

**Meeting of the Children's Services
Select Committee**

**Monday 11th March 2024, at 6pm
In Committee Room 2, The Council House,
Priory Road, Dudley. DY1 1HF**

**Revised Agenda - Public Session
(Meeting open to the public and press)**

1. Apologies for absence
2. To report the appointment of any substitute members serving for this meeting of the Committee.
3. To receive any declarations of interest under the Members' Code of Conduct
4. [To confirm and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 18th January 2024 \(Pages 4 to 12\)](#)
5. Public Forum
6. [Children's Services Select Committee Progress Tracker \(Page 13\)](#)
7. [Verbal feedback on the Ofsted visits on 1st and 2nd February 2024 from the Director of Children's Services.](#)
8. [Corporate Quarterly Performance Report Quarter 3 \(1st October 2023 to 31st December 2023\) \(Pages 14 - 20\)](#)
9. [Education Report \(Pages 21 to 33\)](#)
10. [Learning from Complaints \(Pages 34 to 38\)](#)

11. To consider any questions from Members to the Chair where two clear days' notice has been given to the Monitoring Officer (Council Procedure Rule 11.8).

Distribution:

Councillor K Lewis (Chair)

Councillor D Bevan (Vice-Chair)

Councillors C Bayton, R Collins, T Crumpton, P Lee, C Reid, S Ridney, D Stanley, C Sullivan, and M Webb.

Substitute – Councillor H Bills

Invitee: Councillor R Buttery – Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Education.

Co-opted Members with voting rights on matters concerning education: -

R May – Archdiocese of Birmingham Education Service Representative

T Reid – Worcester Diocesan Board of Education Representative



Chief Executive

Dated: re-dated 4th March 2024

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Minutes of the Children's Services Select Committee

**Thursday 18th January 2024 at 6.00 pm
In Committee Room 2, The Council House, Priory Road,
Dudley**

Present:

Councillor K Lewis (Chair)
Councillor D Bevan (Vice-Chair)
Councillors C Bayton, T Crumpton, P Lee, C Reid, S Ridney, C Sullivan, D Stanley, and M Webb; R May (Co-opted Member)

Officers:

C Driscoll (Director of Children's Services), K Graham (Service Director of Children's Social Care), S Thirlway (Service Director Education, SEND and Family Solutions), E Thomas (Acting Virtual School Head Teacher) and K Buckle (Democratic Services Officer).

36. **Introductions**

The Chair wished those present a Happy New Year.

37. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillor R Collins and T Reid.

38. **Appointment of Substitute Members**

No substitute Members were appointed for this Meeting of the Committee.



39. **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor P Lee declared a pecuniary interest as he was engaged as a Dudley Foster Carer.

Councillor S Ridney declared a non-pecuniary interest as a member of the Management Board of the Virtual School.

Councillor K Lewis declared a pecuniary interest as an Early Years Provider.

C Driscoll declared a non-pecuniary interest as a former Director of Worcestershire County Council.

40. **Minutes**

Resolved

That subject to R May being included in the list of apologies for absence, the minutes of the meeting held on 16th November 2023, be confirmed as a correct record, and signed.

41. **Public Forum**

There were no members of the public present.

Councillor S Ridney referred to the Medium-Term Financial Strategy particularly with emphasis on proposals relevant to the Committee's Terms of Reference, specifically Children's Services stating that the proposals contained therein should have been submitted to the meeting for scrutiny purposes and expressed her disappointment that it had not.

42. **Children's Services Select Committee Progress Tracker**

The Democratic Services Officer referred to the progress tracker detailing the recommendations and actions from the previous meeting, stating that a response had not been received from the Assistant Director People and Inclusion in relation to the DBS checks and undertook to contact the Director in order that a response could be provided as soon as practicably possible.

Members noted the future business items for 2023/24.

Councillor T Crumpton requested the Director of Children’s Services to report to a future meeting on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, particularly the impact that would have upon Children’s Services for the forthcoming municipal year.

Resolved

- (1) That the information contained in the Children’s Services Select Committee Progress Tracker, be noted.
- (2) That the Democratic Services Officer be requested to contact the Assistant Director People and Inclusion for a response in relation to the position regarding DBS checks for Members and the criteria required.
- (3) That the Director of Children’s Services be requested to consider the request to report to a future meeting on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, particularly the impact that would have upon Children’s Services for the forthcoming municipal year.

43. **Corporate Quarterly Performance Report Quarter 2 (1st July 2023 to 30th September 2023)**

The Director of Children’s Services referred to the key performance indicators relating to Children’s Services for Quarter 2 making specific reference to the following: -

Performance Indicator 1447 the percentage of Agency Social Workers, although the target was 15%, there remained the ambition to reduce this Indicator to zero, however nationally there was a shortage of social workers. Although the indicator for Quarter 2 was 18.8%, this was significantly higher in January 2023 as nearly one quarter of the posts had not been filled.

The Directorate re-design was referred to which had made a significant difference to the ability to recruit social workers, with the position significantly improving.

In relation to Performance Indicator 432, the number of children looked after per 10,000 of the population, previously the performance indicator had been high over a prolonged period of time. It was evidenced that Children in Care do not perform well in education outcomes, had health and wellbeing issues and there was an over representation in the Youth

justice system. The ambition remained to ensure that only those children who need to be taken into care were taken into care.

The Family Safeguarding model that had recently been implemented was based upon the belief that family was best for children and the model enabled parents to care for their children both safely and appropriately with a clear focus on Special Guardianship Orders (SGO'S). Following the introduction of the Model the rate of children in care was reducing, with 84.2% of children in the care of the Authority at Quarter 2, against a target of 83%. That figure continued to reduce to well below 600 at the end of September 2023.

In relation to children subject to Child Protection Plans the target had been 43% for Quarter 2, with the outturn position being 22.4%. There had been a downward trend during the preceding five years and that figure was now much lower than comparator groups. Work had been conducted to ensure that children were not being left at risk.

The Service Director of Children's Social Care referred to the work conducted to introduce the Family Safeguarding Model including the triangulation work with Hertfordshire County Council, Walsall, and South Staffordshire. Individual children were reviewed weekly, and Audit checks undertaken. Work was conducted with the Centre for Professional Practice, and an oversight was provided by Dudley Children's Safeguarding Partnership and reported in the Safeguarding report.

Arising from the presentation of the report submitted, Members raised questions and queries and responses were provided where appropriate as follows: -

- (a) In response to a question from Councillor S Ridney, the Service Director of Children's Social Care confirmed that in relation to the correct children being made subject to a Child Protection Plan, that would ensure that those children who are at risk of significant harm were provided with wrap around care and subject to Child Protection Plans.

Regarding older children, Child Protection Plans were sometimes not appropriate, and those children were subject to Safety Plans based around exploitation with the ambition that the right approach be provided for the right child.

- (b) In response to a question from Councillor C Bayton regarding Safety Plans, the Service Director of Children's Social Care advised that Safety Plans provided the same level of protection as Child

Protection Plans, with child protection meetings running parallel with the plans.

- (c) In response to a question from Councillor D Stanley in relation to financial pressures resulting from the employment of agency Social Workers and the current number of children/young people who were in the care of the Authority, the Director of Children's Services advised that there was an underspend on the Social Worker budget for 2023 as there were problems with recruitment. A Market Forces Supplement had now been implemented in the sum of £7,000 per year with a commitment to peg pay for Social Workers in conjunction with 14 other authorities working together. There remained the ambition to recruit permanent staff who were committed to the Authority.

The service redesign had resulted in more interest being generated by both Social Workers and former Social Workers and applications being received for the positions.

It was reported that as at the end of December 2023 there were 565 children and young people in the care of the Local Authority, which represented the lowest number for several years. The Director assured members that she was confident that the right decisions were being made for children and young people.

In response to a further question from the same Member, the Director confirmed that children remained looked after until the age of 18 years and should a young person have remained in care for a number of years they were classed as care experienced young people and support could be provided to them up until the age of 25 years.

The Service Director for Children's Social Care confirmed that all children in the care of the Authority were allocated a Social Worker, however it was accepted that individual Social Workers could change with work continuing in relation to caseloads.

- (d) Councillor C Reid raised concerns with safeguarding particularly regarding Agency Social Workers should information not be shared, and safeguarding issues missed.

The Director of Children's Services advised that the Authority were no longer in the position where there were high levels of vacancies. Should Agency Social Workers be recruited they were registered in the same way and treated as permanent members of staff, having

to adhere to a child record system. Lightweight mobile devices had been issued to Social Workers to record in real time.

Should Members wish to raise concerns, individual cases could be examined to determine what, if any, action was being taken. It was confirmed that safeguarding work remained paramount.

The Director of Children's Services requested Members to raise individual concerns with her.

- (e) Councillor T Crumpton raised concerns regarding the reduction in producing Child Protection Plans and in response the Service Director of Children's Social Care stated that the current reporting period for 1st July to 30th September 2023 did not reflect current numbers and was fully confident that children and young people who needed Child Protection Plans had those plans and there was no correlation between those gaps in Social Workers.

In response to a further question from the same Member, the Director of Children's Services advised that one of the challenges for recruiting Social Workers is that it was a generic profession for most authorities and there were a range of payments in various authorities for permanent staff. It was accepted that it would be ideal if there was a standard rate of pay across all authorities but that was not possible. Wolverhampton City Council remained the highest paying authority within the region, and it was not affordable for Dudley to match the same rate of pay. Progress was being made and indicators and data evidenced that. Staff remained positive and positive feedback had also been received from children and families.

- (f) In response to a query from R May, the Director of Children's Services advised that there was no evidence to suggest that high thresholds were affecting the implementation of Child Protection Plans and the performance data remained good in relation to the number of early help cases being closed.

Resolved

That the contents of the Corporate Quarterly Performance Report for Quarter 2 (1st July 2023 to 30th September 2023), be noted.

44. Dudley Virtual School – Summary of Annual Report 2022 – 2023

Members considered a report of the Director of Children's Services on the work of the Virtual School, programme of activities, systems and processes that were being developed to improve outcomes and enhance learning of children in care.

The Acting Virtual School Head Teacher referred to the background in relation to the Virtual School and made reference to the academic outcomes for children in care including in the Early Years Foundation, Key Stage Two SAT's results and Key Stage Four Results as contained in the report submitted.

Members noted the Post 16 outcomes and that the full cohort of children in care had an increasing number with identified special educational needs at 41%.

The Ofsted ratings for 2022/23 were noted together with details of the attendance at school for Dudley children and details of exclusions and suspensions.

In relation to suspensions those continued to raise concerns and work on inclusive pathways was continuing with data being examined to ascertain the reasons for suspensions and identifying trends.

Trauma informed practice training to support children in schools was provided.

It was reported that there were low numbers of young people who were not in employment, education, or training, however the number of young people identified as NEET tended to increase as they moved towards leaving care. That was an area of focus of partnership work between the Care Leavers Team, Dudley Virtual School, and Connexions.

It was reported that the Virtual School Health and Emotional Wellbeing Programme supported young people.

Dudley Counselling Service and Play Therapy intervention work was referred to and the number of those children being assessed and worked with as contained in the report submitted was noted.

Barnardo's had continued to support children in care, with the service receiving 27 referrals in the period between July 2022 and July 2023.

Work continued to improve and support Personal Education Plans (PEP's).

It was noted that Breathing Space had supported 14 young people referred to their service by the Dudley Virtual School. Breathing Space was a therapeutic alternative provision which supported young people that were disengaged with learning and at risk of suspensions or permanent exclusions.

The Virtual School had continued to initiate work with the Primary and Secondary settings with the aim to develop a co-ordinated programme to integrate an inclusive approach to teaching and learning across Dudley.

The Delivering Equality and Equity across Dudley Schools programme (DEED'S) and full details thereof were outlined. It was noted that this would link with other programmes including engaging with all secondary settings in the RADY approach over three phases.

Details of the Aspire to University Programme run by the University of Wolverhampton that was designed to support young people who were in care from Year 7 through to Year 13 were outlined.

The Virtual School were also working with 'Unifrog' to provide all young people with the chance to register on their online platform to help them research possible career choices, compare university courses and apprenticeships offers.

The Arts offer had continued to be delivered for Dudley's children in care. The programme 'Artslink' was part of the West Midlands Virtual Schools Children in Care Foundation. Details of the full arts offer were outlined in paragraph 4.9 of the report.

The Virtual School were awarded a grant from the Department for Education for the Post 16 pilot to develop an offer over the academic year of 2022 to 2023. That aimed to create a strategic platform for the enhancement of educational provision and help inform the wider 'system' to refine processes, offers and interventions for the children in care cohort.

The 'Smashlife' programme prepared young people for adulthood and reflected what young people wanted.

Arising from the presentation of the report Members asked questions and made observations and responses were provided as follows: -

- (a) Councillor C Bayton in referring to the Key Stage Four results referred to those students with social challenges and difficult journeys through their education and in particular the increase in numbers of unaccompanied asylum seekers.

The Acting Virtual School Head Teacher confirmed that their Education Health and Care Plan would move with those specific children to the alternative Authority, with the Virtual School working with colleagues as soon as children and young people were in placement including conversations with neighbouring authorities, social care services and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Teams.

- (b) R May expressed the importance of the RADY programme and encouraged Members to discuss the programme and encourage those schools who were not participating in the programme to do so.

Resolved

That the information contained in the report submitted on Dudley Virtual School – Summary of Annual Report 2022, be noted.

45. **Questions from Members to the Chair under (Council Procedure Rule 11.8)**

There were no questions to the Chair pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 11.8.

The meeting ended at 7.15pm

CHAIR

Children's Services Select Committee

Progress Tracker

Subject (Date of Meeting)	Recommendation/action	Responsible Officer/Area	Status/Notes
(11 th September 2023) – Children's Services Select Committee Progress Tracker	Minute No. 17 Resolution (2) – J Branch be requested to determine the position in relation to DBS checks for Members and details of the criteria required.	Assistant Director People and Inclusion	Briefing Note to be provided prior to the meeting.

Meeting of the Children’s Services Select Committee –11th March 2024

Report of the Director of Children’s Services

Corporate Quarterly Performance Report – Quarter 3 (1st October 2023 to 31st December 2023)

Purpose of report

1. To present the Quarter 3 position for Children’s Services of the financial year 2023/24 covering the period 1st October 2023 to 31st December 2023.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that the Children’s Services Select Committee review the contents of this report and that any identified performance issues are referred to the relevant Cabinet Member.

Background

3. The Quarter 3 performance report incorporates quarterly key performance measures.

Within Children’s Services there are five (5) Performance Indicators across two (2) Council Priorities:

Dudley the safe and healthy borough– 4 measures
Dudley the Borough of Opportunity – 1 measure

Sub-Headings

4. **Performance Summary**

Dudley the safe and healthy borough

PI.1447 - % of agency workers

Target = **15%**
Q3 2023/24 position = 17.7%

Workforce Board continues to have a sole focus on the recruitment and retention of social workers. As at end December, the unfilled social work posts remain under 10% and we are reducing our reliance on agency staff (17.7% end December 2023).

Staff feedback evidences that the career progression arrangements, including the role of Advance Practitioner, have been well received.

Staff turnover rates have continued to reduce from a position of 25% at the end of 2022/23 to 18% as at end Q3; this remains above our target of 12%

PI.432 - Number of Looked After Children per 10,000 of the child population

Target = **83**
Q3 2023/24 position = 82.1

Our rates of children looked after has surpassed the target of 83 for the first time this financial year. This is due to a continuing decrease in the number of children entering care alongside an increase in the number of children ceasing.

We are continuing to work with the courts to ensure that SGO applications and care order discharges are progressing in a timely manner to ensure permanency is achieved earlier for our children looked after cohort.

PI.433 Number of children subject to child protection plan per 10,000 of the child population

Target = **43.0**
Q3 2023/24 position = 25.4

Our rates of children subject to a Child Protection Plan has increased slightly since Q2 however, the number is still well below the target of 43. Our rates of children have been on a downward trend over the last 5 years and our rate is still lower than that of all of our comparator groups.

Work has been undertaken to ensure that our reduction is appropriate and that the correct children are being made subject to a Child Protection Plan

or that other appropriate services and actions are being undertaken where Child Protection Plans are not being utilised.

PI. 2250 % of closed Early Help Cases that were not open to Level 4 Services less than 6 months after closure.

Target = **90%**

Q3 2023/24 position = 96.0%

Continued high performance on this measure indicates that families are closed at the appropriate time when there is confidence that any changes made can be sustained without early help support. A consistently high percentage of families do not escalate to level 4 once early help work has closed which indicates effectiveness of early help interventions on tackling concerns at a lower level and prevents escalation into statutory services.

Q3 2023/24 Summary

Of the five (5) Performance Indicators, four (4) have surpassed their target one (1) remains yet to achieve its target (*PI 1447*) however, this percentage of 17.7% has reduced each quarter towards its target of 15%

Service interventions put in place previously and those that are ongoing during 2023/24 have had a positive impact on performance, with a steady senior workforce contributing to driving improvements across Children Services.

5. There are no alternative options to be made in receiving this report.

Finance

6. There are no direct financial implications in receiving this report.

Law

7. There are no direct legal implications in receiving this report.

Risk Management

8. The current performance reporting period, risk management is contained and reviewed in the performance reporting, however as part of the new risk management framework approved at audit and standards committee, risk reporting will not sit within performance and each directorate will need to develop a risk register for monitoring purposes.

Equality Impact

9. There are no special considerations to be made with regard to equality and diversity in noting and receiving this report.

No proposals have been carried out.

No proposals have been made, therefore does not impact on children and young people.

Human Resources/Organisational Development

10. There are no specific direct human resource issues in receiving this report. In terms of the Council's sickness level and the management of attendance, the HR and OD team continues to work with Directors and Heads of Service to assist and provide support in tackling those areas identified as having high levels of sickness.

Commercial/Procurement

11. There is no direct commercial impact.

Environment/Climate Change

12. There is not impact on the environment or climate change.

Council Priorities and Projects

15. Within Children's Services there are five (5) Performance Indicators across two (2) Council Priorities:

Dudley the safe and healthy borough– 4 measures
Dudley the Borough of Opportunity – 1 measure



Director of Children's Services

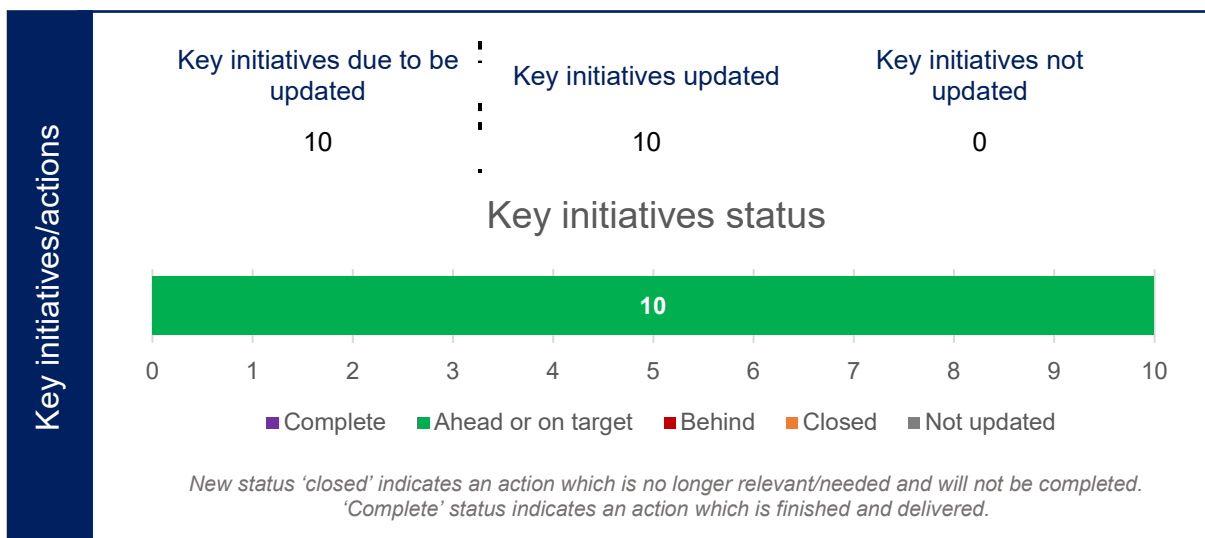
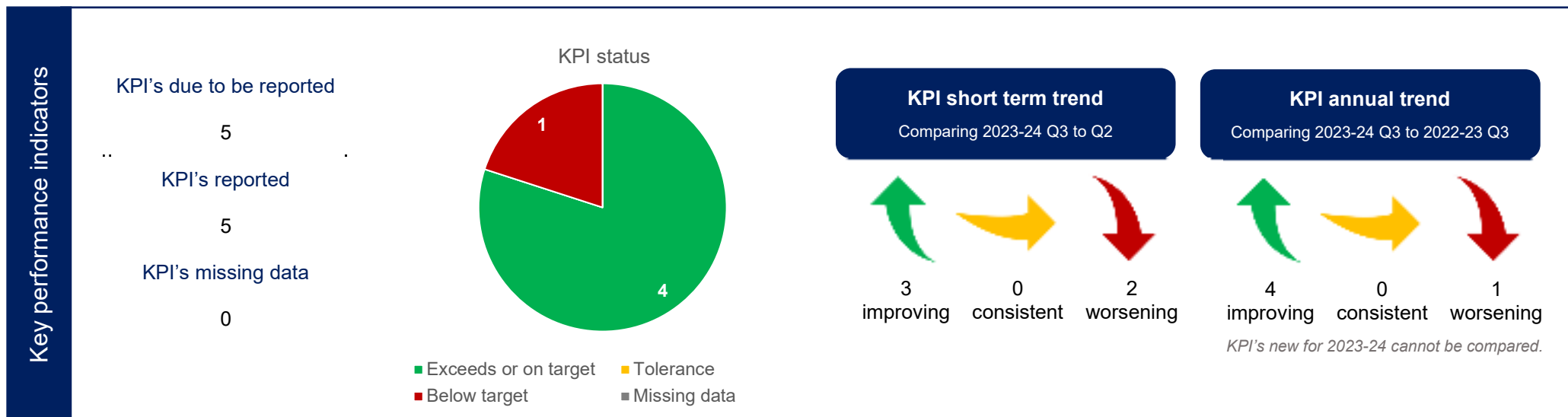
Report Author: Carl Turner
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Email: carl.turner@dudley.gov.uk

Appendices

- *Appendix 1 – Children's Services overview*

Children's Services overview

The following pages provide a dashboard overview for the directorate of Children's Services. They show the status of corporate key performance indicators and of key initiatives/actions being delivered. KPI scorecards are used to report and monitor performance outturns for the given quarter along with exception commentary for those measures below target.



Council plan links

The table below provides a breakdown of key initiatives and corporate KPI's by directorate for this financial year including any not due to be reported this quarter.

Council plan priority	Key initiatives	Corporate KPI's
Dudley the borough of opportunity	6	2
Dudley the safe and healthy borough	4	4
Total	10	6

Children's Services scorecard

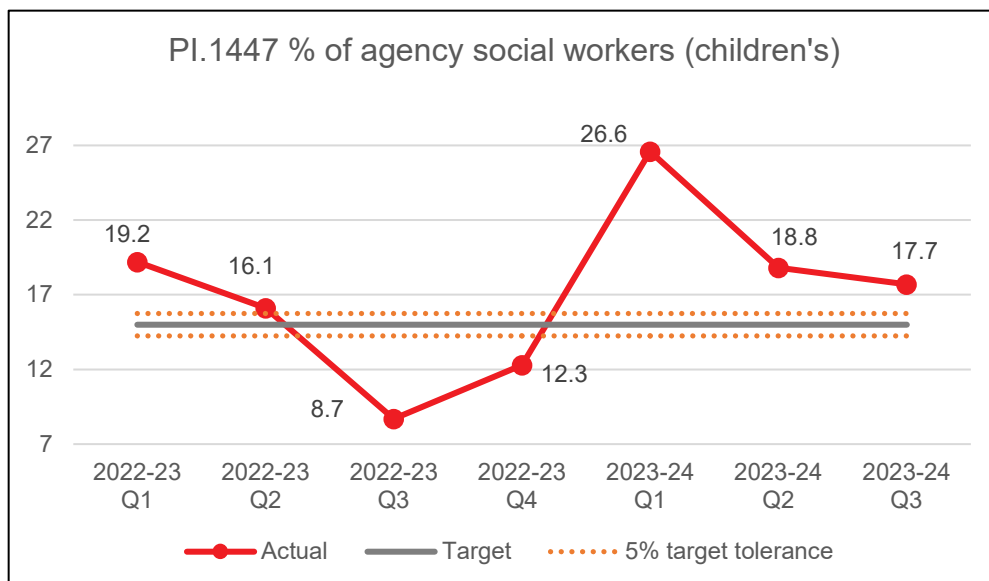
	Performance Indicator	2022-23				2023-24				Target	Score	Short term trend	Annual trend	Benchmarking comparator data
		Qtr. 1 outturn	Qtr. 2 outturn	Qtr. 3 outturn	Qtr. 4 outturn	Qtr. 1 outturn	Qtr. 2 outturn	Qtr. 3 outturn	Qtr. 4 outturn					
Borough of opportunity	PI.120 16- to 18-year-olds who are not in education, employment or training (NEET)	2%	2.5%	2.4%	3.1%	3.2%	1.3% (96 / 7,459)	2.2% (168 / 7,663)		2.8%	★	↘	↗	2.2% West Midlands regional data
Safe & healthy	PI.1447 % of agency social workers (children's)	19.2%	16.1%	8.7%	12.3%	26.6%	18.8% (26.8 / 142.5)	17.73% (25.27 / 142.5)		15%	▲	↗	↘	17.6% Top Quartile LAIT Annual Figure
	PI.432 Number of children looked after per 10,000 of the population	85.2	88.9	88.8	86.2	84.2	84.2 (576 / 68,446)	82.1 (562 / 68,446)		83	★	↗	↗	70 Top Quartile LAIT Annual Figure
	PI.433 Number of children subject to child protection plan per 10,000 of the child population	38.2	37.5	39.5	36.8	28.3	22.4 (153 / 68,446)	25.4 (174 / 68,446)		43	★	↘	↗	42.1 Top Quartile LAIT Annual Figure
	PI.2250 % of closed Early Help Cases that were not open to Level 4 Services less than 6 months after closure	92.6%	92.3%	92.5%	94.2%	94.9%	95.5% (1,565 / 1,638)	96% (1,547 / 1,612)		90%	★	↗	↗	Local measure, no external benchmarking available.

Short term trend compares current quarter with previous quarter within the same year. Annual trend compares the same quarter between years.

Children's Services exception commentary

PI.1447 % of agency social workers (children's)

PI	2022-23				2023-24					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Quarter 3			
							Outturn	Target	S	T
PI.1447	19.2	16.1	8.7	12.3	26.6	18.8	17.7%	15%	▲	➔



Performance: what is the data telling us?

We continue to see a reduction of the reliance on agency staff, which at the end of Q3 had further reduced to 17.73% (our target is 15%). This is in the context of continuing to ensure that we have appropriate social work staff in post to work effectively with our children. It is of note that we have sustained the reduction in our vacancy rate (neither permanent nor agency SW in post) at less than 10% since July 2023, which is helpful but we have more to do to ensure a full workforce.

Assurance: evidence that actions are in place and having an impact

We are sustaining the progress towards our 15% target. We have recruited permanently to our redesign Head of Service roles and Service Manager posts. These leadership roles have critical function in quality assurance, as well as delivering the leadership that forms a core judgement through our regulatory body, Ofsted. External feedback (Hertfordshire) triangulates that the redesign has been well received by staff, and that the work to embed the model of working is positively implemented.

Impact: what are the issues/risks for service delivery?

As we recruit and retain permanent social workers, we are increasingly able to support the consistent relationship with a child and their family. This is critical in the delivery of timely and effective intervention, enabling more families to care safely for their children.

Meeting of the Children's Services Select Committee – 11th March 2024

Report of the Director of Children's Services

Education Report

Purpose of report

1. To provide an update on Education Outcomes to Children's Services Select Committee

Recommendations

2. The Select Committee are asked to note and comment on the contents of the report.

Background

3. The report contains updates on the work of the Education Outcomes team as follows:
 - Dudley Performing Arts
 - Suspensions
 - Admissions
 - AP Strategy
 - EHE Numbers
 - CME Numbers

Dudley Performing Arts

4. Dudley Performing Arts (DPA) continues to provide musical opportunities for young people attending maintained schools and academies. The service is currently engaging with 94% of all possible settings with regular weekly

tuition delivered in 82% of all schools. Numbers of students learning continue






5. to rise steadily following a decimation of student numbers during the pandemic. In recent years the service has prioritised a focus on inclusion that has resulted in extensive work with our special schools, a strategic partnership with Dudley Virtual School and a series of projects with Youth Justice.
6. Dudley MBC has submitted an application to lead the new Black Country Music Hub from September 2024. Preliminary work has included the development of a memorandum of understanding for the other Black Country Music Services who have all agreed to support the application. If successful, this will lead to annual funding of £1,973,994 per annum (subject to spending review) and a capital grant of £649,041. Arts Council England are scheduled to announce the new hub leads in April with a start date of September 1st.



Suspension & Exclusion data – Term 1 2023/24

7. Across Dudley schools, there have been 1430 individual suspensions recorded since the beginning of the academic year, 2023-24. Within that number, 868 individual child/young person have received a suspension, with 294 receiving one or more suspensions. This is showing an increase from the same period of the previous academic year.

Primary - % of all suspensions






8. We are seeing an improving trend of reducing suspensions across EYFS, KS1 and KS2. In every year group of statutory school age children at Primary Schools, the percentage of suspensions have reduced. This can be seen in the table below which shows the percentage of suspensions to date in term 1 this academic year against term 1 last year.

Data set / group	22/23 – Term 1	23/24 – Term 1	Trend
Reception	0.7%	0.5%	
Yr1	2.2%	1.7%	
Yr2	2.1%	0.8%	
Yr3	1.6%	0.6%	
Yr4	1.8%	0.3%	

Yr5	1.5%	1.1%	
Yr6	1.9%	1.1%	

Secondary - % of all suspensions



9. There is an increase in the number of suspensions being seen at KS3 and KS4 across the Secondary schools. All year groups have seen a general increase, with the greatest increase in KS3, with Year 9 having nearly 25% of all suspensions for term 1, and an increase of almost 150 additional suspensions to the same time last year. This year group were in Year 5 when schools went into lockdown and may have missed out on significant transition to secondary school. Within the table there is a improvement in the percentage of suspensions at KS4.




Data set / group	22/23 – Term 1	23/24 – Term 1	Trend
Yr7	7.0%	7.8%	
Yr8	19.1%	21.7%	
Yr9	16.5%	24.3%	
Yr10	24.2%	21.6%	
Yr11	21.1%	18.3%	

Highest groups / reasons - % of all suspensions

10. The greatest reason for the increase in suspensions is around verbal and threatening abuse aimed at adults. Pupil on pupil assaults have seen a slight decrease in the percentage of suspensions, where Persistent Disruptive Behaviour sees around the same amount. It is worth noting that it is the percentage of the suspensions that remains the same, but there is an increase in those numbers.

The percentage split between male and female remain on par with the previous year. In terms of ethnic split, 72% of all suspensions are of White British, with White British Boys at 44% of all suspensions.

Data set / group	22/23 – Term 1	23/24 – Term 1	Trend
Male	64.4%	64.0%	
Female	35.6%	36.0%	

PDB	43.4%	43.1%	
Assault of pupil on pupil	18.5%	16.0%	
Verbal / threatening abuse	18.3%	25.2%	

Exclusions

11. Up to the end of the first term there had been 52 permanent exclusions issued across all Dudley schools, an increase from 33 last year. Not all that are issued become upheld as some are withdrawn (due to the work of the Inclusion Team), overturned (by governing bodies) or appealed by the parent/child and placed at an IRP (Independent Review Panel). There is still an increase of upheld PX decisions at 37, up from 23 for the previous year.
12. This increase compared to regional and national figures shows that Dudley are above these. The trends from 21/22 when 66 had an upheld PX with Dudley at 0.14% per 100 children, Regional at 0.11% and national at 0.07%. In 22/23, 74 had an upheld PX (up by 8) with Dudley at 0.15%, regional at 0.14% and national at 0.10%. Although the gap has closed to national, we are still well above the national average.
13. Going against the suspension data, Year 11 have seen an increase in permanent exclusions. During 22/23 academic year there were 7 total issued, with 4 upheld decisions. Already at the end of term 1, there have been 10 issued, with 8 upheld. There is a significant decrease of exclusions at Primary Schools, where the work of the Inclusive Pathways team is showing impact and effect.
14. The table below shows the trend of percentage of permanent exclusions against the total percentage for the previous academic year. There is an increase in one off reasons for the exclusion rather than Persistent Disruptive Behaviour, in particular on pupil-on-pupil assaults.

Data set / group – total issued	22/23 – Total	23/24 – Term 1	Trend
Primary	15.7%	5.7%	↓
Year 7	5.5%	7.7%	↑
Year 8	22.7%	21.2%	→
Year 9	21.1%	15.4%	↓
Year 10	29.7%	26.9%	↓
Year 11	5.5%	19.2%	↑↑
PDB	43.8%	38.5%	↓
Assault – pupil	19.5%	30.8%	↑↑
Assault – adult	9.4%	17.3%	↑
Weapon related	10.2%	9.6%	→

15. In terms of ethnicities, 78% of upheld exclusions are White British, with the next group 12% are White & Black Caribbean. We have seen a reduction with those on EHCP – 5 issued, 3 upheld – in total last year 14 were issued, 7 upheld. There has been one CLA (not Dudley Borough) that has been excluded. This went to appeal and upheld by the panel.

Summary

16. There has been an increase in suspensions and exclusions across Dudley. One school, The Wordsley School has accounted for 22% of all suspensions. 13% of all children and young people with suspensions and 23% of all who have received one or more have come from this school. Significant support is being given to the school with weekly meetings to triage their young people with the Inclusion Team and AP external providers, an increase of Inclusive Pathways caseload and regular meetings with the Headteacher.
17. The Inclusion Team continue to challenge schools with suspensions and exclusions, with schools receiving individual conversations about their data,

and what support can be offered to improve this. The Dudley Pathway strategy due to be launched September 2024 will ensure that school interventions are consistently identified and implemented for children and young people at risk of repeat suspensions and exclusion, alongside appropriate assessments to identify need and barriers to engagement. A clear pathway into base provisions and an assessment centre will provide specialist support for children, young people, and families.

Admissions Update

18. Admissions data is in line with the birth rate overview as expected over recent years. Applications to primary have dropped as the ‘bulge’ years move through secondary. There is spare capacity across the primary phases and more pressure in the higher years of secondary. This is expected to level out in the coming years. Birth rates have not returned to pre-pandemic levels at present.
19. New arrivals and in year transfers is showing a significant increase with almost 1500 applications in the first term this year compared to 2533 for the entire academic year previously. The number of students joining schools (and the borough) with English as a second language is significantly higher. Secondaries are currently working collaboratively through the FAP process to establish a New Arrivals and ESOL base.

20. **School Admissions – January 2024**

Primary	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24
No. of Applications	3701	3627	3686	3561
% of 1 st Preference Offers	90% (NA 90.2%)	91% (NA 91.8%)	90% (NA 92.25)	90% (NA 92.5%)
% of One Preference	97% (NA 97%)	98.5% (NA 98.4%)	97% (NA 98.4%)	98% (NA 98.6%)
No. of Appeals	75	51	67	39
No. of Successful Appeals	1	2	1	0
Secondary	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24
No. of Applications	3670	3804	3838	4031
% of 1 st Preference Offers	86% (NA 82.2%)	86% (NA 81.1%)	88% (NA 83.3%)	84.5% (NA 82.6%)

% of One Preference	96.5% (NA 95.6%)	97% (NA 95.5%)	97% (NA 95.8%)	96% (NA 95.6%)
No. of Appeals	82	79	85	128
No. of Successful Appeals	7	5	9	22

AP Strategy Update

21. The Alternative Provision strategy is now being redeveloped to ensure that it is fit for purpose and meeting the needs of CYP across the local area. This was launched in September 2023 with an internal meeting of LA Officers, Health, Social Care and other stakeholders to outline a clear rationale behind the direction of travel. There have been several workshops with schools, external providers and Officers are now crafting an options appraisal for consultation in the coming weeks.
22. The Alternative Provision Strategy is being developed to be consistent with the principles underpinning the SEND Strategy and our Inclusive Pathways programme in order to:
- increase the number of children and young people supported in mainstream provision
 - reduce the number of exclusions from schools
 - address the rising number of young people receiving home tuition
 - stop off-rolling, leaving young people without education
 - reduce the increasing use of specialist provision
 - ensure specialist provision is in the right locations.
 - increase the number of young people in education, employment and training, therefore reducing our NEET statistics.

OUR END GAME

- 23.
1. Clear Ethos & Vision for Alternative Pathways
 2. A change in 'language' from AP to 'Educational Pathways' which meet children's needs.
 3. New Inclusion Strategy and development of Inclusive Pathways
 4. A comprehensive review and implementation of new AP Places/Alternative Curriculum – with good physical space and buildings
 5. A focus on Behaviour Outreach/development of relationships
 6. Development of a 'behaviour curriculum' in schools
 7. Effective Transition in AND out including date stamped exit points.

EHE Numbers

24. Since 2016 the number of children in Dudley whose parents have chosen to provide education otherwise than at school, by enacting their right to provide 'Elective Home Education' has increased significantly.
In the academic year 2016/17 there were 192 instances of children registered as EHE, this rose to 310 in 2017/18 and 393 in 2018/19. 2019/20 saw this figure rise again to 430 due to the start of Covid measures and increase again to 555 in 2020/21.
25. Since Covid measures were removed the numbers of EHE has continued to rise with 665 in 2021/22 and 725 in 2022/23.
Currently in 2023/24 there has been 578 instances which is expected to increase throughout the academic year.
The numbers of EHE children remaining stubbornly high despite the concerns that many children are not receiving a sufficient education provision in this way.

26. **Pupils that have started with the EHE Service since 1st September 2016 and were active during the following Academic Years.**

	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24
			9					
Elective Home Education	192	310	393	430	555	665	725	578
Female	102	148	202	219	279	337	381	305
Male	90	162	191	211	276	328	344	273
SEN Support	50	78	95	102	107	137	136	109
No Special Educational Need	116	195	264	287	392	465	522	423
SEN Discontinued	13	18	12	11	13	11	7	3
Education, Health, and Care Plan	13	19	21	29	40	46	50	38
Statutory Assessment	0	0	1	1	3	6	10	5

27. Each year we see a significant number of children leaving EHE for a variety of reasons. Some parents chose to return their children to mainstream education provision, others may be assessed as providing insufficient education and are transferred to Children Missing Education to support or direct a return to mainstream education.

28. In 2021/22 school year there were 245 children removed from EHE, 86 of those were over compulsory school age meaning 159 left EHE to be returned to mainstream education.
29. In 2022/23 304 children were removed, 117 were over compulsory school age leaving 187 who were returned to mainstream education
In 2023/24, so far there have been 74 children returned to mainstream education.
30. In 2016 the resources made available by the council to review, assess and support EHE children were reported to be below the levels expected nationally, with 1fte officer to overview 192 children, this resource was increased in 2021/22 by the equivalent of 1fte which has since been reported to be insufficient to meet the statutory requirements to assess and support 724 children registered in 2022/23.
31. Authorities assessed by OFSTED to be delivering best practice are reported to have 1fte officer per 100 children. To meet this requirement Dudley would need 5fte officers to provide assessment and support to effectively deliver our statutory obligations and meet the needs of Dudley's EHE population.
32. EHE Regional comparison data shows that in 2021/22 Dudley had 660 children registered as EHE on the census day compared to Shropshire with 630, Solihull with 470 Stoke on Trent with 470, Telford & Wrekin with 530, Walsall with 560 and Wolverhampton with 670.

CME Numbers

33. Children Missing Education represent the children who are known or thought to reside with Dudley Borough who do not have a school place or are not receiving suitable education otherwise than at school.
34. Since August 2022 the monthly numbers of CME children has been high. This is in the main due to regularly high numbers of children newly arriving in Dudley from other countries or other authority areas. Most of these children meet the authorities Fair Access criteria and are placed in schools via our Fair Access Panels.
35. In January 2024 there were 369 children recorded as CME, 123 children were newly identified CME during January, 66 children were placed in provision in January alone. Other children have been allocated school places in January and are yet to confirm their on-roll status.
36. In January 140 children were identified as new movers into the borough, in previous years this has been:

January 2023 – 132, January 2022 – 85, January 2021 – 37, January 2020 - 75

The numbers of CME trend shows:



37. In addition, the numbers being removed from the CME register because they returned to school, left the area, become over compulsory school age or accessed a suitable education otherwise than at school are:

Children Missing Education Academic Year Left CME													
	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Total
18/19	127	57	60	38	52	41	65	44	49	76	25	2	636
19/20	109	49	49	29	71	32	40	3	16	62	4	9	473
20/21	66	50	72	24	46	32	51	33	48	67	15	3	507
21/22	72	63	58	23	79	40	57	53	63	65	41	2	616
22/23	142	91	106	43	125	59	88	62	103	124	58	10	1011
23/24	201	125	143	50	64	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	583

The authority identifies CME via many different sources and uses a range of investigatory powers and methods to try and identify the whereabouts of children who leave the authority without notifying their school or other departments.

The authority has 2fte officers who work to identify CME children and support the parents to apply for school places.

Finance

38. There are no direct financial implications arising from the proposals outlined in the report.

Law

39. The law governing Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council’s (the Local Authority) statutory duties in relation to education in its area is provided by

the Acts of Parliament, Regulations and Statutory Guidance regularly published and updated by Central Government.

In particular, the Education Act 1996 obliges the Local Authority to:

“... ensure that their relevant education ... and ... training functions are ... exercised ... with a view to ... promoting high standards, ... ensuring fair access ... and ... promoting the fulfilment of [the] learning potential by every person to whom this subsection applies.”
sub-section 13A(1)

AND

“... establish primary schools and secondary schools ... maintain primary and secondary schools, whether established by them or not; and ... assist any primary or secondary school which is not maintained by them [for the purpose of fulfilling their functions under this Act] ...” sub-section 16(1)

The Local Authority must therefore have policies and procedures that enable it to collate, interpret and act upon data regarding the social and educational needs of local children and young people, as well as the progress of local schools. This will enable the Local Authority to improve the educational provision available and the attainments and outcomes of the pupils and students in its area.

Consequently, because this report summarises the data being collated and describes the work being done by officers within Education Outcomes, it demonstrates how they are ensuring that the Local Authority is complying with the statutory duties cited above.

Risk Management

40. There are no deemed risks as this report is provided for information purposes only.

Equality Impact

41. The HR/OD Business Partner is fully engaged with officers within the Childrens Services Directorate to support the delivery of the key principles of this strategy

Human Resources/Organisational Development

42. The HR/OD Business Partner is fully engaged with officers within the Childrens Services Directorate to support the delivery of the key principles of this strategy.

Commercial/Procurement

43. There are no direct commercial or procurement implications associated with this report, however improved relationships with Dudley schools does create opportunity for increased trading.

Environment/Climate Change

44. The report is for information only and there is no perceived impact on climate change or environmental factors.

Council Priorities and Projects

45. A place where everybody has the education and skills they need, and where outstanding local schools, colleges, and universities secure excellent results for their learners.

A place of healthy, resilient, safe communities with high aspirations and the ability to shape their own future.



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Meeting of the Children's Services Select Committee - 11th March 2024

Report of the Director of Children's Services

Learning from Complaints

Purpose of report

1. This report is to provide information in relation to learning from complaints. The aim is to provide a better understanding of how we learn the lessons from complaints, and how training and quality assurance activity supports with this.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended:
 - Members note and comment on the contents of the report, which is provided to supplement the annual and statutory Complaints Report.

Background

3. Tracey Curran presented the Annual Report for Complaints, Comments and Compliments between 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023, at the meeting of the Children's Services Select Committee in September 2023. The report identified that 126 complaints had been upheld or partially upheld, and these form the basis for ongoing practice learning.

As part of the Select Committee discussion, we proposed that in the 6 months between the annual complaints report that is provided by the Complaints Team, the Centre for Professional Practice will provide an annual learning report. This will set out examples of how the learning is shared, and the impact of the learning tested through our assurance activity.

With each complaint response, there is the opportunity for the manager to also complete a monitoring form to summarise any learning. These are shared back with the Complaints Team, and in completing this exercise, it

has provided a useful prompt for this learning to be more routinely shared with CPP.

In each complaint response, there is a discussion with the practitioner and their manager in considering the response. Where there is learning identified, this is shared back with the practitioner as part of their regular supervision.

This report does not repeat the information available in the statutory Complaints Report but uses some specific and themed examples to set out how the learning is used across the service.

4. Concerns around Communication

19 of the complaints that were raised had shared a concern where the family felt they had missed out on clear information that should be shared in a timely manner.

Individual examples included not knowing when a social worker was away from work (sickness absence); where an assessment included information that the family did not consider to be accurate; or where family members considered they were not kept up to date in relation to the plans for children and that this impacted on the family time arrangements.

At the time when families raise a complaint, they are often experiencing hurt or distress. We know that this can affect how each of us 'hears' information or remembers the detail. In this context we want to be as clear as possible, in as many ways as possible.

For assessments, we have taken the opportunity to work through our Principal Social Worker in direct sessions across the workforce to review and refresh our practice guidance, which was completed in December 2023. This has given the opportunity to raise the profile of including fathers in assessments; of ensuring that assessments are shared with children and families in a timely way; of using the period of assessment to maximise our reach to the wider family and increase curiosity in our practice.

The triangulation of the impact of this has been included in our Quality Assurance Framework. Post redesign, this was reviewed and updated to make sure that it addresses the whole directorate (and not just Children's Social Care). The detailed and monthly practice learning audits specifically include exploration of the quality of assessments and consider how the assessment is shared with the child, young person and family.

Recognising the importance of keeping families and other professionals up to date with worker availability, we have reminded our teams about the

use of out of office responses; to be clear if practitioners are away from work, when they will return and who to contact if the query is urgent. We seek to hold each other to account for this – examples have included making sure through IT that an appropriate out of office is added when a staff member is unexpectedly off work and advising of appropriate phrasing for out of office messages.

5. Concerns raised about staff behaviour:

13 of the complaints that were upheld or partially upheld related to families experience of the practitioner. This is often aligned to a concern about communication, but not exclusively.

There are examples of families explaining that they considered a practitioner lacked empathy with their situation. Other examples have included a view that the practitioner did not respond to the family in a timely way, or in a manner that they considered would have been helpful.

As part of the work to implement Family Safeguarding, we have shared a comprehensive training programme for practitioners and for managers around Motivational Interviewing. This is an approach that has at its core a collaborative way of working *with* people; that pays attention to the language of change and is designed to strengthen the commitment to change by exploring the person's own reasons for change. It is an approach of compassion.

Motivational interviewing fits completely within our Restorative Practice Framework. Having shared the one-day practice framework training with the staff, this is also directed from induction for new practitioners.

Our assurance is also triangulated through a quarterly Stocktake and Showcase activity. Here, each Service Manager reviews and shares their progress against the Practice Framework and Participation Strategy. A directorate wide analysis is undertaken on the basis of this, and in addition, there is a detailed deep dive across three or four services in each quarter so that the whole service is reviewed in a 12-month period.

6 Education, Health and Care assessments and plans:

The Authority is subject to an Accelerated Progress Plan in relation to SEND, and this report does not seek to replicate the extensive detail of the plan, nor the oversight through the Dept of Education. The SEND strategic partnership board is established in this context.

However, it is an area that also raises complaints including for example in relation to timely delivery of a decision, or the quality of the EHC plan.

As part of the wider response, the Directorate now has in place a Designated Social Care Officer (DiSCO) to support the work. The primary focus is on enabling good quality social care contribution to the assessment of need and where relevant, in the plan.

A multi-agency, bi-monthly quality assurance group has been developed (including the parent and carer forum), which includes a specific focus on the quality impact of plans.

We have further developed our practice to contribute to an EHC assessment in a more timely way across early help and with social care. This includes making appropriate use of prior social care involvement; throughout February 2024, we are testing out such a tool in our Front Door.

We have progressed training through Genuine Partnership (4cornerstones co production) to better support our effective co production arrangements with children and families who have additional needs. This has been well received across the professional and family community, and the merging impact is evident in the reporting to DfE.

Finance

7. There are no direct financial implications arising from the contents of this report.

Law

8. The procedures for Children's complaints, are determined by legislation, predominantly involving the:
 - Children Act 1989, Representations Procedures (England) Regulations 2006
 - The Children and Adoption Act 2002 and Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

Risk Management

9. This report has no direct implications for the council in relation to Risk Management

Equality Impact

10. This report has no direct implications for the Council's commitment to equality and diversity. The complaints policy is applied fairly and equitably to all users.

Human Resources/Organisational Development

11. There are no direct Human Recourses/Organisational Development implications arising from this report.

Commercial/Procurement

12. There are no commercial or procurement implications that require consideration.

Environment/Climate Change

13. There are no environment/climate change implications that require consideration.

Council Priorities and Projects

14. The 2022/2025 Council Plan is clear in its ambitions for Dudley to be the Borough of Opportunity in ensuring that:

- Children and young people benefit from the best possible start in life in our Child Friendly borough.
- Those with special educational needs and disabilities and care leavers achieve the best possible outcomes.
- Everyone, including our most vulnerable, have the choice, support, and control of the services they need to live independently.



Catherine Driscoll
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