

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 18th February, 2014 at 6.00 pm at the
Council House, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Councillor Marrey (Chair)
Councillor Boleyn (Vice-Chair)
Councillors Bills, Casey, Harley, Hill, Islam, Perks, Vickers and Mrs Walker; Mrs Coulter, Mr Lynch, Mr Ridley, Mr Taylor,

OFFICERS

Assistant Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services (Housing Management) – Lead Officer to the Committee, Interim Director of Children's Services, Assistant Director of Children's Services (Quality and Partnership), Ms C Ballinger (Divisional Lead - Social Work), Ms J Jennings (Safeguarding Development Manager), Ms A Callear (Interim Divisional Lead – Safeguarding and Review) (all Directorate of Children's Services) and Mrs M Johal (Directorate of Corporate Resources)

15 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of Councillors Arshad and Mrs Simms, Reverend Wickens and Ms Sinden.

16 **SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

It was reported that Councillor Harley was serving in place of Councillor Mrs Simms for this meeting of the Committee only.

17 **DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

No Member made a declaration of interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct.

18 **MINUTES**

In connection with the report on the Children's Centres submitted to the previous meeting, the Chair commended the Directorate of Children's Services for their input in producing the report.

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 19th November, 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed.

19 PUBLIC FORUM

No issues were raised under this item.

20 ANNUAL REPORT OF DUDLEY SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD
2012-13

A report of the Interim Director of Children's Services was submitted on the Annual Report of the Safeguarding Children's Board 2012-13.

Arising from the presentation of the report the Chair referred to the commissioning of the Section 11 review which had included the completion of an online audit tool whereby key member agencies were asked to complete the audit and he sought clarification on the steps that would be taken in accelerating the audit programme. In responding the Divisional Lead - Social Work reported that agencies had attended a Sub-Committee meeting where their self-audit was reviewed.

The Interim Director of Children's Services, the Divisional Lead - Social Work and the Interim Divisional Lead – Safeguarding and Review responded to further questions from Members of the Committee, and in doing so, made the following points:-

- Insofar as serious case reviews and any lessons learned it was stated that there was a need for better Local Authority and interagency working when a child moved into another area, and where vulnerable children were concerned, there was a need to work with highly resistant families and training programmes were being offered in this regard. There was also a need to listen to the child and appropriate professional escalation of any concerns.
- With regard to the Dudley Safeguarding Children Board's (DSCB) self-evaluation relating to Quality Assurance it was commented that a Quality Assurance Programme had been developed for the Board to assist them for analytical purposes with a view to improvements being made.
- In relation to the composition of the DSCB it was reported that the Director of Public Health was a Member together with a Child Protection Co-ordinator and school representatives. There was good member engagement, all partners attended regularly and attempts were made to look at innovative ways to engage.
- In relation to child sexual exploitation it was stated that this was not always obvious but that children were still exploited and this would be discussed as part of the next agenda item.

Following further discussion and debate it was:-

RESOLVED:

That the information contained in the report on the Annual Report of the Safeguarding Children's Board 2012-13 be received and noted.

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CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

A report of the Interim Director of Children's Services was submitted on child sexual exploitation and how it was being addressed by Dudley Safeguarding Children's Board.

Arising from the presentation of the report and in responding to a query as to why it was taking so long for young people to be protected and why it was taking so long for perpetrators to be brought to justice, the Interim Divisional Lead – Safeguarding and Review, commented that people were reluctant to believe that sexual exploitation was a problem. Perpetrators manipulated young people by coercion and fear and as a society there was a reluctance to believe this was happening and there were tendencies to put the blame on the child rather than the perpetrator which made it difficult to detect. The Regional Group were undertaking work with a view to moving forward and taking steps to protect and listen to young people.

Reference was made to the Rochdale and Oxford cases whereby victims had not been taken seriously and a debate ensued on the dilemmas faced in listening to and believing a child and that correct judgement should be applied in ascertaining the nature of the evidence.

Following further deliberations the following queries, comments and points were made:-

- The Local Authority viewed anyone under the age of eighteen years as a child but this appeared different to the age used by the Police when interviewing young people in connection with criminal matters. The Interim Director of Children's Services undertook to seek clarification and to provide a definitive answer on the current legislation to Members of the Committee.
- Young people being groomed and sexually exploited by their peers was an increasing problem within schools and it was stated that tailored programmes were being developed so schools could become more engaged.
- Perpetrators were known to target vulnerable children. This could include any vulnerable group and there were links between sexual exploitation and children who persistently went missing. It was noted that in Dudley that "Street Teams" were working with local agencies to help tackle the problem.

- Ongoing work for the future included engaging schools, pooling of intelligence, co-ordinating responses, educating children and young people, equipping parents and carers so that they were more aware, to provide people with appropriate tools on working together more effectively and a commitment to move the agenda forward.
- A concern expressed about the abusive and exploitive culture developing amongst teenagers and that children as young as fourteen were able to access pornographic material via various media, and in particular, via mobile phones which made it difficult for schools to detect and the onus of the responsibility and discipline aspect were questioned. The Interim Director of Children's Services indicated that requests were being made of schools to identify an issue and to report to the appropriate professional with a view to seeking advice.

Following further discussion and debate it was:-

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the information contained in the report on child sexual exploitation be noted.
- (2) That the Interim Director of Children's Services be requested to submit a response to Members of the Committee clarifying the legal age of an adult in accordance with the current legislation.

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KEY FEATURES OF CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

A presentation was made by the Safeguarding Development Manager on Child Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking, various literature and documents circulated and a Digital Versatile Disk was also played to graphically highlight the manner in which perpetrators captured their victims.

During the course of the presentation the Safeguarding Development Manager made the following points:-

- Child sexual exploitation was a massive problem but that Dudley was no different to other Local Authorities. She also referred to a news headline that day which had stated that child trafficking in the United Kingdom (UK) had risen significantly.
- Gave scenarios on how perpetrators operated and indicated that the primary goal of an offender was not to get caught therefore offenders were motivated to discredit the child which included creating dependency on alcohol and drugs, negative attendance at school, periodically going missing and engaging in petty crime.
- A plea was made to schools for early intervention by identifying certain problems for example a child that had 100% attendance record suddenly deteriorating could mean there was an underlying issue

- Perpetrators sometimes booked rooms at quality/expensive hotels which could potentially indicate the possibility of filming abuse for internet profit, although there was no specific evidence that this was happening. Work was being undertaken with hotels with a view to help them to identify any suspicious activity such as people asking for rooms near a fire exit, where there is a young child with an adult and also when cleaning rooms to report any incidents of excessive empty alcohol bottles and condoms etc.
- The majority of hotels were willing to work together to combat the problem but they were reluctant to advertise or display any material as it could potentially give a message to customers that a problem existed within the hotel. However, engagement with hotels was slowly increasing.

Arising from the presentation the following comments were made by Members:-

- A suggestion made that every Secondary School be asked to undergo training with a view to identifying problems with a view to early intervention
- It was frustrating because the Local Authority had limited powers to penalise an individual that had sold alcohol to an under-aged person
- Reference was made to Leasowes Park where there were overgrown bushes and that there were certain areas around the Park which were ideal for perpetrators to take victims and it was commented that these areas needed to be targeted
- Awareness needed to be raised to inform people to the extent of the issue of child trafficking and it was commented that the individuals organising trafficking were the ones that should be targeted as they were the source of the problem
- Literature should be circulated to parents via schools to raise their awareness

In responding to comments made the Safeguarding Development Manager stated that the Police were proactive and passionate and were working with the Local Authority to combat problems. There was an online course for parents to raise their awareness although it was acknowledged that not everyone had access to computers.

In concluding the presentation the Divisional Lead for Social Work stated that there was a potential for an upsurge in referrals, all of which needed an effective response. Some indicators might seem minor but all concerns needed to be evaluated. This required a clear understanding and co-ordination between agencies with regard to the role and responsibilities of all agencies. A Member stated that the issue was a national problem and although it was acknowledged that there were budgetary restrictions it was suggested that more resources should be made nationally available by the Government to target the problem as child's lives were at risk.

The Chair asked that Members undertake an information gathering exercise on the subject with a view to considering the information at the informal meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Meeting the following week and he also asked Members to notify him of any other topics or issues that they wished to discuss.

The Chair on behalf of the Committee commended and thanked Officers on the quality of the presentation and information given.

RESOLVED:

That the information given in the presentation on Child Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking be noted.

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INVOLVEMENT OF MEMBERS IN SCRUTINISING THE WORK OF THE
DUDLEY SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN'S BOARD

It was reported that a session would be held in January and an invite had been given to a number of organisations and Members with a view to collating information. A feedback form would be completed and a report would be circulated in due course.

The meeting ended at 8.20 pm

CHAIR