

SELECT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Wednesday, 17th January, 2007 at 6.00 p.m.
in The Council Chamber at The Council House, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Councillor Nottingham (Chairman)
Councillor Ms Boleyn (Vice Chairman)
Councillors Ahmed, Mrs Coulter, Mrs Dunn, Johnston, Nottingham, Ms Partridge, A Turner, K Turner and C Wilson; Mr Hatton, Reverend Wickens; Mr Smith; Mr Lynch, Ms Verdegam; and Mr Taylor

OFFICERS

The Director of Finance (as Lead Officer to the Select Committee), the Director of Children's Services, the Assistant Directors of Children's Services (Early Years, Youth and Education Services) (Partnership and Children's Trust) and (Policy, Performance and Information), the Head of the Youth Service and Mr Sanders (Directorate of Law and Property)

40 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of Councillor Rogers.

41 **SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

It was reported that Councillor K Turner was serving in place of Councillor Rogers for this meeting of the Committee only.

42 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No Member made a Declaration of Interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct.

43 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 16th November, 2006 be approved as a correct record and signed.

YOUTH SERVICE INSPECTION REPORT AND ACTION PLAN

A presentation on the recent Youth Service Inspection Report and the action plan arising therefrom was given by the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Early Years, Youth and Education).

The summary report of the inspection, produced by OFSTED was set out in the agenda documentation together with the Action Plan arising therefrom. The summary report contained the main findings of the inspection in terms of effectiveness and value for money, the strengths and areas for development of Dudley's Youth Service, and the inspection grades awarded for key aspects; and a commentary on the key aspects in three main areas: the contributions to the Youth Service to the "Every Child Matters" agenda, the standards of young people's achievements and the quality of youth work practice; the quality of curriculum resources; and on leadership and management.

In its main findings, the Inspectorate had concluded that Dudley provided an adequate youth service for its users and offered satisfactory value for money. The strengths indicated that young people made good personal gains through their engagement; the service offered a broad range provision in a variety of venues; effective alternative curriculum work was being undertaken in conjunction with partners; good strategic management and financial support from the Council was being provided; and young people's health and safety was being ensured through effective safe-guarding procedures. Areas for development were defined as being a need to improve the recording and accreditation of young people's learning; ensuring improvements in the standards of achievement of youth work practice were carried out; full implementation of the curriculum framework; ensuring that service targets were specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time limited and were reflected at unit level; and to enable quality assurance procedures to be implemented effectively.

In the presentation, the Assistant Director indicated progress against targets in various key areas, making particular reference to a training scheme set up for youth workers which had been set up and which would have the effect of improving recruitment and retention. She also referred to the establishment of a computer recording system in relation to outcomes for individual clients. She summarised progress in relation to accreditation of young people, the implementation of the curriculum framework and in relation to partnership working in different fields. The Head of the Youth Service then reported on progress against targets made in respect of the four key performance indicators, these involving the number of clients reached, those participating in youth service

initiatives, what young people gained from the youth service, and accredited outcomes. In relation to reach, the Head of the Youth Service indicated that the Council was on track to meet the target. Regarding participation, the main issues were the number of times young people engaged with the Youth Service and the intensity of relationships; on monitoring, the issue was to evidence the impact of what young people gained from the Youth Service and, regarding accreditation, she described a range of activities in respect of which accreditation was offered. The Head of Youth Service described how the Council was progressing in these areas and gave examples of practice.

The next steps would involve three key issues; to continue to develop against the Action Plan and to monitor attainments against the Plan; to review what the Council and its Partner providers offered and to compare activities against the legislative framework; and to ensure that provision across the Borough was correctly targeted.

A question and answer session followed, in which the following issues were addressed and points raised:

- In response to a question on the implications of the target figure of reaching 25% of the 13-19 year old population being exceeded, the Assistant Director and the Head of the Youth Service indicated that to set a higher target figure would result in the quality of service offered being diluted.
- In response to questions asked on the number of clients reached in relation to the number of youth workers and other staff employed on youth provision, the Assistant Director agreed to circulate the Committee with the information.
- In response to an observation by one member that the perception of the public in the electoral ward that he represented, which was in a priority area and one of social deprivation, that there was very little youth work being undertaken, the Director of Children's Services referred to the OFSTED conclusion and grade, which indicated that a satisfactory service was being provided with good features.
It was the Council's responsibility, however, to look at the best way of reaching people in client groups. The Head of the Youth Service indicated that, regarding the ward referred to, the Inspectorate had divided it into its two component areas and had found that youth provision existed in one area but not the other.
- In response to a question regarding a satisfaction rate of 93% from respondents to a recent survey on the Youth Service, the Director of Children's Services qualified this information by indicating that the survey had covered only users of the service and not non-users. The point was made by some Members that it was important to ascertain the views of non-users on the reasons why they did not use the service.

- The point was made that a number of areas in the Borough, which were certainly not affluent but were not in priority neighbourhoods, had no buildings for youth provision, in response to which the Director of Children's Services referred to the limited capital resources available in this respect. The Head of the Youth Service indicated that the area in question comprised part of a ward that had a youth facility.
- In response to a question on the possibility of the Council's improving its grading on youth provision from 2 to 3, the Assistant Director confirmed that the service was striving to achieve this but was having to do so in the light of changing regulations and guidance.
- In response to a question on the attitude adopted by youth workers to users of the service whom did not wish to engage in activities that received accreditation, in the light of the suggestion by the questioner that the requirements for meeting targets on accredited activities could distort fundamental youth work, the Assistant Director confirmed that the Youth Service endeavoured to meet the needs and wishes of all users. No person of youth age was turned away. Users of the service were progressed onto an accredited scheme only if they so wished.
- In response to a question regarding the relationship of the Youth Service to schools opening for longer hours, the Assistant Director confirmed that this was a key aspect of the extended services agenda for schools.
- In response to a request by one member, it was agreed that the information below be circulated to all members of the Committee
 - Details of the Partners with which the Council worked in Youth Service provision
 - Clarification of the action being taken, as referred to in the Action Plan, to respond to the concerns of the Inspectorate regarding involvement of young people at unit level
 - Clarification of the action being taken to comply with the target in the Action Plan regarding the planning and evaluation of local projects

RESOLVED

That the presentation be received and noted.

A presentation on the Local Area Agreement, in so far as it related to the Children and Young People Plan, for the period from 2007-2010 was given by the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Partnership and Children's Trust).

The Agreement was being delivered by the Council and its partners in four blocks in accordance with the Community Strategy: Children and Young People, Safer and Stronger, Healthier Communities and Older People, and Economic Development and Regeneration. Activities between the delivery blocks were linked in many cases. The Assistant Director gave examples of issues provided for under the Agreement, including facilities for young persons not in education nor employment and training, targeted at their vulnerable groups and for 16-18 year olds, safer routes to schools and key stage 1, health promotion in schools and teenage pregnancies and referred briefly to the progress being made by the Council and its partners in these matters. The Agreement required the Council to meet national targets on some issues, including Foundation Stage and Key Stage 3 teaching, and the Assistant Director confirmed that the Authority was working with schools to ascertain how targets could be stretched further.

The Assistant Director concluded her presentation by referring to the funding arrangements, whereby the Council would receive grant monies in increasing proportions in relation to the targets met.

In the question and answer session that followed, reference was made to the issues of safer routes to schools and progress in respect of walking buses. In respect of safety in relation to students attending colleges of further education, the Director of Children's Services indicated that, while initiatives like walking buses were not appropriate to persons of that age, capital funding was being provided for facilities such as cycle sheds.

RESOLVED

That the presentation be noted and that the presentation material be circulated to all members of the Committee by e-mail.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PLAN

A presentation on the Strategic Plan was given by the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Partnership and Children's Trust).

The Assistant Director indicated that the Plan covered the period from 2007-10 and that it was reviewed annually. The purpose of the review was to enable the agencies in partnership under the Plan, which included the Council, to look for areas of improvement, in compliance with the Local Area Agreement and statutory guidance. The Plan was monitored via the Joint Area Review and recommendations arising from the Joint Area Review were included in the Plan.

The Plan had been drawn up to comply with the outcomes in 'Every Child Matters' on Be Healthy, Stay Safe, Enjoy and Achieve, Positive Contribution and Economic Well Being. Particular reference was made in the presentation to the Children's Trust arrangements under the Plan, which included governance, joint commissioning, integrating processes and front line delivery and locality working. The Plan also contained a parenting strategy and a workforce development strategy.

The Assistant Director indicated that the next step would be to develop and produce a draft Plan for publication by 1st April, 2007. A workshop evening to consider the draft would be held on 22nd February, 2007 at 6 pm at Saltwells Educational Development Centre and all members of the Select Committee would be able to attend. The executive summary to the Plan had been written by children and young people in 2006 and the same would apply in the updated plan. Comments would be welcomed from all interested parties including Council Members. Performance against targets would be monitored through the Council's performance reporting procedures.

In the question and answer session that followed, the Assistant Director clarified that performance monitoring was conducted by way of the quarterly reports submitted initially to Cabinet, which were then tailored for submission to relevant Select Committees according to their areas of responsibility.

On the issue of accountability in relation to the inter-agency governance arrangements under the Plan, the Assistant Director indicated that other issues had to be resolved, including a realignment of budgets after the Partnership had agreed the way forward. In reply to a supplementary question, on the pooled budget that would subsist, the Director of Children's Services acknowledged that there could be tensions between the partners which contributed financially but advocated the principle of partnership working on children's issues for the common good.

RESOLVED

That the presentation be received and noted.

The Quarterly Corporate Performance Management Report in respect of the activities relating to the terms of reference of the Select Committee for the second quarter of 2006/07 was submitted.

In introducing the report, the Lead Officer to the Committee explained the key symbols and made particular reference to Appendix B to the report, in which the comments of the Director of Children's Services on the issues on which performance was more than 10% away from target were set out. The Director of Children's Services expanded orally on those issues.

In the question and answer session that followed, the responses and comments below were given:-

- In response to a question on Personal Education Plans (PEPs), the Director of Children Services confirmed that it was the intention of the Authority that every child in care would have a PEP in order to maximise achievement and ensure that educational provision was fit for purpose. The Director then expanded on how this was being achieved.
- The Assistant Director of Children's Services (Policy, Performance and Information) confirmed that the target for assigning a social worker for each child in care was 100%
- The Assistant Director of Children's Services (Early Years, Youth and Education) explained the action that was taken by the Authority after OFSTED had determined that a school had serious weaknesses or had placed a school in special measures. She also explained the time-scales involved.

RESOLVED

That the report be received and the information contained therein noted, together with the responses to the questions asked.

REVENUE BUDGET STRATEGY 2007/08

A joint report of the Director of Children's Services and Director of Finance was submitted on the proposed Revenue Budget and Council Tax for 2007/08 and seeking consideration of the Revenue Budget Strategy for 2007/08 and later years in so far as it related to Children's Services.

In the question and answer session that followed the introduction of the report, the Director of Children's Services expanded on the implications of the proposal to maximise grant monies in order to enable the consequential release of budgeted funding for other purposes. Particular reference was also made to the proposed reduction of £210,000 in the budget for home to school transport, referred to at paragraph 29 of the report, in respect of which the Director of Children's Services confirmed the information in the report that each application for funding from the budget would be considered strictly against the eligibility criteria.

At the request of one member, it was agreed that details of 'other savings' as referred to in paragraph 17 of the report would be circulated to the Committee.

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet's budget proposals for 2007/08 be accepted, in so far as the issues for which this Committee is responsible are concerned.

The meeting ended at 8.15 pm

CHAIRMAN