
Select Committee on Children's Services – 17 June 2010

Report of the Director of Children's Services

Directorate of Children's Services – Contextual Information regarding Performance in the Following Areas:-

1. Percentage of looked after children in care for at least one year who were in year 11 and achieved at least 5 A*-C GCSEs or equivalent including English and Maths
2. Prosecutions for non-school attendance within 14 days of receipt of instruction
3. Percentage of 16-18 year olds not in education, employment or training
4. Number of young people leaving care aged 16 who are in education, employment or training
5. Percentage of young offenders in education, employment or training
6. Percentage of initial assessments for children's social care carried out within 7 working days of referral
7. Percentage of looked after children cases which should have been reviewed during the year ending March 31st that were reviewed on time (within 28 days of placement, then within three months and six months thereafter – subject to rescheduling if there are significant changes to the child's care plan)
8. Number of conceptions to under-18s per thousand of the female population aged 15-17

Purpose of Report

1. To inform members of the committee about specific performance measures, and factors affecting performance measures, in a small number of specific areas highlighted in the quarterly reporting process. To inform members of actions being taken and which are planned, to improve performance.

Background

2. The Directorate of Children's Services reports regularly to Select Committee on issues where we are performing below target in order to help members understand why this is the case, and what the Directorate of Children's Services and the Children's Trust is doing to improve. This report is based upon the performance

3. It should be remembered that these matters are reported in the overall context of Children's Services having been judged as good in the 2009 Comprehensive Area Assessment.

1. Percentage of looked after children in care for at least one year who were in year 11 and achieved at least 5 A*-C GCSEs or equivalent including English and Maths

In 2009 7.7% of Dudley's LAC achieved at least 5 A*-C GCSEs or equivalent including English and Maths. This was a reduction from 10.5% the previous year. The relatively small number of young people in this cohort does mean that our percentage success rate fluctuates dramatically. Our strategy to improve attainment amongst looked after children, involves challenge and support to schools to ensure that their provision is highly effective.

The current target for 2010 is 19% with approximately 24% of the children currently capable of achieving 5 GCSE's including maths and English. However 3 of these children are experiencing care difficulties and may not succeed in passing the exams of which we believe they are capable. This would take our results down to 16%, which is a large improvement on last year. This year 5 looked after young people went on to higher education compared to the normal 0 or 1 who usually achieve this.

Since April 2008 we have also been investing heavily (£250,000) in the provision of private tuition for looked after children to improve their attainment. This is part of a government initiative and the initial funding was provided by HSBC banks. This has now come to an end but we have created a charitable trust to generate further income that can be invested in the same work. This is a long- term investment because many of the children taking part are in primary schools and key stage 3 and so the impact of the project on GCSE scores will take time.

2. Prosecutions for non-school attendance within 14 days of receipt of instruction

During the period in question there have been changes to the court processes, which have affected the performance indicator. In particular, there is now a requirement in place whereby all prosecutors are required to contact the Police National Computer Bureau and submit the relevant forms in relation to any matter that is to be brought before the court. The Police National Computer Bureau will validate the information provided and either issue an arrest summons number or advice that one is not required depending on whether the offence is recordable. This information then has to be entered onto the summons before being sent out for issue. Accordingly, the timeliness of the issue of the summons is dependant on the timeliness of receipt of the information from the Police National Computer Bureau over which the Legal Division has no control.

Added to this there has been significant increases in workloads also with tight deadlines to be met and on occasion other matters have had to take priority.

3. Percentage of 16-18 year olds not in education, employment or training

Despite excellent performance we have failed to reach our NEET targets. Successful partnership working has resulted in a steady reduction in the overall numbers of young people who are NEET and this is a significant achievement considering the economic climate. Dudley's result is well below both the England and West Midlands average and in the Ofsted Survey on reducing NEET published this quarter Dudley was chosen out of 12 Local Authorities due to the successes around consistently reducing NEET numbers.

Reductions to the budget of our Connexions Service limit the resources that we commit to this work.

4. Number of young people leaving care aged 16 who are in education, employment or training

Many young people in care find it very hard to make the transition from school to post 16 education for social as well as academic reasons.

In response to the challenges that we face in this area the members of the Board of the Children's Trust, which contains all the major public sector employers in Dudley, has agreed to regard looked after children in Year 11 as a priority group for employment, training and extended work experience opportunities when they leave school.

Looked after children are being targeted for extra support from our Connexions Service in order to help them find positive destinations on leaving school, and our Employer Engagement Team in our 14-19 office is working with employers to find appropriate placements. Some of the young people in question are amongst the most challenging individuals that we work with and they will need considerable support once found a placement, to remain within that setting.

Other projects are becoming more targeted to support specific vulnerable groups. A programme is currently being developed called Tackling NEET, which is specifically targeting care leavers. Both Dudley College and Stourbridge College are providing programmes supporting care leavers to achieve qualifications and work experience. We have a NEET Steering Group in place, which is also making each of the vulnerable groups a priority particularly, care leavers.

5. Percentage of young offenders in education, employment or training

Young Offenders are a priority group within our Targeted Youth Support Plan. Our Youth Offending Service (YOS) treat young offenders who are in danger of becoming NEET as a priority. There are monthly meetings attended by YOS staff, Connexions Personal Advisers and others to analyse data and to discuss action plans for individual "hard to engage" cases. Systems are in place with Connexions to support any young person who has completed their order and is still NEET. Advice and Guidance is offered to all NEET young people. A weekly job club has been developed specifically for young offenders. This has enabled some of the obstacles,

which prevent engagement to be addressed. Post 16 providers meet young people face to face in order to support them into provision. The National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders has just been awarded a contract to specifically run a small programme targeting young offenders in Dudley. Also other programmes such as Kickstart Your Life are currently supporting this group.

6. Percentage of assessments of social care referrals carried out within 7 days of referral

This figure is influenced by the continuing rise of work coming in to the Assessment Service. Over the past two years there has been a 95% increase in referrals to Children's Social Care. In order to address the issues we have taken the following actions:

Key elements of our Improvement Plan are:

- Appointing 6 additional agency workers to the Assessment Teams to provide capacity to deal with the volume of work
- Publication of guidance on the role of Children's Social Care in relation to the common assessment process in order to safely reduce the numbers of children being referred
- Taking steps to ensure that domestic abuse notifications can be dealt with as "contacts" rather than referrals – this should reduce the conversion rate to initial assessments by 20% and reduce the amount of admin work
- Establishment of the Domestic Abuse Response Team
- Development of regional and local protocols in relation to class A drugs and substance misuse in order to ensure appropriate referral practice
- Extending the Team Around the Child school pilot which is proving successful in meeting early need without referral to Children's Social Care (CSC)
- Meeting with Senior Managers in other agencies to improve referral practice
- Developing multi-agency teams to work with young people and families at an early stage to help prevent the need for referral to CSC, and to increase capacity by workers in these teams remaining engaged should referral become necessary
- Involve Looked After Children Team more so that work can transfer out of the Assessment Teams in a more timely manner

7. Percentage of looked after children cases reviewed within time limits

The rise in the numbers of looked after children, together with staff sickness has impacted on performance against this target. Continued work on an improvement plan and resource has been identified for 0.5 reviewing officer.

We are improving the effectiveness of our common assessment processes to safely reduce the number of referrals. Partners within the Children's Trust are working with us to safely reduce LAC numbers.

8. Rate of Teenage Conception (Rate per 1000 girls)

2008/09 (i.e. December 2008 position - second year of agreement) data was released in March 2010. The achieved 2008/09 rate of 43.7 is slightly higher than the England average (43.11) but places us in the top 25% of Metropolitan Councils

(Met average 47.76%). Most pleasing is the apparent impact that increased focus on this target has made to the % rate change over the 10 years 1998 to 2008. In 2008 this rate plummeted to a reduction of 20.1% (2007 rate -9.5%). This places Dudley in the top third of England Councils (England average rate change -12.6%) and in the top 20% for Metropolitan Councils (Met average rate change -10.61%).

Despite this significant achievement reaching the final 2009/10 stretch target of an average of 32.7 over the three years is now impossible. It is still mathematically possible to achieve the 60% reward threshold of an average of 31.7 over the three years however and taking into account the performance in years 1& 2 this would require us to achieve a reduction to an average maximum rate 1.14 per thousand in 2009/10. The total amount of PRG attached to this target is £750,000. The final data for this target will not be available until March 2011.

Finance

4. Our action plans concerning improvements in these areas are based upon existing budgets.

Law

5. The main pieces of legislation governing these aspects of our work are the Children Act 2004 and the Education and Inspections Act of 2006.

Equality Impact

6. OfSTED judges that Dudley's Services for all children and young people are good but agrees with our self-assessment that the progress of children in care and those with learning difficulties/disabilities should continue to be seen as priorities for improvement.

Recommendation

7. That the report be noted by the committee and the areas kept under review.



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List of Background Papers