

SELECT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Monday 14th September, 2009 at 6.00 pm
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Councillor Vickers (Chairman)
Councillor Ms Boleyn (Vice-Chairman)
Councillors Mrs Coulter, Crumpton, Mrs Dunn, Mrs Greenaway, Hanif, Nottingham, Ms Partridge and Wright; Mr Jones, Mrs Lees, Mrs Simms, Mrs Verdegem and Reverend Wickens.

OFFICERS

Interim Director of Finance (as Lead Officer to the Committee), Director of Children's Services, Assistant Directors of Children's Services (Children's Specialist Services and Performance and Partnership), Interim Assistant Director of Children's Services (Early Years, Youth and Education Services) and Mr Sanders (Directorate of Law, Property and Human Resources)

15 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillor Mrs Rogers; Mrs Roe and Mr Taylor.

16 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, were received in respect of any matters to be considered at this meeting.

17 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 18th June, 2009, be approved as a correct record and signed.

18 **DUDLEY CHILDREN'S TRUST INCLUDING THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PLAN**

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on progress on the activities of the Children's Trust in Dudley, including the development of the Council's Children and Young People's Plan.

The Dudley Trust had been set up in accordance with the legislative requirement for Local Authorities to make arrangements for the promotion of co-operation to improve the wellbeing of children. The Trust in Dudley comprised part of the Dudley Community Partnership and the membership of the Board of the Trust, which incorporated representatives from the agencies involved in child safeguarding, was set out in the report, together with details of the attendance of members at Executive Board meetings. The constitution of the Board, as updated in May 2009, was also included.

The report indicated that the vision of the Children's Trust and the manner in which it was proposed that this would be achieved were set out in the Children and Young People's Plan for 2009-11. The key priorities for action within the Plan were set out in the report.

In the discussion on the item, the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Performance and Partnership) indicated that, in two recent external reviews of partnership working, these being the Inspectorate report of young people not in education, employment or training and the review by the Department of Health on infant mortality, favourable comments had been made on the collaborative arrangements in Dudley.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted and that progress be reported to future meetings of the Committee.

19

PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENTS IN EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted providing an update on progress and achievements in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The report confirmed sessions in respect of summer born boys and the learning environment had been introduced in consequence of the single point of entry for all children in the reception year effected from September 2008 and summarised other support provided to improve outcomes in Early Years. Particular reference was made to the targeting of schools on the programme for communication, language and literacy, regarding which it was indicated that 11 schools had been targeted to date and that 9 new settings would join the programme in September 2009.

Initiatives explained in the report in relation to Early Years Support included the Looking Glass Centre, the Young Children's Voice Project, the Dudley Recordkeeping and Great Outdoor Tool Kits, the Early Education Programme and certain ratings, standards and scales.

Outcomes in relation to Dudley's performance against targets in the areas of Communication, Language and Literacy Development and Personal Social Emotional Development were set out in the report and, in the discussion that ensued, it was confirmed that the Council was making progress in these areas. In relation to the "Every Child a Talker" programme, it was confirmed that the number of speech therapists available was currently sufficient.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) That further reports on future progress be made to the Committee.

20

RAISING ATTAINMENT AT KEY STAGE 1 – PROGRESS REPORT

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted providing an update on the work being undertaken to raise standards in Key Stage 1 and which outlined the work currently taking place to raise standards. The report summarised the initiatives being undertaken in schools to raise standards, including the "Every Child a Reader", "Every Child Counts", "Communication Language and Literacy Development" and "Assessment for Learning" programmes. The report also referred to the measures devised and produced by the Primary Education Team for training to support the improvement of Key Stage 1 Teachers.

The Interim Assistant Director of Children's Services (Early Years, Youth and Education Services) reported orally the Key Stage 1 results for 2009 in relation to reading, writing and mathematics, all of which had seen improvements in the respective levels of expectation for the year. He reported further that the overall improvement rate for Dudley and Key Stage 1 was faster than that of the national average.

RESOLVED

That the report and action taken to improve standards at Key Stage 1, as set out, be noted and that the performance of the Council for reading, writing and mathematics, as reported orally by the Interim Assistant Director, also be noted.

21

ANNUAL REPORT ON OUTCOMES FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted indicating the Council's performance in discharging its corporate parenting responsibilities for children in care, and advising the Committee of the key comparator outcomes for Looked After Children and of key developments in the service for those children. The Annual Report on Looked After Children was attached to the report submitted.

Reference was made in the report to the background and provisions of the Children and Young People's Act, 2008, and the relevant legislation and events which had led to the Act.

In presenting the report, the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Children's Specialist Services) referred to the additional pressure on the Council's core services in terms of placements and social work in consequence of the revised safeguarding arrangements required further to the Baby Peter and other child abuse cases.

In the discussion that ensued, the Assistant Director confirmed that the additional resources provided for Care Matters had not been granted on a ring fenced basis. The Assistant Director also answered questions in relation to events that would be organised for care leavers and responded to questions on the numbers of children in care and in out of borough placements, in comparison to numbers provided for in the budget.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the Council's role in corporate parenting to children in care be recognised and that particular areas for further scrutiny be undertaken through the Social Care Working Group.
- (2) That the Annual Report on Children in Care, as attached to the report now submitted, be received and noted.
- (3) That a representative of Social Workers be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee to explain and discuss the role.

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on the Business Plan of the Dudley Safeguarding Children Board. The Executive Summary of the Annual Report for 2008/09 and Business Plan for 2009-12, reference to which was made in the report, had been circulated to the Committee by e-mail in advance of the meeting.

The report summarised the core objectives of the Board as set out under the Children Act 2004, and explained the three broad areas of activity in the role of the Board in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. The composition of the Board, which was a partner organisation comprising representatives of relevant agencies in child protection, was referred to, and the role of the elected members was stated.

In the discussion on the report and the Business Plan and Annual Report, the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Children's Specialist Services) emphasised the significant amount of attention that needed to be given to the focus on the key priorities for the Board for 2009-12, in relation to which the Chairman expressed his endorsement of the collaborative arrangements with Sandwell which, be considered, would help to mitigate the likelihood of local child abuse cases remaining undiscovered or not dealt with. In the question and answer session that followed the presentation of the report, reference was made to the impact on both the budget and the workforce on the greater number of referrals being made and anticipated in the future as a result of the increased emphasis on safeguarding in the light of the recent cases and the Government's intention to require a far greater cross section of the public engaged in activities involving children to be CRB checked. A suggestion was made that a handbook should be produced for parents with regard to the latter issue.

A comment was made by a member that the reasons for the apparent rise in cases of neglect should be explored and defined, and that a comparison of Dudley's position against neighbouring authorities would be useful. The Assistant Director agreed to provide the member with the figures in this regard for the previous six months. In response to a comment on the increase in cases referred, it was indicated by the Assistant Director that, while the increase was significant, the figures could not be relied on entirely as they were produced on the basis of a year in arrears. She acknowledged the value of early intervention and indicated that attention was being given to improvements in risk assessing.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the report, together with the Annual Report and Business Plan, be received and noted together with the comments made.
- (2) That consideration of the Board's activities and the issue of safeguarding in general be considered in detail by the Social Care Working Group.

The Quarterly Corporate Performance Management Report on the activities relating to the terms of reference of the Select Committee on Children's Services for the first quarter of 2009/10 was submitted.

A report of the Director of Children's Services containing contextual information regarding performance in particular areas of service, was also submitted.

In the discussion, the opposition spokesperson was critical of a recent newspaper report on attainment levels of looked after children in gaining GCSE qualifications which, he considered, to have been taken out of context and were unhelpful to both the Authority and the young person in this extremely difficult field. The Assistant Director of Children's Services (Children's Specialist Services) gave an oral summary of initiatives being taken in order to raise attainment levels.

A question was asked on the number of children not in education, employment or training, in respect of which the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Performance and Partnership) confirmed that Dudley performed better than the national average and suggested that the matter be considered at the Children's Trust. In response to a comment by a Member that provision of further information would be useful in respect of children with learning difficulties, it was agreed that this issue be referred to the appropriate Working Group for consideration.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

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WORKING GROUPS FOR 2009/10

A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee setting out the membership and dates of meetings of the Working Groups of the Select Committee for the 2009/10 municipal year was submitted.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the membership of the Working Groups, as set out in paragraph 3 of the report now submitted, be noted.
- (2) That the dates of meetings of each Working Group for 2009/10, as set out in paragraph 4 of the report now submitted, be noted.
- (3) That, in relation to the election of Chairmen to the Working Groups, Chairmanships be determined at the first meeting of each respective Group in the 2009/10 municipal year.

The meeting ended at 7.10 pm

CHAIRMAN
SCCS/13