

SELECT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Thursday, 15th November, 2007 at 6.00pm
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Councillor Nottingham (Chairman)
Councillor Ms Boleyn (Vice Chairman)
Councillors Ms Coulter, Mrs Dunn, Hanif, Hill, Mrs Ridney, Ms Roberts, Mrs Rogers, and Wright; Mr Billingham, Mr Jones, Mrs Roe, Mr Smith, Mr Taylor, Ms Verdegem and Reverend Wickens.

OFFICERS

The Director of Finance (as Lead Officer to the Committee), the Director of Children's Services, the Assistant Directors of Children's Services (Children's Specialist Services), (Partnership and Children's Trust) and (Resources), The Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinator and Manager for Care Management North (both Directorate of Children's Services) and Mr Sanders (Directorate of Law and Property)

22

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of Councillors D Blood and Ms Partridge; Mr Hatton and Mrs Simms.

23

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Declarations of Personal Interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, were made by the following in relation to all items on the Agenda in view of their Governorships of the schools and educational establishments indicated below:

Councillor Ms Boleyn – Maidensbridge Primary School.

Councillor Mrs Coulter – Pupil Referral Unit.

Councillor Mrs Dunn – Huntingtree Primary School and Cradley CE Primary School

Councillor Hill – Earls High School.

Councillor Nottingham – The Crestwood School

Councillor Mrs Ridney – The Coseley School, Cristchurch CE Primary School and Hurst Hill Primary School

Councillor Wright – Ellowes Hall School

Mr Jones – Redhall School

Mrs Roe – Redhill School

Mr Smith – Oldswinford Hospital School

Reverend Wicken – Jessons CE Primary School, St Marks CE Primary School and Castle High School

24

MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 17th September, 2007, be approved as a correct record and signed.

25

SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was reported that Councillor Mrs Ridney was serving in place of Councillor Ms Partridge for this meeting of the Committee only.

26

ORDER OF BUSINESS

RESOLVED

That, pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 13(c), item 12 on the Agenda (Teenage Pregnancy) be considered as the next item of business.

27

TEENAGE PREGNANCY

A presentation by the Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinator was given on this issue, covering the following areas:

- Staffing Structure of the Dudley Teenage Pregnancy Team.
- How teenage pregnancy was measured, this being by way of the conception rates of 15-17 year olds at a rate per thousand, the current rate in Dudley being 46.7 per thousand.
- Strategic goals in relation to reducing teenage conceptions, the target comprising a 55% reduction over the period from the start of the initiative in 1998 to 2010. (this translated into 14 fewer conceptions per thousand over the period)

- Statistical information showing a gradual reduction in the number of teenage conceptions and a ward map showing the incidence of teenage conceptions by ward. Generally, the higher figures were prevalent in the most deprived wards.
- The nature of research undertaken into teenage pregnancy and the measures being taken to improve the position. These included the provision of a discrete, credible, highly visible and young people friendly sexual health/contraceptive advice service with a focus on health promotion as well as reactive services; strong delivery of sexual relationships education and personal, social health education by schools; targeted work with at risk groups of young people, in particular looked after children; work force training on sex and relationship issues within mainstream partner agencies; and a well resourced youth service, with a clear remit to tackle social issues, such as young people's sexual health. It was indicated in the presentation that there was evidence that greatest progress was being made in areas where all aspects of the strategy were being delivered effectively.
- Strengths and developments in Dudley identified following a strategic review that had been undertaken were indicated. Strengths related to a strong and established provision of sex and relationship education (SRE) in primary, secondary and special schools in conjunction with the work of school health advisors and the healthy schools programme. Baseline provision and explicit mapping of sex related education provision in schools was being developed in order that all schools could provide basic educational advice to young people. Reference was made to a peer education programme which had been developed across the Borough and was operating very satisfactorily.
- Further issues on which work was being carried out, together with certain impediments to progress, were indicated in the presentation.

The presentation concluded by referring to the strong and established provision of co-ordinated multi agency support for pregnant young women and young parents that existed, including supported housing, floating support, specialists groups, support with educational access and care and care to learning. Reference was made to the work of the Teenage Parent Development Officer, funded by Connexions, who worked with the various agencies involved to develop support for teenage parents and to support professionals in developing work with teenage parents with the aim of reducing social exclusion.

The role of the Dudley Teenage Pregnancy Partnership and the components of its strategy for the period from 2008 to 2011 for reducing teenage pregnancy, was discussed. The presentation also covered the contents and targets in the Dudley Teenage Pregnancy Action Plan from 2007 to 2009.

In the question and answer session that followed, the Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinator expressed confidence that the targets in the Action Plan would be met by the date set of 2010. In addressing a question on why some young persons evidently allowed themselves to become pregnant deliberately, the Co-ordinator replied that as all young persons were different, so also were their reasons for becoming pregnant. Reference was made by one member to evidence from another authority that teenage pregnancy rates were lower in schools where clinics were provided.

RESOLVED

That the presentation be received and the information contained therein, noted.

28

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PLAN 2008-2011

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on progress towards a new Children and Young People's Plan, as required by OFSTED following their consideration of the initial Plan which had been reviewed in June, 2007, prior to the Annual Performance Assessment.

The report indicated that a project plan had been developed and agreed by the Children's Trust, to enable a new Plan to be written, based on rigorous needs analysis. Stakeholders and partners, and children and young people had been engaged in the process. The needs analysis was now nearing completion and would shortly be posted on the Children's Trust website.

The report also indicated emerging priorities for consideration in the Plan, these resulting mainly from conferences and discussions held with stakeholders and partners, children and young people. The emerging needs were identified in paragraph 7 of the report submitted and it was also indicated in the report that it would be necessary to include 17 education indicators as set out by the Department for Children, Schools and Families which would be included in the new Local Area Agreement. Broadly, the latter would cover the areas of achievement, exclusion and attendance.

In the discussion on this issue, the Chairman of the Select Committee on Health and Adult Social Care indicated that that Committee was looking at the issue of an alcohol strategy, which would include consideration of the sale of alcohol to children and young persons with a particular focus on the outlets from which they were accessing alcohol.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

CHILDREN'S TRUST UPDATE

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted, indicating developments with regard to the Children's Trust.

The report indicated the method of operation of the Children and Young People's Partnership which formed the Children's Trust in Dudley, and summarised the commissioning arrangements with service providers. Reference was also made to the pooled budget arrangements that had been agreed and implemented to support the development framework and embed integrated processes for information sharing and assessment. The four different processes for information sharing and assessment were summarised in the report.

In the discussion on this item, the secondary teacher representative reported that, while the Teachers Advisory Committee were generally supportive of the initiative, they had concerns arising from the project being piloted in Devon in terms of the additional demands on teachers' workloads from time spent in additional meetings.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

BUILDING SCHOOLS FOR THE FUTURE – PRIMARY SCHOOLS

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted, further to the Primary Schools Review, reports on which had been submitted to the former Select Committee on Lifelong Learning in March, 2005 and January, 2006.

The report indicated that, while changes arising from the Primary Schools Review and other capital funding sources had substantially addressed the serious problem of growing surplus places, some concerns remained to be addressed. The report summarised progress made following the Primary Schools Review, described opportunities provided by the government's Primary Capital Programme to complete the development of sustainable primary schools fit for 21st century learning and situated at the heart of local communities; and described the process that needed to be followed in order to release the necessary funding from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF).

In presenting the report, the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Resources) indicated that, further to the Primary Schools Review, the number of primary schools in the Borough with more than 25% surplus places had been reduced from 14 to 4 in number over the period from January, 2006 to January, 2007.

He then drew particular attention to the anticipated requirements of the DCSF regarding access to funding from the Primary Capital Programme monies to be available to local authorities from 2009 for the improvement or replacement of primary school buildings. These would involve the determination of criteria to formulate a matrix of priorities for expenditure from the monies, consultation on which with schools would start from November and December, with further consultation on the draft strategy emanating therefrom in January and February. The preferred method of assessment by the DCSF necessitated the draft strategy document to be referred to them by 31st March, 2008 and for the formal, approved, strategy to be submitted to them by the end of April.

RESOLVED

- (1) That progress made with addressing surplus primary school places be noted.
- (2) That the Director of Children's Services advise the Cabinet Member for Children's Services of the need to address preparation for the Primary Strategy for Change document, including the criteria for the use of the funding for capital investment, as soon as possible, in order to meet the submission date of the draft strategy of 31st March, 2008.

BUILDING SCHOOLS FOR THE FUTURE – TRANSFORMING SECONDARY EDUCATION

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted indicating progress on Dudley's preparations for inclusion in wave 7 of the national Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme.

The report indicated that local authorities approved for funding in wave 7 would be announced by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) in Autumn, 2008 and that the release of funding would be subject to a series of rigorous assessments and approvals by Partnership for Schools, the DCSF and HM Treasury, the first stage of the process being the development of Dudley's Strategy for Change Part 1.

The issues proposed for inclusion in the Strategy were indicated in the report. The report suggested that the submission of an early draft to the DCSF, a key element in relation to which would be the Council's ability to demonstrate readiness to deliver, would provide a valuable opportunity to strengthen Dudley's case for inclusion in wave 7.

The report also indicated the initiatives and consultation arrangements undertaken in order to prepare for the submission of the documents. The Assistant Director of Children's Services (Resources) reported orally on further work proposed in preparation for submission and indicated that an update would be given to the Select Committee and Area Committees after Christmas.

In the question and answer session that followed the presentation of the report, the Assistant Director confirmed that the strategic document to be prepared would include reference to academies, on which the stance of DCSF had changed since its original conception. In relation to paragraph 10 of the report, the Assistant Director indicated the current position of the Directorate with regard to the incorporation of schools of different phases and type working together on a single campus model.

RESOLVED

That the report and the information provided be noted.

32

UPDATE OF THE COUNCIL'S CAPITAL STRATEGY

A report of the Director of Finance seeking consideration of the Capital Strategy for the Council proposed for the period from 2008 to 2013 was submitted.

RESOLVED

That the draft Capital Strategy for 2008 –2013 be received and that no issues be raised for consideration by the Cabinet or the Council.

33

WHITE PAPER "CARE MATTERS"

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted summarising the key proposals of this White Paper and giving consideration to the possible implications arising from it for the delivery of services to looked after children in the care of the Authority. A briefing paper, setting out a summary of the key points and recommendations for each chapter in the White Paper, was appended to the report.

RESOLVED

That the report and the briefing paper be noted.

DUDLEY SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD

A report of the Director of Children's Services on the Business Plan for the Dudley Safeguarding Children Board and seeking consideration of key priorities for scrutiny in this connection for 2007/08, was submitted. The Business Plan was appended to the report.

The report explained that the requirement for each Local Authority to establish a Local Safeguarding Children Board had emanated from the commitment of the Government to put in place effective coordination measures in every local area in order to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. The core objectives of Local Safeguarding Children Boards were indicated in the report, together with a summary of the governance arrangements anticipated.

A short film illustrating potential dangers to children and young people was shown. Statistical information in this regard was reported, particularly in the area of risk from child sex exploitation.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the Business Plan for the Dudley Safeguarding Children Board be received and noted.
- (2) That the Lead Officer to the Committee, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairman, be authorised to determine appropriate subject matter for scrutiny.

PERSONAL EDUCATION PLANS

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted setting out progress against targets in relation to Personal Education Plans for looked after children (PEPs).

The Director of Children's Services advised of the work of the multi-agency PEP Improvement Group and the implementation of the Improvement Plan. All partners were now engaged in sharing responsibility for the improvement of this target and progress in the right direction was being made.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

ADENDUM TO THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES
EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2006/07

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted further to a question asked at the previous meeting following consideration of the Equality and Diversity Annual Report for the Directorate of Children's Services for 2006/07 on the issue of racist incidents.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

The meeting ended at 8.05 p.m.

CHAIRMAN