Health Provider for Children's Services) and P Owens (Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children - NHS, Dudley); Representatives of the Dudley Youth Service and young people/users of the Youth Service attended for the relevant agenda items.

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of Councillor Attwood, Mr Songole and Reverend Wickens and the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services (Councillor Crumpton).

2 **SUBSTITUTE MEMBER**

It was reported that Councillor Miller was serving in place of Councillor Attwood for this meeting of the Committee only.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mrs Walker declared a personal interest in Minute No. 8 below in view of her grandson attending one of the young peoples' clubs referred to in the report.

Councillor Mrs Simms declared a personal interest in Minute No. 9 below in view of her employment with Barnardos.

4 MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 22nd March, 2012 be approved as a correct record and signed.

5 WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2012/13

The Committee considered a report of the Lead Officer on the work programme for the 2012/13 municipal year.

Reference was made to the forthcoming review of the Council's Scrutiny Committees and the need for the work programme to be flexible to take account of business arising during the year. A view was expressed that Scrutiny Committees should focus on particular topics, scrutinise these in detail and formulate reports/recommendations in a similar way to the operation of Parliamentary Select Committees.

The Chair indicated that the review would aim to increase the overall effectiveness of the scrutiny process whilst recognising the requirements for Members to consider certain reports. Work programmes needed to be flexible enough to respond to changing circumstances. The Chair also requested that the Committee's work programme be amended to include an item on School Exam results later in the year.

RESOLVED

That, subject to the inclusion of an agenda item on School Exam results in the autumn of 2012, the draft work programme of the Committee for 2012/13 be approved.

6 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR 2011/12

The annual report of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee for 2011/12 was submitted and considered.

Reference was made to the succinct presentation of the report, which it was considered did not entirely reflect the depth and diverse range of issues dealt with by the Children's Services Directorate during the year. The Committee paid tribute to the commitment of Members and Officers in dealing with issues affecting Children's Services and requested that this be reflected in future reports.

The Committee also referred to the importance of the role of elected Members in relation to Corporate Parenting. It was requested that more information be circulated to Members to promote this role.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the annual report of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee be noted and referred to the Council.
- (2) That the full range of activities dealt with by the Directorate of Children's Services Directorate be more fully reflected in future reports on the work of this Scrutiny Committee.
- (3) That the Acting Director of Children's Services liaise with the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services with a view to circulating a leaflet/newsletter to all Members of the Council on the duties and responsibilities in connection with Corporate Parenting.

7 UPDATE ON THE YOUTH SERVICE

The Committee considered a report of the Acting Director of Children's Services on Dudley Youth Service, including information on the structure of the service and key priorities for 2012/13 onwards.

The following priorities were being pursued by the Youth Service taking account of the views of young people in the ongoing development of the range of services offered:-

- Work with vulnerable and targeted young people
- Active and suitably resourced youth centres contributing to local communities
- Young people actively involved in decision making, service design and quality assurance
- Young-leaders working with peers and the local community
- Secure a wide range of activities to improve the wellbeing of young people
- Local capacity building including the management of risk and workforce development opportunities.

The Committee thanked officers for the presentation of a concise and comprehensive report. Reference was made to the lack of media activity identified in Appendix 2 on the provision of positive activities for young people across the five Area Committee geographical locations. It was noted, however, that in connection with Dudley Grid for Learning, many schools operated 'after school' clubs and media activities were also offered by Dudley College and voluntary organisations.

The Committee noted that 7,772 young people (29.97% of the borough's youth population) had accessed some form of activity provided by the Youth Service in 2011/12. Members supported the continued promotion of the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme and various other initiatives to actively engage with the youth population. The Head of the Youth Service referred to the availability of Detached Workers in some areas whose role was to reach out to young people who were not engaged in mainstream activities. Members with any particular issues in their wards were invited to discuss these with the Acting Director of Children's Services.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services be advised that this Committee supports the ongoing priorities that have been identified for the Youth Service.
- (2) That the Cabinet Member be briefed on the comments made by Members of the Committee including the need to give consideration to the provision of Detached Workers to pursue further outreach work in certain parts of the Borough.

The Committee considered a report of the Acting Director of Children's Services on the Dudley Youth Service provision for targeted and vulnerable young people and outlining key priorities for 2012 onwards.

The Youth Service had a focused staff team working with targeted groups. The groups being supported were disability, sexual health and teenage pregnancy, looked after children and young people and crime. The wider staff team also worked to improve the outcomes of targeted and vulnerable young people. The report identified examples of provision currently being delivered and developed by the Youth Service.

The Committee heard comments from representatives of the team in addition to young people who attended the clubs, service users and parent/carers. In particular, members of the "Fantastic Fun Club" for looked after children explained how a mixture of structured activities and peer support provided a valuable resource. The Committee also noted comments concerning a group for children with autism in Lower Gornal that had been established by users and their carers and which had grown successfully in recent years.

Members welcomed all the comments made and thanked everyone for their attendance and the direct feedback given and the experiences shared with the Committee.

Members noted comments made by young people concerning facilities that might be available but could not be used due to the lack of trained personnel (eg: a climbing wall). The Committee asked that consideration be given to encouraging schools to engage further with the Youth Service with a view to making such facilities available for use by the clubs concerned. The Acting Director of Children's Services indicated that links were already in place with secondary schools and efforts to encourage engagement with the Youth Service would be pursued further.

Reference was also made to the possibility of encouraging voluntary sector organisations to set up additional groups and where possible this could be assisted by the provision of small capacity grants from the Council. Such activities would, however, need to take account of the availability of volunteers in certain parts of the Borough that might exclude disadvantaged groups.

The Committee also identified the need for further promotional work on the activities provided and the possibility of Members undertaking visits to Youth Clubs to raise the profile of the work undertaken by the Youth Service.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the report and information provided be noted.
- (2) That the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services be recommended to support the promotion of elected Member involvement in and visits to Youth Clubs.
- (3) That the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services be requested to consider the age ranges for service provision to ensure that young people are not excluded from attending clubs or undertaking activities which may be appropriate to them.

- (4) That the Acting Director of Children's Services be requested to continue efforts to encourage schools to engage with the Youth Service to make appropriate facilities available to users of the various Youth Clubs concerned and that these views be communicated to the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services.
- (5) That the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services be informed of the views of the Committee concerning the encouragement of voluntary sector organisations to set up additional groups, with assistance from small capacity grants where possible, subject to appropriate safeguards to ensure that disadvantaged groups are not excluded in certain parts of the Borough.
- (6) That the Acting Director of Children's Services be requested to ensure appropriate communication with Councillors, in particular the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services and the Members of this Scrutiny Committee, to promote the activities offered by the Youth Service.
- (7) That appropriate Councillors be included on the mailing lists for information from individual youth clubs where possible.

9

ACTION PLANS IN RESPONSE TO THE OFSTED INSPECTION OF SAFEGUARDING AND LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

The Committee considered a report of the Acting Director of Children's Services on the progress of work in connection with the Ofsted inspection of Safeguarding and Looked after children services that had taken place in 2011.

The Committee received four action plans to address specific issues in the inspection report relating to:

- Joint and agreed quality standards for safeguarding practice across the partnership and implementation of a joint quality assurance and performance framework underpinned by efficient information systems.
- Ensure MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) is fully operational and effective leadership is in place in order to meet the level of demand for such arrangements.
- Improve the consistency of recording and assessments.
- NHS to review the capacity of the specialist health services to looked after children and young people to ensure health support, including dental health care and annual health assessments, is accessible, timely and user-friendly.

The Committee welcomed G Tilby (Head of Service - Safeguarding and Review Unit), Detective Chief Inspector R Jones (West Midlands Police – Public Protection Unit), S Marshall (Health Provider for Children’s Services) and P Owens (Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children - NHS, Dudley) who made representations to the Committee on issues in the action plans relating to their areas of responsibility.

The Acting Director of Children’s Services emphasised that the actions set out in the detailed action plans were intended to build upon and strengthen work previously undertaken in Dudley. The focus was on developing areas that would have a positive impact and improve outcomes for local children and young people.

Reference was made to the need to submit an annual report on the results achieved. The Acting Director of Children’s Services confirmed that further plans and progress information would be reported to the Committee in 2012/13.

In regard to the MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference), the Committee noted that this group had a key role in identifying and mitigating serious risks by strengthening multi agency working and information sharing in cases of domestic violence and associated child protection issues. The MARAC group had adopted a ‘task and finish’ approach to the development of risk management action plans, which had strengthened the co-ordinated approach taken by all the agencies involved.

In relation to the electronic recording system in Children’s Social Care, the Committee noted the complexity of this ongoing work and the collaborative approach being taken by officers in conjunction with the supplier of the system.

In relation to issues associated with School Health Advisors, reference was made to the possibility of changing working conditions to ensure that such staff were ‘on call’ during the school holidays. Although the Advisors could be contacted during school holidays, the Committee was concerned that more robust arrangements should be in place on a ‘year round’ basis.

A business case was being developed for the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). The Committee emphasised the importance of fully representing the health and well being of children and young people in the context of health reforms and within the discussions of the Shadow Dudley Health and Wellbeing Board. The Acting Director of Children’s Services reported that the CCG were represented on the Health and Wellbeing Board and representations would be made on this issue in the context of overall financial pressures. The Committee requested that the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children’s Services and the Chair and Vice-Chair be kept informed of developments.

The Acting Director of Children's Services and the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services had acknowledged the key role of Members in assisting with safeguarding matters and information was circulated on the contact telephone numbers to be used in any cases where child abuse was suspected.

RESOLVED

That subject to the comments of the Committee, as set out above, the action plans presented to the meeting be noted and that further action plans be submitted to future meetings during the 2012/13 municipal year.

10

QUESTIONS UNDER COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 11.8

There were no questions asked under the provisions of Council Procedure Rule 11.8. The Lead Officer clarified that answers would be provided to questions asked at the meeting wherever possible and that written answers would be given should this be necessary or appropriate.

At the conclusion of the business, the Chair thanked all those present for their attendance and contributions to the discussions of the Scrutiny Committee.

The meeting ended at 7.55 pm

CHAIR

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee – 13th September 2012

Report of the Director of Children's Services

Elective Home Education Report for the Academic Year 2011 - 2012

Purpose of Report

1. To inform and update the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee on the current work being undertaken in relation to Elective Home Education.

Background

2. **Parental Responsibilities are:** The responsibility for a child's education rests with parents. The law requires that a parent provides suitable education for their child or children. In the majority of cases this means that parents send their children to school. Some parents however prefer to educate their child or children at home. When a parent elects to home educate their child or children there is no clear definition of what a suitable education should be. As a result guidance has to be drawn from cases presented to the law courts. For example:
3. The diversity of modern society and styles of education give parents considerable freedom of choice in enabling children to achieve their potential. In the case of *R v Secretary of State for Education and Science, ex parte Talmud Torah Machikei Hadass School Trust* (1985)(Times, 12 April 1985) Mr Justice Woolf held that:
 - Education is 'suitable' if it primarily equips a child for life within the community of which he is a member, rather than the way of life in the country as a whole, as long as it does not foreclose the child's options in later years to adopt some other form of life if he wishes to do so.
4. Examining the meaning of the expression *full-time* shows the hours spent on teaching in schools are not relevant to home education, which generally takes place on a one-to-one basis, or in small groups, in very different conditions.
5. Provided the child is not registered at a school, the parent is not required to provide any particular type of education, and is under no obligation to:
 - have premises equipped to any particular standard
 - have any specific qualifications

- cover the same syllabus as any school
- adopt the National Curriculum
- make detailed plans in advance
- observe school hours, days or terms
- have a fixed timetable
- give formal lessons
- reproduce school type peer group socialisation
- match school, age-specific standards
- seek permission to educate 'otherwise'
- take the initiative in informing the Local Authority
- have regular contact with the Local Authority

6. **Local Authority responsibilities are:**

- To provide accurate and clear written information about Elective Home Education on the Local Authority website re. legal position, roles and responsibilities of both the Local Authority and parents.
- To recognise that there are many approaches to educational provision, not just a 'school at home' model.
- The Education and Inspection Act 2006, Section 4, placed a duty on Local Authorities to make arrangements to identify children not receiving a suitable education. However, parents do not have to register a child as being home educated, unless they are leaving a school's roll.
- The Local Authority has no statutory duties in relation to monitoring the quality of home education on a routine basis. However, under Section 437(1) of the Education Act 1996, a Local Authority's shall intervene if **it appears** that parents are not providing a suitable education. The Local Authority shall serve a note in writing on the parents requiring them to satisfy the Local Authority within the period specified in the notice that the child is receiving such education. However, in such cases, the Local Authority is encouraged to resolve the situation informally, negating the need to serve an Attendance Order.
- Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 sets out the arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. However, this does not extend Local Authority powers, under Section 175(1) of the Education Act 2002, to enter the home of, or

otherwise see, children for the purpose of monitoring the provision of Elective Home Education.

- When a child comes onto the Elective Home Education register, our Standard Operating Procedures are such that safeguarding checks are carried out for all new children added to the Elective Home Education list. This provides transparency with information sharing between Dudley Safeguarding Board, the Education Investigation Service and other services involved in Elective Home Education.
 - These links raised awareness that Social Services had involvement with 34 Elective Home Education children either in the past or presently with issues of domestic violence, neglect, youth offending or child protection. A few cases have resulted in Child Protection Case Conferences being initiated that have resulted in the child/ren being returned to school and three children were removed from the family home and taken into care.
7. The number of children on the Elective Home Education Register continues to be fluid, with 6 (3.1%) children / young people moving out of the Dudley area and 28 (14.4%) students being referred to Admissions procedures or the Fair Access Panel for a return to school. (Academic year 2011-12)
8. In the academic year 2011 -12, 194 children have at some stage been on the Elective Home Education register. This is an increase over the numbers in the previous academic year. The three-year rolling average shows ever increasing numbers with the associated implications re: staff workload and resources.

2002 – 2005	82.0
2003 – 2006	102.3
2004 – 2007	129.0
2005 – 2008	150.0
2006 – 2009	170.7
2007 – 2010	180.7
2008 – 2011	181.7
2009 – 2012	186.0

9. Tracking of children has continued to be successful, with contact having been made with and information established for each child.
10. Reports and / or file notes, together with the Elective Home Education database, are up-to-date and held securely.

11. We continue to have well-embedded procedures for monitoring the effectiveness of home education, by the Local Authority 's preferred option of a home visit, a meeting at Saltwells Education Development Centre or a parent report. It is pleasing to note that we have only 3 families that have chosen to write a written report, rather than have direct contact with the Local Authority. However, it is still of concern that for the eight children / young people (4.1%), it is difficult to assess if they are receiving a suitable education. We believe this is a reflection of the importance we place on developing effective relationships with children, parents and the Elective Home Education community.
12. Systems are also well-embedded for cases where the education being provided is deemed to be unsuitable. Contact with parents and children is directly proportioned to need, with more frequent contact where concerns have been identified and have to be addressed, e.g. educational progress, Special Educational Needs, child protection and welfare.
13. It is pleasing to note that all of the 28 children who were returned to mainstream or special schools this year were with the agreement and support of families. This includes three children on the Child Protection list and two 'children in need'.
14. Elective Home Education has continued to work effectively with other departments within Children's Services and other agencies to ensure a two-way flow of information to address individual cases, namely:
 - ✓ Admissions
 - ✓ Autism Outreach Team
 - ✓ Children's Health Department
 - ✓ Children Missing Education
 - ✓ Connexions
 - ✓ Education Business Partnerships
 - ✓ Education Investigation Service
 - ✓ Family Intervention Teams
 - ✓ Traveller Education
 - ✓ Parent Partnership
 - ✓ Safeguarding Board
 - ✓ Speech and Language Therapy
 - ✓ Schools and Colleges
 - ✓ Special Educational Needs Team
 - ✓ Social Services

15. The effectiveness of the communication between colleagues is enhanced by what brings us together. We have developed an ethos where we embrace our responsibilities and help each other succeed. We strive to understand the big picture then do our part. We acknowledge that, by working together, we can and do produce better results than any of us can achieve alone.

16. However, in terms of a return to school for Elective Home Education students, this continues to be problematic. The lack of spaces in some of our primary and secondary schools continues to be an issue and, together with Fair Access Panel and Admissions protocols, often results in significant time lapses before Elective Home Education children who are not receiving a suitable education are finally placed. This is compounded if individuals are referred to township and then borough panels. There is also the specific issue with Fair Access Panel protocols, in that Elective Home Education students are returned to the school they previously attended. This makes no sense from the parents' perspective for children / young people who have become Elective Home Educated for alleged bullying. This matter is part of an on going dialogue with schools as they revise their Fair Access Protocol.

17. The number of children with a Statement of Special Educational Needs is continuing to decrease. In this academic year the number has reduced to 6, namely: 1 girl and 5 boys.

2004 /05 =	1
2005 / 06 =	4
2006 / 07 =	13
2007 / 08 =	12
2008 / 09 =	11
2009 / 10 =	9
2010 / 11 =	8
2011 / 12 =	6

18. For children with special educational needs, there is a process of interim assessments with specialist areas so that Elective Home Education visits and reports feed into the annual review of the statement.

19. Protocols are embedded for assessing requests from parents of children in special schools who need to seek the permission of the Local Authority before electing for home education and for the review of the annual statement, since the Local Authority has a duty to ensure that the child's special educational needs continues to be met. It is pleasing to note the continued development of outreach support for Elective Home Education children, which includes Cherry Tree Learning Centre, Pens Meadow, Rosewood and Sutton Special Schools.

20. The reasons given by parents for electing for home education show little variation from last year, namely:

	Reasons	No.	%
1	Schools not meeting individuals' educational needs	34	17.5
2	Cultural issues/traveller children / lifestyle choice	34	17.5
3	Attendance / disciplinary issue with the school	30	15.5
4	Health problems / school phobia / emotional issues	24	12.4
5	Religious beliefs	21	10.8
6	Philosophical	18	9.3
7	Alleged bullying	17	8.8
8	Not accepting school on transfer to secondary/ admissions issue	9	4.6
9	Family circumstances	7	3.6

- The age profile, by year and key stage, is consistent with previous years' figures with greater numbers at the secondary stage of education.

Year	No. of Pupils
Reception	2
1	11
2	9
3	8
4	6
5	8
6	15
7	20
8	19
9	33
10	30
11	33

Year	No. of Pupils	%
Reception	2	1.0
KS1	20	10.3
KS2	37	19.1
KS3	72	37.1
KS4	63	32.5

21. It is still of concern that parents will remove children at a late stage in their schooling to home educate.

22. **The gender profile is shown below:**

Gender	No. of Pupils	% of Pupils
Male	104	53.6
Female	90	46.4

23. The breakdown of Elective Home Education children / young people in terms of ethnicity is:

Ethnicity	No.	Gender
Pakistani	3	3 girls
Black African	5	4 boys, 1 girl
Mixed: White / Black African	1	1 boy
Mixed: White / Asian	4	2 boys, 2 girls
Mixed: White / Caribbean	3	2 boys, 1 girl
Any Other Ethnic Background	1	1 boy
Any Other White Background	5	4 boys, 1 girl
White British	142	72 boys, 70 girls
Gypsy / Roma & Traveller of Irish Heritage	30	18 boys, 12 girls

24. The trend of an increase in the number of non white-British students becoming Elective Home Education in the last seven years has now levelled out.
25. The Connexions Service has dedicated personal advisers for Elective Home Education students and has continued to provide career interviews, advice and guidance for home educated children. Post-16 destinations have been determined for all Year 11 students, namely:

Destination	No.
College	19
Employment	6
Glasshouse Arts Centre	1
Open University Degree	1
Traveller Lifestyle	3
Vocational Training	3

Dudley Local Authority support for Elective Home Education children

26. The Local Authority has continued to provide significant support for Elective Home Education children this year to ensure that they are getting the best possible education. The support for Elective Home Education families consists of:

- The weekly provision at Pensnett 14-19 Education Campus for the delivery of GCSE classes in English and mathematics and the study of literacy and numeracy. This will be extended in September 2012 to include the teaching of functional skills. 46 children have attended throughout the year including seven Gypsy Roma Traveller children. This has included some very vulnerable children who have, therefore, been seen and monitored weekly.
- Attendance at Dudley College for Hair and Beauty and Construction courses. These college links will be further extended in September 2012 with students attending Halesowen College to follow Animal Care and Hairdressing programmes of study,
- ASDAN, Certificate of Personal Effectiveness and Personal Social Education programme with training provided by the Local Authority and delivered by an Elective Home Education parent. Next year will focus on the ASDAN Adult Literacy and Numeracy Programmes.
- Outreach support for Elective Home Education statemented children from Cherry Tree Learning Centre, Pens Meadow, Rosewood and Sutton Special Schools.
- Dedicated officers from the Connexions Team to support progression post 16 to ensure that there is effective transition from home education to higher and further education. It is pleasing to report that we again have no children in the NEET category.
- Dedicated officers from our Education Business Partnership Team to provide work experience for interested young people.
- An exciting development this year has seen the establishment of a virtual learning environment for Elective Home Education students.

27. The scoping of the design of the Elective Home Education, Virtual Learning Environment and the procurement, provisioning and populating of resources within the Elective Home Education Virtual Learning Environment has culminated with the provision of a Dudley Grid for Learning 'Portal' account to all Elective Home Education pupils, providing a 'one-stop' safe and secure virtual learning environment and allowing access to the following key features:

- The provisioning of RM Easymail Plus e-mail accounts for children to correspond with a 'virtual teacher'. This facility provides the opportunities for

children to ask a teacher for advice on their studies, as well as receive work electronically.

- The provision of a safe and secure 'chat-room' facility open to Elective Home Education pupils to take part in discussions/debates and seek clarification to questions relating to their studies.
- The provision of a safe and secure 'Instant Messenger' (IM) service for quick question and answer correspondence.
- Instant access to some of the best free resources on the Internet for English, Maths and ICT and to purchased resources for Science.
- Instant access to a bank of prepared resources from Dudley Grid for Learning to include Art, Humanities and Music.
- Access to a number of productivity tools purchased by Dudley Grid for Learning including J2e and Purple Mash (programs popular in secondary and primary schools).
- Access to a range of other free facilities including ICE (Safe Internet Search Engine) and the National Archives.

28. The system has been future-proofed with integration into the Integris Management Information System, capacity for additional users, integration of a virtual workflow and mark book environment as well as complementary parental access.

29. A further development commencing in September 2012 will be the introduction of a Core Science iGCSE covering the three elements of Biology, Chemistry and Physics. This will take place at Halesowen College to utilise their science facilities in a twilight session once per week. This introduction will ensure that all Elective Home Education children within Dudley Local Authority have the opportunity of studying all of the core subjects ensuring an entitlement curriculum.

30. In terms of outcomes and qualifications it is pleasing to note that results of the GCSE examinations in 2010/11, 100% of the 12 students ranging from Year 8 to Year 11 achieved grade A*-C, namely:

English – 2A*, 5A, 3B, 2C

Mathematics – 2A*, 5A, 4B, 1C

31. For the present cohort, 18 children ranging from Year 9 to Year 11 have been entered for GCSE Mathematics and 10 for GCSE English. One year 11 girl has already attained 8 GCSEs at 'A' and A* level and has just completed studying 'A' level Biology, Chemistry and Physics and a third year Open University maths degree.
32. It was also pleasing to note that an ex Elective Home Education student has just been awarded a first class honours degree in computer Science.
33. The Government's Education Committee's enquiry into the support available for home education does not wish to cause 'controversy in its muddling of safeguarding matters and education matters' but it is still of concern that nationally we have not addressed the tension that presently exists between local authority responsibility and parental rights, namely:
- Parents are not required to register their intent to home educate.
 - There is no clear workable definition of what constitutes an efficient and suitable full-time education.
 - There is no right of access to the home re. educational provision/working conditions.
 - There is no right of access to the child for educational purposes, although Local Authorities are responsible for safeguarding and promoting children's welfare.
 - Parents can presently elect for home education, even if there is a history of condoned absence, unmanaged truancy or other low level concerns.
34. In terms of financial support for home educators, the new guidance notes for the 2012 Alternative Provision Census includes a category entitled 'Not a school'. This allows the Local Authority to receive funding for arrangements that we make for the education of pupils of Gypsy, Roma & Traveller families and also children who are electively home educated by their parents who are receiving significant financial support by the Local Authority to attend a College of Further Education or other Alternative Provision and / or in support of the child's special educational needs.
35. There is no minimum age for the students, courses can be online and it is not necessary for the child to have a statement of special educational needs. It is a matter for the Local Authority to determine what support to give, but the Local Authority needs to be satisfied that the support being provided contributes to the overall education of the child and provides value for money.

Law

36. In England, education is compulsory, but schooling is not. Section 7 of the 1996 Education Act provides that:

‘The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause them to receive efficient full-time education suitable (a) to their age, ability and aptitude and (b) to any special educational needs they may have, either by attendance at school or otherwise.’

Finance

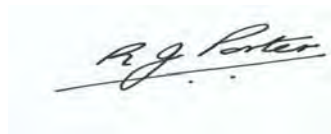
37. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report in respect of Elective Home Education. The (aforementioned) new Alternative Provision Census 2012 guidance notes are being considered as part of the wider formula funding review.

Equality Impact

38. This report takes into account the Council’s Equal Opportunities Policy.

Recommendations

39. It is recommended that the Scrutiny Committee note and comment on the content contained within the report.



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Jane Porter
Director of Children’s Services

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Children's Services Scrutiny Committee – 13th September 2012

Report of the Director of Children's Services

Annual Report of the Dudley Local Authority Adoption Service 2011/12

Purpose of Report

1. To present the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee with the annual report of Dudley Local Authority Adoption Service for 2011/12.

Background

2. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 places a duty on Local Authorities to maintain an adoption service including arrangements for the provision of adoption support services and an inter-country adoption service.
3. Dudley's adoption service arranges for the adoption of children and in doing so provides recruitment, assessment, training and support services to prospective and approved adopters. The Service offers advice to childcare social workers in matters pertaining to adoption and works in partnership with social workers to identify a suitable placement for children looked after by Dudley Council for whom adoption is considered to be in the best interest of those individual children. The adoption support service assesses and provides support to all those affected by adoption and the service facilitates contact and information exchange between birth families, adoptive parents and their children.
4. The adoption service also commissions support services to represent and support birth parents where adoption is proposed or has taken place and counselling for individuals who have been adopted.
5. Local Authority adoption services are subject to inspection by Ofsted to ensure that the services meeting the national minimum stated for Local Authority adoption services and the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000, the Adoption Children's Act 2002 and the Adoption Service Regulations 2005. The service was last inspected in November 2010. The overall Judgement for the service was good.

6. Adoption services in Dudley are provided by a dedicated team of adoption social workers, adoption support workers, and a marketing officer which is shared with the other three Black Country Borough plus administrative staff. The team is managed by a service manager and assistant team manager. In addition the service benefits from the support of a clinical psychologist which is funded from the Children and Adolescence Mental Health Grant.
7. In March 2011 the government published an action plan for adoption 'tackling delay' which sets out the governments actions to reform the system so that children needing adoption are placed with a permanent family more quickly. In addition in chapter 3 of the plan adoption score cards for all Local Authority were published. The score cards set out performance and provide a basis for authorities to assess their own performance, compare it with other Local Authorities and to inform discussions with partners including the courts- see Appendix 1. In June the Department for Education published amendments to the statutory guidance on adoption to reflect the changes to be implemented by the adoption agencies (panel and consequential amendments) regulations 2012 which will come into force on the 1st September 2012.
8. The primary change made by the regulations is that adoption panels will no longer be involved in the agencies process of deciding whether a child should be placed for adoption when the court will be involved in the decision. Panel will still be required to consider places and make recommendations where the child's parents consent for the child to be placed for adoption. Where the child's parents are not prepared to consent, where proceedings are ongoing or where the child has no parents, the case must be directed to the agency decision maker who is the Assistant Director, Children & Families.
9. Attached at Appendix 1 is the annual report of the Dudley Adoption Service which outlines all of the services which are provided by the team together with performance and activity levels plus service development for the year 2011/12.

Finance

10. The Local Authority Adoption Service budget for 2011/12 was £1,058,800. The current 2012/13 budget is £1,164,300; this is inclusive of staffing costs, but excludes any departmental administrative recharges.

Law

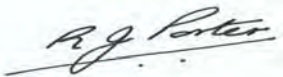
11. The Adoption Children Act 2002 places a duty on Local Authorities to maintain an adoption service including arrangements for the provision of adoption support services and an inter-country adoption service.

Equality Impact

12. The maintenance and development of a comprehensive adoption service contributes to improving outcomes for looked after children by providing stable, secure and safe care. It assists the Council in discharging its Corporate Parenting responsibilities to ensure that looked after children are disadvantaged by being in care and that they achieve secure attachments and have experience of family life where they are unable to live with their birth families.

Recommendations

13. Children's Services Scrutiny Committee receive and makes comments where appropriate to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services on the annual report of Dudley's adoption service 2011/12.



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Dudley Adoption Service Annual Report



1st April 2011 to 31st March 2012

Dudley Adoption Service Mission Statement;

To find and support lifelong adoptive families for Dudley's 'Looked After Children' whose needs can be best met through adoption.

Contents

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5. Summary

1. Setting the scene – adoption service statutory duties

This report is to update the Director of Children's Services, highlighting the successes and challenges that the service is seeking to address.

Service Overview

The Adoption Service provides a comprehensive range of adoption services to carry out the responsibilities of the Directorate in its role as an Adoption Agency. The service offers specialist advice, skills and information on adoption and permanency matters to children's social workers and others in the Directorate.

Family finding social workers assist Care Management colleagues in managing skilled transitions of children into carefully matched adoptive placements. They provide initial assessment to inform the agencies acceptance of an application to adopt and then undertake comprehensive assessment using the BAAF Prospective Adopters Report format to enable the Adoption Panel to assess suitability to adopt. They also provide counselling of all individuals wishing to adopt, and for birth parents who are considering relinquishing a child to adoption. In addition the service provides support, advice and activity in relation to non -agency (step parent) adoptions which can include an inter-country element.

Our adoption support service assesses and provides tailor-made support to all those affected by adoption, prioritising families at risk of breakdown where children are under 18 years of age. Close working links are established with universal and specialist provisions in the borough. Dudley Adoption Service remains responsible for all its former 'Looked After children' (LAC) placed with adopters for a 3 year period after the making of an Adoption Order and Adoption Support Plans are in place for these families to cater for their particular needs. Other adoptive families approved by neighbouring boroughs or by Voluntary Adoption Agencies, resident within the borough become eligible for service post 3 years. Increasing emphasis is being placed on early notification of these placements to assist prediction of future service needs. The adoption support social workers facilitate face-to-face contact and all adoption staff service the information exchange between growing numbers of birth families and adoptive parents, and their children.

Adoption in the Black Country (ABC) consortium service agreements are in place to provide effective adoption services to all affected by adoption. **Adoption UK**, an independent non profit making adopter lead organisation provides a range of support services including adopter support groups at venues in the Black Country. Other services include Family Support Services that maximise peer support and the Piece of Cake post placement training programme.

After Adoption (formerly Adoption Support Birmingham) provides a dedicated independent service to birth parents of children where adoption is proposed or has taken place. It also undertakes all adult related adoption work for Dudley residents to tracing adopted relatives or access to their adoption records with an Intermediary Service, to support all parties to reconnect in a well managed safe way.

A regular newsletter enables adopters to remain informed and self selected the services that most support their family's current needs.

Initial counselling interviews for those individuals adopted pre 1976 is provided by the Dudley Adoption Service.

The promotion of Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) as a permanence option for LAC who are in stable family placements is high on the Directorate's current agenda in addressing escalating LAC numbers. The Assistant Team Manager provides information packs and surgery sessions for interested parties. The support needs of this group are becoming more apparent and need investment if this option is to be promoted to many stable permanent families.

2. Profile of adoption service staff group

Management Team	
37hr	Adoption Service Manager-Ofsted Registered Manager
37hr	Assistant Team Manager (Adoption support and SGO with a small complex caseload)

Family finding for children, recruitment and assessment of future adoptive parent/s and duty work	
37hr	Senior Practitioner
37hr	Social Worker
30hr	Social Worker
18.5hr	Social Worker
18.5hr	Social Worker

12.5	Social Worker
30hr	Social Worker (from November 2011)

Adoption support and contact including letterbox and duty work	
37hr	Adoption Support Social Worker
22.5hr	Adoption Support Social Worker
22.5 hr	Clinical Psychologist (Maternity until April 2012)
4hr	Sessional social worker- letterbox contact

Administrative support	
37 hr	Senior Admin Assistant / Panel administrator
37 hr	Senior Admin Assistant / Panel administrator
37hr	Admin Assistant /Letterbox Assistant
18hr	Young apprentice temporary appointment

NB all financial means testing for Adoption allowance, SGO and Residence Order (RO) are completed by the senior admin assistants, in addition to specialist adoption panel administrative roles.

Adoption in the Black Country Consortium (ABC)- Recruitment and Marketing Service	
37 hr	Marketing and Recruitment Officer (Part funded by Dudley, Sandwell, Wolverhampton and Walsall) - Managed and administrative support from DMBC Adoption Service

Sessional Social Work Staff	
3 independent Social Workers (GSCC reg'd) Completing adopter assessment work, non agency adoption court reports and adoption support work	

3. Service Activity Levels

During the review period the service was involved in the following activities to meet the Directorates responsibilities as an Adoption Agency

3.1 Children's case progression

Number of children accepted for adoption during the 12 months to 31st March 2012

2011-12	36
Children with Placement Order of 1.4.2012	35 (Scorecard data)
2010-11	47
2009-10	32

Ethnicity of children accepted for adoption during the 12 months to 31st March 2012

Asian/British	2
White/ Asian British	3
White/Black British	2
White/British	29

Number of children placed with approved adopter/s from 1st April to 31st March 2012

2011-12	27
2010-11	14
2009-10	22

Proportion of children placed for adoption with 21 months of becoming LAC

2011-12	64%
2008-11 Dudley Scorecard	52% *noted improving trend

* This is a new indicator to monitor performance from first admission to care to a child being placed for with an approved family.

Number of children placed through inter-agency arrangements

2011-12	9 children in 6 placements
2010-11	13 children in 10 placements

Number of children adopted from LAC during the 12 months ending 31st March 2012

2011-12	19
2010-11	21
2009-10	19
2008-09	12

Percentage of children leaving LAC through adoption: 14%

2011-12	14%
2008-11	11% (Average scorecard data)

Care Management Team distribution;

Dudley North and Team 4	5
Halesowen	7
Brierley Hill	5
Children's disability team	1

Ethnicity of children adopted:

Asian/British	1
White/ Asian British	1
White/Black British	1
White/British	16

Ages of children at adoption order:

Under 12 months	1
Before 2 nd birthday	5
Before 3 rd birthday	9
After 3 rd birthday but before 5 th birthday	2
Child 5 +	2

This included 3 sibling pairs and 1 child joining an adopted sibling

Adoptive placements disrupted pre order:

2011-2012	0
2010 -2011	0

Number of children withdrawn from the Adoption List and new care plan during the review period

Permanent fostering	2
Rehabilitation programme to birth parent	1

Number of children whose adoptive parents are receiving adoption allowance;

2011-2012	68
2010-2011	65
2009-2010	66

Special Guardianship Activity**Total Number of children where SGO allowances are provided:**

2011-2012	22
2010-2011	19

There are 20 children whose carers have been informed of the financial package that they would receive if they progress their intended plan to seek an SGO order.

Attendance at Special Guardianship surgeries from April 2011 – March 2012

Family and Friends	7
Foster carers	8
Private applications	7
Total	22

3.2 ASSESSING ADOPTIVE PARENT/S WORK**Adults seeking to adopt enquiries during the review period**

2011-2012	85
2011-2012 Redirected to Adoption in the Black Country as DMBC address	39
2010-2011	75
2009-2010	70

Outcome of enquiry

Initial assessments completed	22
Accepted application	12
Withdrew during home study assessment	2
Intercountry adoption enquiry	9
Intercountry adoption applications	0

Applications approved as suitable to adopt

2011-12	13
Current assessments to of suitability at 31.3.2012	9
2010-11	10
2009-10	7
Time taken to match with child once approved	10 of 14 matched < 7 months

Diversity of approved adopter/s; Total 13

White British heterosexual couples	10
White Black British couple	1
Single Female White British	2
Number of approvals for foster carers adopting a known child	6

Approved Adopter/s waiting as of 1st April

2011-12	3
2010-11	7
2009-10	4

Dudley Adoptive families matched and LAC child adopted originating outside of Dudley area

White/British Male Couple	White British Child aged 3yrs
Asian/British Heterosexual Couple	Asian British Child aged 2 yrs

Approved adopters who withdrew from their adoption plans by agreement with the agency during the review period

1 white British couple	Approved August 2008
1 white/Asian British Couple	Approved June 2009
1 Asian British Couple	Approved November 2007
1 white/British Couple- Intercountry	Approved June 2003

3.3 Adoption Support Enquiries/Requests from adoptive parents with dependent children

Service request	2010 -2011	2011-2012
Contact issues needing SW allocation	9	8
Life story / Telling	24	6
Emotional and educational difficulties	29	21
Request for financial assistance	*Data not available	3
Request for review of records	*Data not available	25
Enquiries from birth parents/adoptive parents about letterbox including change of address, follow ups etc	90	125

3.4 Adoption support work for adults affected by adoption

Service request	2010 -2011	2011-2012
Self referral- pregnant mothers	1	1
Adopted adults; records access, link to adopted relatives	50	50
Birth records Schedule 2(pre 1976)	10	11
Non agency adoption enquiry to duty service	26	15
Non agency notice of intent received	7	0
Non agency adoption orders granted	3	1

4. Current issues for the Dudley Adoption Agency

4.1 The Government Adoption Action Plan - March 2012.

Adoption has been under close government scrutiny during the past 12 months, commencing with the appointment of Martin Narey as the 'Adoption Tsar' and leading to a programme of reform launched by Michael Gove in An Action Plan for Adoption; Tackling Delay, March 2012. Two main themes are at the heart of government legislative reform:

- The timeliness of adoption for a young child, with particular attention given to the increased delay experienced by children of diverse heritage.
- The second theme has been about the variation of agency work with adults seeking to adopt.

The introduction of the Adoption Scorecard in May 2012 for each agency showed the variation across local authority regions in time taken to place a child with approved adopters. Formulated from data for the period 2008 to 2011, the national average was found to be 625 days. Dudley's performance was **669** days, calculated from the first day of being a looked after child to joining the adoptive placement. We would all agree that this is an excessive delay for any child and we share the commitment to reduce this duration for the majority of children for whom adoption planning needs to occur.

Adoption agency forums and British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) have expressed concern at scorecard data alerting that there is potential for perverse disincentives to develop.

Our local experience reflects national trends which indicate that seeking adopter/s for sibling pairs with a school age child is increasingly challenging. In addition we continue to experience additional challenges in placing children of white/Black British ethnicity. The scorecard calculation counts each day a child is in care and their parents are undergoing activities to seek to enable change for parents or kinship carers to be in a position to provide good enough care. The focus now is to scrutinise time taken at every stage of the care planning process, including timeliness of moving to an adoption placement. We are implementing new internal processes to identify matches for children at the earliest opportunity to support the work of our care management services for children requiring permanency through adoption.

We welcome the inclusion of data on the scorecard about the impact of delay arising from court processes. This has been a feature that is known to have impacted on at least 4 children during the last year. New court protocols are driving through faster planning for young children, with a commitment to reduce repetitive assessments and appointment of expert witness evidence. These processes must however remain robust, noting the enormity of the impact of adoption – the permanent separation of the child from kin for life that is irreversible. The dilemma of the rights of parents to family life versus the rights of the child exposed to the neglectful and chaotic family environments continues to be a complex balancing act. Research into resistance to change of 'dysfunctional families', as well as high profile child deaths informs the drive towards early intervention and speedier decision making where separation is indicated. We welcome the renewed government attention to the training and support needs of all professionals including the judiciary, involved in this complex arena of highly emotive decision making.

This year has also seen media attention drawn to the reality that some adopted children from care cannot remain in the adopted family home into adulthood; this is termed breakdown or disruption. Adoption disruption is defined as the child being returned to care **before** the making of an adoption order. Adoption breakdown is the adoptive family experiencing such challenges in parenting that they request the young person leaves their family home.

This area of support is the primary focus of our adoption support social workers. Research consistently informs that the younger the age of the child at point of joining an adoptive family the more successful the outcomes for the child. Dudley adoption service provides sensitive support to adoptive families where a young person is at risk of returning to care. Many of these children did not originate in the borough but are eligible

for our support services **3** years after the adoption order is granted. It is our experience that even after separation adoptive parents remain in contact with their young adults offering continuing support into adulthood. We are fortunate to have a clinical psychologist attached to the service offering consultation before matching or where therapeutic needs arise.

Dudley has been sensitively matching children with adoptive parents for many years, without rigid same race procedural constraints. The racial heritage of the child is one of a number of significant factors that informs the selection of the best available family. Adoption is a lifelong experience and we are informed from research that adopted young people value looking like their adoptive kin networks, and understanding their cultural heritage. Locally, the timeliness of placement for children of white/Asian British heritage or Asian British heritage varies little compared to white British children waiting. One area that remains a challenge nationally in adoption matching is for children of white/ black British ethnicity. Our recruitment strategy led by Adoption in the Black Country (ABC) is constantly seeking new ways to tap into well connected families who can support the needs of these children.

The Adoption Service has been required to provide extensive data to the Dept of Education and this could not have been completed without the skills and energy of the service administrative staff.

4.2 Local and national shortage of approved adopters

There is an increasing recognition that there is a shortage of approved adopters who match and can take on the needs of 'looked after children' waiting for adoption. Previously it has been highlighted that Dudley has needed to spot purchase approved families for its children waiting. This year we secured just **6** approved adoptive families approved by other adoption agencies nationally.

We set a target to approve 15 families for the year, and were pleased to achieve **13** approvals. Our revision of processes to speed up adoption applications by foster carers for a known child has proved successful and will continue. For the first time in November 2011 we reached full staffing capacity within the service, and this is reflected in the ongoing high level of activity in all areas of work.

From reviewing adoption assessment experiences we are acutely aware that our highly motivated applicants are most likely to experience delay at the point of allocation of a social worker for the home study assessment. Without the ability to service assessments quickly for more potential adopters we cannot further improve our approval performance. We are currently seeking to add capacity to the service to enable preparation of more adoptive families in shorter timescales. Comparative staffing data

for the Black Country Adoption Agencies indicates that we have the least establishment posts within our adoption service.

4.3 Future assessment developments

We have seen a growth in the number of foster carers coming forward to adopt a known child in their care. This can provide excellent opportunities for a child 'where stranger adoption' has failed to provide a viable option. We will be looking at the theme of dual approval of carers for some young children where case history would inform that rehabilitation to birth parents care is extremely unlikely. Prospective adopters will need careful selection to undertake this task that has the potential risk of a baby returning to birth parents care.

The government is encouraging adoption agencies to revise adoption assessment processes, and new statutory guidance is anticipated.

Placing children at a young an age will alter the ongoing demands on our adoption support services. However some other aspects of adoption support will remain as critical to the wellbeing of all involved e.g. letterbox work, and very time intensive therapeutic work.

4.4 Backgrounds of children needing adoption

The government adoption action plan shows the growth in understanding that modern adoption is for children coming from care backgrounds; in most scenarios their birth parents are opposing this life plan. The needs of children exposed to alcohol and drugs during pregnancy are becoming more widely recognised. These children are at high risk needing adoption if lifestyle patterns cannot quickly be changed. Research suggests that alcohol exposure during early weeks of pregnancy is particularly destructive to the long term well being of the unborn infant. For adoptive parents of children exposed to drugs and/or alcohol they need specialist support to ensure the child's additional needs are met in preschool and school provision.

Many children referred to the adoption service will have older siblings already in care placements or living in extended family arrangements endorsed by social care services. This group of children come to the service already aged 4+ and presenting a range of additional needs. With the growth in numbers of children for whom adoption is being sought nationally so approved adopters are more able to select younger children. Currently in Dudley we are looking for matches for 6 sibling pairs where one child is in the school reception year.

During the last 12 months we were able to support 2 Dudley approved adoptive families in becoming parents to sibling pairs. We remain eager to not place Dudley children at

vast distances ensuring the child's known social worker can offer continuity of support during the stressful transition from a known foster carer to an approved adoptive parent. Assessing and supporting families who parent sibling groups requires highly skilled practitioners familiar with attachment and trauma knowledge as the dynamics of the neglect are highly resistant to change.

4.5 Adoption in the Black Country Recruitment Strategy

Interest from individuals wanting to consider adoptive parenting has increased rapidly since the autumn 2011, with speculation that media focus on baby adoption is one factor. Adoption in the Black Country www.adoptionblackcountry.org continues to provide an excellent front door service to the 4 local authorities of the Black Country. The Internet site offers information and there is a current trend of growth in hits on the website of 30%. This is reflected in higher attendance at monthly Information Events across the region, with Dudley social workers present at all these sessions.

The website provides a wealth of information and is well placed to adapt to the anticipated changes arising from government redesign. As is shown in the data we do receive a high level of interest from Dudley residents and Adoption in the Black Country can ensure this is used to best advantage for the regions young children waiting for adoption. Adoption in the Black Country enables interest from the other 3 areas to be directed to Dudley and we also have been successful in recruiting from areas touching our boundaries.

Adoption in the Black Country was cited as an example of innovative practice in the Ofsted publication Avoiding Delay; February 2012.

4.6 Support opportunities for adoptive parents

Dudley adoption service seeks to inform adopters of opportunities for both universal and specialist resources that can meet some of the needs of adoptive parents and children. Regular Adoption in the Black Country specialist themed sessions are provided; topics have included Telling about Adoption, Attachment and Trauma.

In addition Adoption UK provides a range of services commissioned by the Adoption in the Black Country consortium that adoptive parent/s can access including; Piece of cake course, family support service, family fun day and evening support groups. After Adoption, formerly Adoption Support Birmingham also publicises its services via the local newsletter and as part of a national adoption organisation we look forward to new opportunities such as Safe Base in the coming year.

4.7 Contact after adoption- Letterbox

Dudley adoption service promotes the exchange of information between adoptive parents and birth family members for all new adoptive placements. There are over 450 arrangements set up and this year has seen a 30% increase in activity levels to sustain these important private news exchange systems to benefit the adopted child or young person. We have been fortunate in having a consistent dedicated social worker for at least one morning each week to maintain this increasing flow of information between families. As a result of the high volume of exchanges taking place we would usually set up a letterbox at the frequency of one exchange per annum and work hard to ensure this is realised for all parties.

The issue of social networking use has resulted in the decision to not exchange photographs in the majority of letterbox exchanges to prioritise the adopted child's needs for privacy in adoption.

4.8 Review of adoption records

This review period has captured for the first time the work that we are undertaking to support adopted parents or teenagers in reviewing the information that the agency recorded when arranging their adoption. This can provide important insight which underpin accesses to specialist support for the child e.g. records about parental alcohol use in pregnancy. This work connects to the need of the Adoption Agency to provide effective tools for adoptive parents to assist explaining at increasing levels of sophistication why they are an adopted child.

4.9 Lifework for adopted children

National minimum standards for adoption require that all children at the point of their adoption ceremony before the court have a Life book and Later Life Letter. Increasing demand of children's social care services has impacted on the quality and timeliness of the production of Life Books and Later Life Letters. We have previously provided training for non social work qualified staff to undertake this work but in order to raise standards a Life Worker Post is being established to support staff and undertake this critical work. This will be for an initial 12 month period which we hope will be extended as the benefits become apparent.

4.10 Adoption panel

In April 2011 new regulations coming into force that were intended to ease the pressures of quoracy for adoption panels which were thought to be one factor that might account for delay in children's care planning. This created a central list and we added 2 new panel members; an early year's educational professional and social worker with adoption assessment specialist experience. Our chairperson of the last 10 years resigned from the role due to ill health and the vice chair person took the chairing arrangements whilst processes were put in place to recruit to a new panel chair. Training for the adoption panel and care management staff was provided on Preparing Child Permanence Reports in October 2011, led by British Association for Adoption and Fostering trainers.

Attendance of prospective adoptive parents at suitability recommendation and matching continued to assist the panel to make recommendations in the majority of cases. Panels have usually run for a full day during the first week of the month. An additional 3 panel sessions were held to ensure cases met the legal timescales to enable children's plans to progress. The issue of sibling separation was probably the most frequently arising dilemma for the panel.

4.11 Adoption Panel Reform

A review of adoption panel acceptance processes will lead to a change in regulation in relation to decision making around adoption where the matter is already before the court. The underpinning belief is that panels contribute to delay for children requiring adoption and that it is a duplication of court processes. In our experience the most likely cause of delay is the capacity of care management social workers known to the child to prepare the Childs Permanence Report. This report is an essential document in placing children successfully for adoption and for their later understanding of the reasons this occurred. In addition the length of care proceedings is influenced by the use of expert witnesses and specialist assessments which contribute to an overall timeframe which is currently around 53 weeks from issue to completion.

From September 2012 adoption panel will scrutinise the matches of each child with their adopter/s and make recommendation about the suitability of applicants to adopt. The adoption agency decision maker will consider acceptance of children for adoption unless they are being relinquished for adoption. Last year just one child was placed for adoption with the consent of their birth parent.

4.12 Developments in Special Guardianship Activities

Special Guardianship is an area of work which has been developed by the Adoption Service in Dudley. It offers an alternative legal option for permanence for children who cannot grow up with their birth parents, where adoption is not appropriate due to the need for continuing relationships with kin. For many years long-term fostering has provided consistent positive family life for some children in care, but it hasn't always offered them the security and sense of belonging that they need. Foster carers have also felt anxious and frustrated about the lack of clarity about their role in day-to-day decision making, and have expressed their need for a legally secure relationship with these children. A Special Guardianship Order gives the special guardian legal parental responsibility for the child which is expected to last until the child is 18. This means that the child is no longer the responsibility of the local authority, and the special guardian will take the lead responsibility for all day-to day decisions about caring for the child or young person, with just one or two exclusions.

Special Guardianship surgeries, lead by the Assistant Team Manager were launched in February 2011 for social workers and carers to discuss the process; the benefits of the order; and the support available after an order is made. There are 4 main routes into Special Guardianship these being through Family and Friends carer's, local authority approved foster carers, private law applications and more recently through the court where care proceedings or viability assessments are being carried out. During the review period the greatest interest has come from family and friends carers. In each case a support plan is agreed covering the financial package; specialist services as well as universal services available to meet the needs the child and their families. Currently support is available and provided by the Adoption Service in these cases but with the increased interest demand will out grow capacity in the future, particularly in relation to contact issues within family members. Whilst it was anticipated at its introduction that this option would be taken up by foster carers for children who have become permanent members of the family in fact Dudley reflects the national picture that informs that family and friends carers are most likely to pursue this permanence option.

5. Summary

- 2011-2012 was a very active and successful year for Dudley Adoption Service with strong performance in placing children waiting for adoption with more families approved and support by the service. We maintained an increasingly

high number of complex letterbox exchanges and provided intensive support to a number of adoptive families experiencing acute difficulties.

- The close working arrangements of Adoption in the Black Country ensured a consistent high quality entry point for future adoptive parents that could meet the many of the needs of Dudley LAC children waiting for adoption.
- Dudley adoption service is working at and beyond capacity with a highly motivated staff group with a range of expertise in adoption work.
- Media coverage of adoption is beneficial and the message is that we need to recruit, educate and support adoptive parents to meet the real needs of the children waiting for adoption. We also have children waiting for this resource and want to support new families on their life journey with their adopted child.
- With the introduction nationally of the Adoption Scorecard, the activities of all local authority adoption provision will be more intrinsically assessed as just one aspect of the provision to children and families needing safeguarding interventions.
- Adoption is most effective with pre school children where there is time to form an emotional safe haven that is the base of all future relationships.
- Adoption can provide a highly effective early intervention service for a small number of young children originating in families where deeply entrenched difficulties remain highly resistant to change. The right children are being sought adoption in this locality and we need to then place at the earliest opportunity to ensure maximum benefit for all parties.

Helen Maybee
Adoption Service Manager

Indarjit Gill-Johal
Assistant Team Manager

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee – 13th September 2012

Report of the Director of Children's Services

Fostering Service Annual Report

Purpose of Report

1. To present the annual report on the Fostering Service in Dudley for 2011/12 to the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee.

Background

2. Local Authorities are required under the Children Act 1989 Section 17 (6) as amended by the Adoption and Children Act 2002 to provide accommodation for children in need who require it as a result of:
 - there being no person with parental responsibility for them
 - their being lost or abandoned
 - their carers being prevented (for whatever reason) from providing them with suitable accommodation
3. The Fostering Service in Dudley provides a comprehensive range of fostering provision working closely with the Social Work Teams to secure appropriate placements for looked after children. The Service also provides family finding for children who require permanent foster placements, recruits, train and supervises mainstream foster carers and Family and Friends foster carers and facilitates carers support groups and groups for young people in care and birth children of families who provide fostering.
4. The service delivers a specialist foster care therapeutic treatment programme known as Flipside. Flipside is an intensive placement option for a small number of children. It provides an evidence based intervention which has been nationally evaluated.
5. The fostering service is subject to inspection by OfSTED. It is inspected against the national minimum standards for fostering service and the requirements of the care standards act 2000, the fostering service regulations 2002 and the children act 1989. The service was last inspected in March 2009 as satisfactory and we are awaiting a

further inspection under the new National Minimum Standards and regulations introduced in April 2011.

6. Attached at Appendix 1 is the annual report of the Fostering Service which details levels of service, placement activity, key achievements and future developments for the service.

Finance

7. The total funding for 2011/12 for the Fostering Service is as follows:

	<u>Revenue Budget</u>	<u>Other Income</u>	<u>Grant Income</u>	<u>Total Funding</u>
Internal Fostering Service (including Price Street)	768,200	0	0	768,200
Fostering Allowances	5,078,400	0	0	5,078,400
Treatment Foster Care	687,300	120,900	0	808,200
Intensive Evidence Based Programme Grant (KEEP/MTFC/Sector Advisor). Figure is based on actual funding spent during 11/12.	0	0	80,200	80,200
Independent Fostering Agencies	5,206,500	0	0	5,206,500
TOTAL	11,740,400	120,900	80,200	11,941,500

Budgets reflected above do not include departmental administrative recharges.

Law

8. The law relating the Local Authority's duty to provide foster care services is governed by the Children Act 1989 and the Fostering Services Regulations 2011.

Equality Impact

9. The provision of a fostering service contributes to the provision of stable, secure and safe care for children looked after in order that they can achieve good life chance outcomes. It assists the Council in discharging its corporate parenting responsibilities to ensure that looked after children are not disadvantaged by being in care and that they receive the support, care and security that we would wish for our own children.

Recommendations

10. The Children's Services Scrutiny Committee receive and make comments where appropriate to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services on the annual report of the Fostering Service.



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Jane Porter
Director of Children's Services

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Dudley Fostering Service Annual Report

1 April 2011 – 31 March 2012

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- To report on the activities of the Fostering Service during 2011/12
- To review the work of the Fostering Panel
- To identify priorities for 2012/13

BACKGROUND

Local Authorities are required under the Children Act 1989 Section 17 (6) as amended by the Adoption and Children Act 2002 to provide accommodation for children in need who require it as a result of:

- There being no person with parental responsibility for them
- Their being lost or abandoned
- Their care is being prevented for whatever reason from providing them with suitable accommodation

All Fostering Services are governed by the regulatory framework of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering. The Regulations and National Minimum Standards define the required and expected conduct of Fostering Services which are inspected by Ofsted who take the Standards into account when conducting and inspection.

The Dudley Fostering Service was last inspected March 2009 and was given a satisfactory judgement.

SERVICE OVERVIEW

The Fostering Service in Dudley provides a comprehensive range of fostering provision working closely with the social work teams to secure appropriate placements for looked after children. The service is responsible for the recruitment, assessment and approval of foster carers and both pre and post approval training, development and support to carers in order to enable them to discharge their responsibilities and duties to children who are placed in their care.

Carers offer a range of provisions from short term care, short breaks care to support families through to more permanent and long term foster care where it has been determined that a child cannot return home to their birth family.

In addition to mainstream foster carers there are a growing number of family and friends carers who care for children with whom they had a pre existing relationship through being part of an extended family or a part of the child's network of known adults prior to them becoming looked after. Family and friends carers are assessed, trained and supervised in the same way as our mainstream carers and this has been a growth area of work for the Fostering Service.

The service also facilitates carers support groups and groups for young people in care and birth children of families who provide fostering.

In addition to financial remuneration the Service offers a comprehensive range of support to its carers including the work of the Dudley Foster Carers Association and the LACES Team within the Authority. Many of the other Council departments are also actively engaged in supporting this area of work with regard to ensuring that Foster Carers have access to leisure opportunities and ensuring our young people have opportunities for engagement in a wide range of leisure and employment opportunities within the Council.

It is important to recognise that the needs of our looked after children are wide and varied and require a wide range of fostering provision in order to meet individual needs but also in order to enable appropriate matching and placement choice.

In order to respond to some of the very demanding and challenging needs which children and young people present Dudley has developed a specialist foster care therapeutic treatment programme (Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care) which operates with carers specifically trained in delivering an evidence based programme to a small range of young people with extremely challenging needs.

Dudley has developed the full range of Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care programmes for both younger and older children and the service in Dudley has been recognised as good practice by the Department for Education National Team who supervise and develop evidenced based interventions for children and young people.

Dudley has also been at the forefront of developing a specialist programme KEEP (Keeping foster and kinship parents supported and trained) which is designed to support mainstream and family and friends carers to prevent or reduce the likelihood of placement breakdowns. The programme is delivering positive outcomes for young people and support to carers and this is demonstrated through the Authority's performance on placement stability which is continuing to maintain high levels of performance.

Dudley Foster Carers Association (DFCA) is an active and thriving group with charitable status which supports all foster cares within Dudley. Dudley Foster Carers Association works with the Fostering Service and continues to have a positive input into the recruitment of new carers and in the promotion of the Service. Carers are also involved in a variety of projects and initiatives that are helping Dudley to gain a national reputation for being amongst the best for providing children with positive activities and opportunities. Recently Dudley Foster Carers Association have secured larger premises which will enable them to further develop a Carers Centre to increase their activities for both foster families and looked after children.

The Fostering Service fulfils a key role for the Authority in ensuring that children have good quality placements which enable them to have a positive care experience when they can no longer remain with their birth families. The Team are actively engaged in both supporting foster carers to provide short to medium term care during periods where children and their families are engaged in court processes and active assessments but also fulfil a significant role in relation to family finding for children who need longer term placements to ensure that their safety and wellbeing is maintained throughout their childhood.

FOSTERING PANEL

A Fostering Panel is established under the Fostering Service Regulation 2011. The functions of the Fostering Panel in respect of cases referred to it are to

- Consider each application for approval and to recommend whether a person is suitable to act as a Foster Carer
- To recommend the terms on which the approval is given
- To recommend whether a person remains as a suitable Foster Carer on the basis of review of the Foster Carer
- The Fostering Panel also has a role in advising on procedures under which reviews are carried out and monitor their effectiveness
- Oversee the conduct of assessments carried out by the Fostering Service provider
- Give advice and make recommendations on such other matters or cases the Fostering Service provider may refer to Panel
- The Fostering Panel therefore has a significant role in relation to quality assurance

In Dudley the Fostering Panel also fulfils a role in relation to considerations of care plans where there is a recommendation for permanent fostering and looks at the suitability of placement matches to meet individual children's service needs. Panel are also presented any variations and exemptions regarding changes in the approval category of carers and panel review minutes of any meeting held when a permanent placement approved by panel has disrupted.

The current Fostering Panel has 10 members. In 2011/12 because of increased activity particularly relating to Family and Friends Assessments the Panel has met on a twice monthly basis.

Because of the increased workload it has sometimes been difficult for members to attend all of the Panels and therefore during 2011/12 there has been active recruitment to increase the membership of the Fostering Panel and this will continue through 2012/13 to ensure that we have an ability to hold quorate Panels on a timely basis to ensure that there is no delay and drift in care planning for children and young people.

We have also recognised that black and minority ethnic Panel members are currently under represented on the Fostering Panel and this is a matter to be addressed during the forthcoming year.

Fostering Panel's recommendations are assessed and approved by the Agency Decision Maker and that function currently rests with the Head of Children's Resources.

As previously noted Panel has a significant role in relation to quality assurance and in order to enhance the quality and independence of foster homes reviews an Independent Reviewing Officer is located within the Independent Reviewing Service with a specific remit for undertaking foster care reviews.

It is not possible within the current capacity to undertake all of the reviews and some of them continue to be undertaken by the Fostering Manager who works together with the Independent Reviewing Officer in order to identify emerging themes from the reviews.

PRIVATE FOSTERING

The Local Authority is responsible for satisfying itself that the welfare of privately fostered children are safeguarded and promoted. An evaluation of the outcomes of the Local Authority's work in relation to privately fostered children within its locality is subject of manual report to the Director of Children's Services and the Chair of the Dudley Safeguarding Children's Board (DSCB). The Annual Evaluation Report for 2011/12 has been presented to the Director and DSCB and is available to Scrutiny Committee if so requested.

PROFILE OF FOSTERING SERVICE STAFF

Manager	37 hours
Senior Practitioner	37 hours
Looked After Children Policy & Project Manager	30 hours
Training & Staff Development Co-ordinator	37 hours
Social Workers	5 @ 37 hours 3 @ 30 hours 2 @ 25.5 hours
Permanency Social Workers	37 hours 30 hours
Family & Friends Social Workers	3 @ 37 hours
KEEP Programme	14 hours
Administrative Support	2 @ 37 hours 22.5 hours 25.5 hours
Sessional staff	In addition to the above complement of staff there are two independent social work agencies who have been commissioned to undertake Family and Friends assessments, and 5 independent social workers offering social work support to those family and friends placements out of borough.

Service Activity Levels

A profile of our current foster carers and activity relating to recruitment and approvals is shown at appendix 1.1.

EVALUATION OF PROGRESS 2011/2012

Nationally the numbers of looked after children are increasing and this has been reflected in the trend in Dudley. As of the 31st March 2012 there were 678 numbers of Looked after Children. The majority of looked after children within Dudley are accommodated with foster carers with only a small number of children placed in residential settings.

The service whilst it has attracted new carers over the year has not been able to grow at a pace which can totally meet the increased demand for service and offer the necessary placement choice. During 2011/12 the placement team sourced 90 placements from independent fostering agencies. This situation is not limited to Dudley with many local authorities finding themselves with a lack of sufficiency placements within internal resources. There has been a significant demand for specialist placements for large sibling groups and we have identified through our analysis of the looked after children population that there have been specific pressure points within the looked after children population with regard to new admissions. The largest demand for service has come from the need for placements for children aged 0-4 and a growing increase in the request for placements for teenagers and aged 10 plus.

The Service works diligently to recruit new carers and has an annual recruitment plan. All new mainstream carers are now being offered a fee on full approval in line with all Local Authorities in the West Midlands and Independent Fostering Agencies which makes the Service more competitive in terms of its ability to attract carers.

The approval of family and friends carers is increasingly seen as a placement of choice for many children and clearly if children can secure placements within their wider family and friends networks this has significant benefits for them.

The Service has seen a significant increase in request s for assessments for Family and Friends Carers, many of which are directed through care proceedings by the courts.

Dudley provides ongoing support and training to Family and Friends Carers as well and remuneration which is in line with our mainstream carers and is also in line with national policy direction in relation to equity of treatment for Family and Friends Carers.

Because of the wide range of Family and Friends situations which occur it is important that processes and procedures are applied consistently and that cases being considered by Fostering Panel are quality assured in order to reduce the risk of subsequent disruptions or concern that the Family and Friends situation is not meeting the National Minimum Standards for Fostering.

In order to ensure that our decision making processes around initial viability assessment are as comprehensive as possible this year we have enhanced the liaison between the district social work teams and the Fostering Service in order that there can be more timely consultation around the application of National Minimum Standards to these situations.

Currently 2 of the Supervising Fostering Social Workers take the lead on recruitment of Foster Carers with the remainder of the Team offering support at recruitment events which are held regularly throughout the year.

In order to further develop our recruitment strategy the Fostering Service has this year had implemented a survey form which was sent to all enquirers asking for feedback as to whether they intend to pursue a fostering application or to identify why they are no longer interested in order to target our recruitment strategy more effectively.

We also consider the cultural and ethnic needs of children requiring placements and quarterly data is now recorded on the number of trans-racial placements made to inform future recruitment activities.

As part of the West Midlands Fostering Consortium there is active discussion on the possibilities of a regional recruitment strategy and work has been undertaken with the 4 Black Country Authorities and a proposal for a joint recruitment campaign for Fostering in the Black Country has been developed and is currently under discussion.

There has been a concerted effort by the Fostering Service to improve the number of carers undertaking the Children's Workforce Development Course and completing their training. As of 31 March 2012, 53 carers had completed their Children's Development Standards course.

Training is an important facet of the support that Dudley offers to its Foster Carers in ensuring that they are aware of new and emerging challenges and requirements and that they maintain their mandatory training in areas for example such as Safe Caring and Safeguarding.

There is a mandatory list of training which Foster Carers are required to undertake and there is a dedicated training resource within the Service to facilitate these developments.

The Fostering Service has developed two new policies this year which have been approved by the Director of Children's Services addressing the issue of:

- Transracial placements
- Bedroom Sharing Policy

A number of children and young people have been more proactively involved in the decision making about their care. Panel see this as integral to ensuring that the children and young people's views have been taking into consideration and are accurately reflected.

INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND FOSTER CARERS

Children Who Foster Group – We Care We Share

The Dudley Children who Foster Group was renamed last year We Care We Share and has been engaged in generating membership and interest amongst the birth children of Dudley Foster Carers.

The Service has continued to offer both a one to one and a group service to the birth children and families of our foster carers. They have throughout the 12 months been consulting with children and young people about their views on training and activity that they feel would be beneficial to their position of living in a fostering household.

The Group have secured the use of a minibus and an approved driver from amongst the Foster Carers who now supports the group.

They are actively linking with other support groups such as the Acappella Acorns Choir and the Youth Club for Looked after Children which has dedicated support from the Youth Service within Dudley.

ACAPELLA ACORNS

Acappella Acorns Choir was born out of Sustainability Funding from Sound It Out, a community music organisation based in Birmingham. The funding provided training and a very supportive and skilled musician to help set up a choir by training foster carers in facilitation and music leadership skills to enable them to deliver this singing opportunity to children and young people, both looked after and the birth children of Foster Carers. It is now totally run by Foster Carers with the support of Fostering and Looked after Children in Education Service.

Acappella Acorns first performance was Christmas 2011, followed by a performance at the Youth Services Celebration of Children and Young People.

The choir works on the principle that anyone can get involved in singing and performing regardless of ability and provides opportunity for all to achieve and develop a positive sense of self.

Acappella Acorns is going from strength to strength. The foster carers have worked hard to get the choir established and is actively seeing new members who can strengthen the initiative.

CHATBACK

2011/12 was a very successful year for the Dudley based drama group Chatback Productions. The group continue to support 11-18 year olds from foster families, helping children and young people who are looked after to have a voice. They are supported by Dudley Foster Carers and a drama teacher from Dudley Performing Arts.

Chatback has built on success of previous productions of Handle with Care, attacking the topic of looked after children's experience of the education system and the emotive subject of birth family relationships.

Chatback have produced an educational DVD/online training resource which was launched at an event in November 2011 to a wide range of Foster Carers and officer from within the Authority. Looked After Children's Education Services from across the country have expressed an interest in using this DVD as a teaching and training resource.

In addition Chatback have also accessed major funding from Children in Need to continue their work.

NEW INITIATIVES

BLACK COUNTRY COLLABORATIVE WORKING

Work has commenced with the Black Country Authorities around a number of themes, in the first instance these will be as follows:

1. Utilising money allocated from the DfE, to develop evidence based programmes around multi-dimensional treatment foster care across the Black Country and alongside this the development of KEEP which is aimed at enhancing placement stability. The development of Multi-dimensional Treatment Foster Care will allow a larger range of placement availability across the Black Country for the more challenging children that would otherwise be placed in external resources.
2. Proposals have been made around joint marketing and recruitment which will develop a Black Country brand around fostering similar to the one which is already in place with regard to adoption in the Black Country.
3. A small amount of resource has been allocated by West Midlands Improvement Partnership to undertake some scoping work around Special Guardianship to ensure continuity of approach across the Black Country and are able to develop collaborative approaches around post guardianship support and allowances.
4. Work is about to commence on the opportunities to collaborate, to consolidate fees and payment schemes across the Black Country and to develop the basis of further collaboration through training and recruitment and scoping up the possibility for a Fostering in the Black Country Service

FOSTERING FRAMEWORK

Dudley along with 6 other Regional Authorities is part of a Fostering Framework Agreement. There are over 40 independent providers signed up to the agreement, which in effect set a pricing structure for the commissioning of independent fostering placements. The placements are procured on a spot purchase basis and depending on availability allows the Authorities to select placements appropriate to individual need against a pre arrange price.

The Framework was implemented in April 2011 and the early indications are that applying it to current placements it will realise significant savings to the Authority.

Conclusions and recommendations for 2012/13

The demands of the Fostering Service have continued to rise due to the increasing numbers of LAC, placement provision pressures foster carer numbers and the increasing number of family and friends assessments. There has been a considerable amount of development activity in the last 12 months designed to implement the new regulations and national minimum standards. The emphasis in 2012/13 will be on embedding new policies and procedures designed to improve service delivery and a more robust quality assurance framework. The Service is expecting to be inspected during 2012 and is taking action to ensure that we are compliant and fit for inspection. We will aim to:

- Increase the involvement of Foster Carers in the delivery and development of training
- Increase awareness and take up of Special Guardianship Orders where appropriate
- Complete carer profiles which can be provided to young people prior to admission to a foster placement.
- Role out new developments of the MTFC KEEP programme -KEEP safe for carers of adolescents and KEEP for carers of younger aged children 3-6yrs
- Continue to promote treatment foster care through leading on and acting as mentor in developing MTFC across the 'Black Country' locality.
- Develop our activities to capture the 'voice of the child' more effectively and utilise emerging themes in service development
- Refresh and review the Children's Guide.
- Improve activities to identify themes from Foster Carer Reviews to influence service delivery and improve outcomes for young people in foster care.
- Continue to work with the Children in Care Council in the development of our service.
- Continue to promote strong working relationships with Children's fieldwork services
- There is a strong drive by Black Country Chief Executives to promote closer collaborative working in a number of ways, this will continue and opportunities for joint training, joined up services, joint recruitment will be explored.
- Develop partnership working within Dudley and with a neighbouring authority to improve our recruitment profile with a view to:
 - Improving number of carers/placements overall
 - Target placements for large sibling groups and teenagers
 - Recruit carers with expertise to look after mother and baby placements
- Review the allocation of roles and responsibilities within the Service to ensure that the allocation of resources is targeted effectively and the identification of future resource requirements is identified.

Signed:

Fostering Service Manager Date

Fostering Panel Chair Date

Data Information Appendix 1.1

No of variations to approval categories		36
A6	Information about young people aged 18 and over	No of YP
A6.1	How many young people in foster care turned 18 between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012?	15
A6.2	How many young people, aged 18 and over, remained in the foster placement they were in prior to their eighteenth birthday, under an arrangement, supported by the local authority? Please include all young people in this position at any point between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012.	7

Information about placements

A1	Information about placements	Permanent Placements	Short Breaks
A1.1	How many approved foster places (not carers) in total did your fostering service provide as at 31 March 2012?	461	0
A1.2	How many of these places were filled (that is the number of children placed) as at 31 March 2012?	388	0
A1.3	How many children were in foster care at any point between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012?	298	108

A3	Local authority fostering services only	Number
A3.1	How many sibling groups were not placed together between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012 where the assessment was for them to be together?	3

A4	Information about placement endings	Number
A4.1	How many unplanned endings of placements occurred between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012?	32
A4.2	How many children and young people were subject to these unplanned endings?	31

A5	Information about exemptions	Number
A5.1	How many exemptions to the usual fostering limit were in place between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012 in foster households in your service?	22

Section C: Information about foster carers

C1	Information about fostering households	Number
C1.1	How many fostering households did you have as at 31 March 2012?	246
C1.2	How many applications from new prospective fostering households did you receive between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012? (Do not count initial enquiries)	50
C1.3	How many applications from prospective fostering households, received prior to 1 April 2011, were not decided by that date?	12
C1.2 + C1.3 total:		62
C1.4	How many applications from prospective fostering households did you	36

	approve between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012? (This includes applications that you received before 1 April 2011).	
C1.5	Of those in C1.4, how many were new family and friends households? (This does not include those family and friends who have children placed with them under Regulation 24 of The Care Planning Regulations 2010 unless they are subsequently approved as foster carers).	23
C1.6	How many approved fostering households were de-registered between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012?	21

C2	Applications that have been rejected or withdrawn	Number
C2.1	How many applications to register as a fostering household were withdrawn between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012? (This includes applications that were received before 1 April 2011 but were withdrawn after that time)	9
C2.2	How many applications to register as a fostering household were rejected after being presented to panel between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012? (This includes applications that were received before 1 April 2011 and were rejected after that time)	2
C1.4 + C2.1 + C2.2 total:		47

C3	Information about training and development	Number
C3.1	How many of your individual foster carers in total had successfully completed the Children's Workforce Development Council's certificate in 'Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care' by 31 March 2012?	53

Section D: Information about the quality of care

D1	Allegations between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012	Number
D1.1	How many allegations of misconduct were made against foster carers?	7
D1.2	How many referrals to the Independent Safeguarding Authority did you make between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012?	0

D2	Concerns resulting in a referral to the local authority Child Protection Team	Number
D2.1	How many Section 47 enquiries were made involving allegations against foster carers between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012?	5

D4	Information about children/young people who went missing between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012	Number
	Where children went missing please calculate this as the total number of children who were missing i.e. where three children went missing this counts as three events. (See guidance)	
D4.1	How many times did children/young people go 'missing' whilst living with foster carers?	7
D4.2	How many children/young people does your answer to D4.1 refer to?	7

D7	Information about children/young people's education (this information is not required for children using short break services)	Number
D7.1	How many children/young people in foster care as at 31 March 2012 were of compulsory school age?	226

D7.2	How many children/young people have changed educational placement or school because of a foster placement change between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012?	0
D7.3	How many children/young people in foster care attended alternative educational provision between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012?	4
D7.4	How many children/young people in foster care had no educational arrangements between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012?	0

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee – 13th September 2012

Report of the Director of Children's Services

Action Plans in Response to OfSTED Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked after Children

Purpose of Report

1. To remind Children's Services Scrutiny Committee of the outcome of Ofsted Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked after Children Services in Dudley which took place between 28 November 2011 to 9 December 2011.
2. To present further examples of action plans in response to the inspection report to Scrutiny Committee.

Background

3. The purpose of the inspection was to evaluate the contribution made by relevant services in the local area towards ensuring that children and young people are properly safeguarded and to determine the quality of service provision for looked after children and care leavers. The inspection team consisted of four of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one inspector from the Care Quality Commission. The inspection was carried out under the Children Act 2004.
4. The evidence evaluated by inspectors included:
 - Discussions with children and young people receiving services, front line staff and managers, senior officers including the Acting Director of Children's services and the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board, elected members, senior NHS health representatives and a range of community representatives.
 - Analysing and evaluating reports from a variety of sources including a review of the Children and Young People's Plan, performance data, information from the inspection of local settings, such as schools and day care provision and the evaluations of a serious case review undertaken by Ofsted in accordance with '*Working Together To Safeguard Children*', 2010.

- A review of over 60 case files for children and young people with a range of need. This provided a view of services provided over time and the quality of reporting, recording and decision making undertaken.
- The outcomes of the most recent annual unannounced inspection of Local Authority contact, referral and assessment services undertaken in March 2011.
- Interviews and focus groups with front line professionals, managers and senior staff from Black Country Partnership Foundation Trust, Dudley and Walsall Mental Health Trust and NHS Dudley.

5. All inspection judgments are made using the following four point scale.

Outstanding (Grade 1)	A service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements
Good (Grade 2)	A service that exceeds minimum requirements
Adequate (Grade 3)	A service that only meets minimum requirements
Inadequate (Grade 4)	A service that does not meet minimum requirements

6. The inspection was focussed on the contributions of all relevant Services in the Local Authority and is approached from a partnership perspective.
7. The inspection provided two overall ratings for Safeguarding Services in relation to their overall effectiveness and capacity for improvement and individual ratings for specific outcomes relating to those Services.
8. The inspection provided two overall ratings for Looked after Children in relation to their overall effectiveness and capacity for improvement and individual ratings for specific outcomes relating to those Services.
9. Thirteen individual outlined action plans have been developed by the Directorate of Children's Services and partner agencies to meet the recommendations outlined in the report. Eight plans have been developed to support section one of the report i.e. safeguarding.
- Plans 1 & 2 are being lead by Health
 - Plans 3,4 & 5 are being lead by the Directorate of Children's Services and supported by partners

- Plan 6 is being lead by the Police Service
- Plans 7 & 8 are being lead by lead by the Directorate of Children's Service
- Plans 1, 8 &12 were scrutinised at 22 March 2012 committee.

Two plans are included for scrutiny at the September committee.

- Plan 2; Ensure timely access to emotional and mental health services for women who require additional support prior to and following the birth of their children (Appendix 1)
- Plan 3; Develop explicit joint protocols between Children's Services, Health and Adult Social Care to ensure that older young people and those at points of transition receive appropriate, timely and continuous services to meet their assessed needs. (Appendix 2)

10. Further plans and information regarding progress will be reported at the following committee meetings later this year and into 2013.

Finance

11. Following a review of existing budgets in light of Council priorities, additional legislative requirements and service pressures the Cabinet at the meeting on 8th February 2012 approved additional spending to target key service areas. For Children's Services, a one off allocation of £400k was identified to be spent in 2012/13 for Support to Social Care Services. The £400k will enable Children's Services to respond to the recommendations as a result of the inspection. The additional work funded by this money will come to an end during the early part of 2013/14 financial year.

Law

12. The legislation and guidance which relates both generally and specifically to looked after children and care leavers is the Children Act 1989, the Children Leaving Care Act 2000, Adoption Children Act 2002, the Children Act 2004, the Children and Young People's Act 2008.
13. The law governing the Local Authorities duties in respect of referrals of a child protection nature, is set out primarily in the Children Act 1989, with further guidance under The Framework for the Assessment of Children In Need and their Families 2000 and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2010.
14. Under section 11 of the Children Act 2004 there is a duty on the LA and its partners to safeguarding and promote the welfare of children.

15. The Council and can do anything incidental thereto, conducive thereto, or which facilitates the discharge of this function under section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972.

Equality Impact

16. The provision of Looked after Children Services contributes to the provision of stable, secure and safe care for children looked after children in order that they can achieve good life chance outcomes. It assists the Council in discharging its corporate parenting responsibilities to ensure that looked after children are not disadvantaged by being in care and that they receive the support, care and security that we would wish for our own children.
17. The Local Authority and its Partners have a duty under Section 11 of the Children Act to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children and ensure that they are not disadvantaged by living in circumstances which compromise their care and well being.

Recommendation

18. That Children's Services Scrutiny Committee note and comment on the action plans presented and receive further action plans for scrutiny and subsequent meetings.



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Children's Services Scrutiny Committee – 13 September 2012

Report of the Director of Children's Services

"TROUBLED FAMILIES" IN DUDLEY

Purpose of Report

1. To provide information about the Department for Communities and Local Government Troubled Families initiative and its implementation in Dudley

Background

National Context

2. The Troubled Families programme is for the period 2012 to 2015 Nationally, it is led from the Department of Communities and Local Government and Louise Casey is the national programme director.
3. The initiative is a three year funded programme. It defines "Troubled Families" as being households who:
 - Are involved in crime and anti-social behaviour
 - Have children not in school
 - Have an adult on out of work benefits
 - Cause high cost to the public purse
4. Nationally and locally these themes cut across the responsibilities of government departments; public sector agencies such as the Police, Councils and Job Centre Plus; the public and private sectors e.g. worklessness.
5. National work states that there are 120,000 families who are defined as "troubled." "Troubled" is taken to mean that they experience all three of the themes which are the aim of the programme i.e. truancy, worklessness, anti-social behaviour or high cost to the public purse.
6. In addition, it is argued that significant resources are already allocated to addressing the challenges of these themes in the funding of Councils or national agencies such as the Police or Job Centre Plus. For this reason, it is argued that the initiative is also aimed at inviting reflection and action over time to change or re-design services and systems which are costly and for which there may be a better, more efficient alternative.
7. Locally, using the Government's figures, it is believed that we have 740 families whose experience reflects the situation as defined by the Government. In year one of the programme Dudley Council is committed to begin working with 250 families.

8. The Troubled Families (Attachment Fee) Grant determination 2012/13: 31/2046 Section 31 sets out the funding allocation for Dudley as given below. In addition there is some co-ordination funding and a system of Payment By Results.

Year One: (250 families)

- Coordination 2012/13, £100,000
- Attachment Fee 2012/13, £665,600
- Maximum £167,000 available as payment by results associated with the year one cohort of 250 families

Year two funding 2013/14 (250 families):

- Coordination, £100,000
- Attachment Fee, £499,000
- Maximum of £333,000 available as payment by results associated with the year two cohort of 250 families

Year three funding 2014/15 (240 families):

- Coordination, £100,000
- Attachment Fee, £320,000
- Maximum of £480,000 available as payment by results associated with the year three cohort of 240 families

9. Dudley Council has committed to work with the identified 740 families over a period of three years with the aim of supporting them to avoid their involvement in anti-social behaviour, truancy or worklessness. In this way, it is believed that the families can avoid or minimise being users of publically provided services through these and so reduce burden on the tax payer.
10. The Troubled Families programme is also linked to other programmes such as the European Social Fund Support for Families Contract 2012-15. The West Midlands contract holder for this is EOS Ltd.
11. The Trouble Families initiative has been supported through the publication of national guidance *The Troubled Families Programme - Financial Framework March 2012* and email updates from the national Troubled Families Unit. Dudley Council's Troubled Families Coordinator feeds into the national Network of Coordinators. Meetings are facilitated by Department for Communities and Local Government officials.

Action in Dudley

12. Local planning based on developing national understandings has been underway since December 2011.
13. Steering Group: a multi-agency Steering Group, chaired by Brendan Clifford, has been established comprising the following Agencies:
- Dudley Council's Directorates of Children's Services; Adult Community and Housing Services; Urban Environment; and Chief Executive's
 - West Midlands Police
 - EOS Ltd

- Department for Work and Pensions
- Dudley Council for Voluntary Services
- Dudley Community Partnership
- NHS Dudley Public Health Service
- Dudley Clinical Commissioning Group

Data / information

14. Dudley staff have worked to ascertain the relevant sources of data which would be used to confirm which families have been using services connected to anti-social behaviour, truancy and worklessness.
15. Significant effort has been made to source and check the information. Through an agreed process, data has been shared with Job Centre Plus who are responding to confirm that the data is correct thus created a cohort to whom action can be directed in Dudley.
16. Information Governance: a Memorandum of Understanding for the sharing of information has been signed between the Council and the Department for Work and Pensions.

Model of working with the "troubled families"

17. Guidance states that an effective model of working with "Troubled Families" is based on a "Keyworker" approach. The Keyworker role is based on the allocation of an individual member of staff who works closely with the Family, and assists them to face the complexities of their contact with public and private agencies and to alter their behaviour in terms of worklessness, truancy and anti-social behaviour.
18. This approach is being adopted in Dudley. However, it is recognised that some related activity is already underway in the Borough eg the Children's Services Directorate Family Intervention Project. Therefore it is important that all relevant strands of work are properly integrated and coherently managed.
19. Similarly, with regard to worklessness, the Government had already initiated activity through the Department for Work and Pensions whereby a private company, EOS Ltd, has European Social Fund money to work with families in order to help adults back into work.
20. In addition, it is recognised that testing a range of models which add value to the initiative will be worthwhile and so schemes working with the voluntary and community sector are also being considered.

Systems change / service re-design

21. Systems change / service re-design is a longer-term aim of the Troubled Families initiative. It is argued that public funds are already being used to address anti-social behaviour, truancy and worklessness, but sometimes in an inefficient manner. Therefore partners are also asked to consider whether organisational changes can be made that will provide greater value for money. This is an aspect

of the programme that we recognise as important but our immediate priority is to start engaging with our year one cohort.

Finance

22. The Prime Minister has made available £448 million over three years from 2012 to 2015, drawn from the budgets of six government departments. This represents 40 per cent of the average cost of turning 120,000 families around using proven intervention techniques, with the remaining 60 per cent coming from local budgets.
23. The relevant Department of Communities and Local Government grant funding details are included in the main body of the report within the background section.

Funding received from DCLG for 2012/13 is as follows:

- Troubled Families Coordination - £100,000
- Attachment Fee to support 250 families £665,600
- Total Funding **£765,600**

24. Results Based Payments are only available for claiming when successful outcomes are achieved with the 250 families. The Results Based funding forecast for 2012/13 is £166,400; it has been assumed that this funding will be claimed after 2012/13.
25. Payments for subsequent years and the level of such grants will be subject to agreement between the Troubled Families Team and the Chief Executive and very much dependant upon Dudley's 2012/13 successful outcomes.

Law

26. There is no statutory requirement to comply with the Troubled Families project as initiated by the Department of Communities and Local Government. However all local authorities, including Dudley, have committed to work on this agenda and in return are in receipt of the grant funding as described.

Equality Impact

27. The purpose of this programme is to improve the long term life experiences and chances of some of the most disadvantaged families in the borough, thereby helping to close some of the most significant equality gaps in areas such as school attendance and education attainment, rates of offending and household incomes.

Recommendation

28. That Committee note and comment on the content in the report.



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