

Meeting of the Council – 13th July, 2009

Report of the Select Committee on Children's Services

Annual Report of the Select Committee on Children's Services for the Review of the 2008/09 Year

Purpose

1. To consider the annual report of the Select Committee on Children's Services for the review of the 2008/09 year.

Background

2. Article 6 of the Council's Constitution requires Select Committees to report annually to the full Council on their workings and to make recommendations for future work programmes and amended working methods if appropriate. It has previously been agreed that the annual report of the Select Committee on Children's Services should be made to the July meeting of the Council.
3. The work of the Select Committee on Children's Services is governed by the following Terms of Reference:-

"To fulfil all of the overview and scrutiny functions of a Select Committee as they relate to Children's Services and, in particular, the functions and responsibilities of the Council under the Children Act 2004 and associated regulations and guidance, including:-

- (a) The roles and responsibilities of relevant partners;
- (b) Listening to and involving children.

With the objective of improving the well-being of all children in the Council's area by developing the "Every Child Matters" outcomes."

4. Given the size and makeup of its membership, the Select Committee continued the practice of appointing Dedicated Working Groups to undertake detailed scrutiny and review. The following Working Groups met several times during the year:-
 - (a) Listening to Children and Young People Working Group – an informal group including a children's representative and the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, to meet across the Borough and engage with and consult young people, on an ad hoc basis.

- (b) School Support Working Group – to ensure schools receive appropriate support and advice from the Local Authority.
- (c) Youth Provision Working Group – to look at matters relating to the area of youth provision.
- (d) Building Schools for the future Working Group – to consider particular issues relating to Building Schools for the Future.

5. The Committee and its Working Groups were particularly concerned to ensure that their work focused specifically on the five “Every Child Matters” outcomes, viz:-

Be Healthy
 Stay Safe
 Enjoy and Achieve
 Make A Positive Contribution
 Achieve Economic Well-Being

and the following Key National and local issues:-

- Improving Outcomes for Looked After Children;
- Reducing Teenage Pregnancies;
- Improving education standards.

6. The Committee’s work programme for the 2008/09 Municipal Year included:-

- (a) Building Schools for the Future
- (b) Fostering Service
- (c) Raising Expectations
- (d) Review of Operation of School Improvement Partners and School Improvement Policy
- (e) Children’s Trust and Children and Young People’s Plan
- (f) Educational Support for Ethnic Minority Pupils
- (g) Annual Performance Assessment Improvement Plan
- (h) Reducing Teenage Pregnancy
- (i) Budget 2009/10
- (j) Outcomes for Looked After Children
- (k) School Performance and Support for Schools
- (l) Youth Facilities and Youth Working

The following issues from the Committee’s Work Plan are worthy of specific mention:-

(a) **Building Schools for the Future**

In September a report was submitted on progress with regard to the Council’s bid for inclusion in the Government’s Building Schools for the Future (BSF) and Academies programme. It was proposed that detailed consideration of the proposals would be undertaken by the Building Schools for the Future Working Group.

A report of the Acting Lead Officer was submitted on the decision of the Cabinet as set out in the resolution to Minute 52 of the meeting of the

Cabinet held on 29th October, 2008. The decision had subsequently been called-in at the request of five elected Members. A special meeting of the Committee was arranged to scrutinise the decision of the Cabinet. At the conclusion of the Committee's deliberations, the Committee resolved that the decision of the Cabinet be upheld and the decision be not referred back.

(b) **Fostering Service**

In September a report was submitted advising the Committee of the findings of the recent OFSTED Inspection in respect of the Council's Fostering Service and of the actions agreed in order to meet the requirements of the Inspection. The overall quality rating of the Service was that of inadequate and the ratings against individual outcomes were set out in the report.

In November an update on progress of the Fostering Service Action Plan was submitted. Reference was made to the content of Appendix 1 to the report submitted which set out the robust actions that had been taken in response to the inspection held. Monitoring of the plan was taking place at regular intervals to ensure progress was made and additional support would be made available if required. Reference was also made to work being undertaken in respect of looked after children so that they could be supported on a cross agency basis whether or not they stayed with their birth families. There was no evidence that any child had been put at risk as a result of the issues raised by the inspection. Although a date for a re-inspection of Fostering Services was not yet known the annual inspection of the service would be in the Spring of 2009. It was noted in March this has now taken place and the service was judged to be satisfactory. A full report and action plan will be submitted once the inspection report has been received.

(c) **Raising Expectations**

In September a report was submitted on the proposals in the White Paper and their implications to the Council. The White Paper contained details in respect of the Government's proposals for responsibility for commissioning for 16-18 education to transfer to Local Authorities. Reference was also made to the major changes proposed to the secondary curriculum and the proposals in the Learning and Skills Bill to raise the minimum age at which young people would be able to leave education. The return of 14-19 education to Local Government was broadly welcomed but reservations were expressed regarding the level of funding that might be made available. The Director indicated that preliminary work was being undertaken to prepare a curriculum for pupils on the basis of their staying at school until 17.

(d) **Review of Operation of School Improvement Partners and School Improvement Policy**

In September a report was submitted drawing to the attention of the Committee the revised School Improvement Policy, this being the vehicle through which the Council implemented its statutory powers to monitor, challenge, support and intervene in schools. The Education and Inspection Act, 2006 had outlined how the Local Authority should conduct its relationship with schools. One of the main provisions had been to make it compulsory for all schools to have a School Improvement Partner to act as a single point of contact between schools and the Local Authority by conducting a series of discussions about school improvement and its rate of progress and the revised Policy had been updated to reflect this and other changes arising from the Act. The Policy was noted and submitted for further consideration by the School Support Working Group.

An update on progress with the School Improvement Partner programme, summarising its impact on school performance was considered. It was noted that, currently, there were no schools in Dudley that had been judged by OFSTED to require special measures and only one school had been served a Notice to Improve.

(e) **Children's Statutory Social Care Complaints and Compliments Report**

The Annual Report 2007/08 on Children's Statutory Social Care Complaints and Compliments was submitted containing information regarding the performance of the Directorate of Children's Services in receiving, monitoring and responding to Children's Social Care complaints and compliments, as required under the Local Authorities Social Services Complaints (England) Regulations, 2006.

(f) **Children's Trust and Children and Young People's Plan 2008/11**

In November there was a report on the remit, membership and activities of the Children's Trust within Dudley, including the development of the Council's Children and Young People's Plan. Arising from consideration of the report, it was agreed that when further reports were submitted to this Committee the details include a list of attendees at meetings of the main board and the contribution of the partners to the work of the board. The Director was requested to arrange, for consideration to be given by the Trust Board to the suggestion made at the meeting, that the Labour Group Spokesperson, or another member of the opposition on the Committee, be appointed to serve on the Children's Trust Board.

In January 2009 we received a further update on progress of The Children's Trust. The report included reference to the constitution and composition of the Board, the implementation of the Common Assessment Framework and its activity to support vulnerable young people, partnership working, the review of the Children's Trust in Dudley by the Audit Commission in June, 2008 and statutory guidance on Children's Trusts published recently by the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

- (g) **Educational Support for Ethnic Minority Pupils**
In November a report was submitted on an amended consultation on the future of the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service published on 8th September 2008, and amended on 23rd October, 2008 which would run until 8th December 2008. Arising from the report it was clarified that the consultation, arising from the judgment received from the High Court decision related only to the financial support for the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service for the future financial year, i.e. 2009/10. Members resolved that no additional representations be made to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services as part of the consultation process.
- (h) **Annual Performance Assessment Improvement Plan**
In January a report was submitted advising the Committee of the outcome of the Annual Performance Assessment of Children's Services for Dudley for 2008. Judgements were based on a four point scale with a 4 being outstanding and 1 being inadequate. Dudley's services had been judged to be good (3) in all respects. It was pointed out in the report that the Assessment was not purely an evaluation of services provided by the Local Authority but also provided an insight into how effectively the Council was collaborating with its partners within the Children's Trust to improve outcomes for children and young people.
- (i) **Reducing Teenage Pregnancy**
In January a report was submitted providing an update on the work and progress of the Respect Yourself Campaign on teenage pregnancy. The report indicated that there had been an 11.1% reduction in teenage conceptions between 1998 and 2006, although the rate had increased slightly in 2006. There had been an overall rate of decline in the Borough since 1998. The report also indicated the consultation arrangements that had been applied locally and gave examples of work undertaken under the campaign.
- (j) **Budget 2009/10**
The annual proposed revenue budget strategy of the Council for 2009/10 and the medium term financial strategy for the period from 2009/10 to 2011/12 was considered. Implications of the Council's overall budgetary position with particular reference to the areas within the terms of reference of this Committee and areas of service under particular pressure and proposals for savings were identified. No issues arising from the budget proposals were referred to the Cabinet.
- (k) **Outcomes for Looked After Children - Briefing on Baby P Case in Haringey**
The report set out the action taken by the Government, including the announcement of a national child protection review under the chairmanship of Lord Laming and, in reporting on the particular measures ordered in respect of Haringey, indicated the key issues and key findings from the joint area review carried out into that authority which were relevant for all local authorities to consider. The report also indicated that, in his initial response, Lord Laming had considered there to be no need to change the legislative base of child protection. The report indicated the action taken locally further to the ministerial announcement and Lord Laming's initial response, which

included inter-agency briefings, briefings to the Children's Trust, briefings to head teachers and chairs of governors and consideration of the issue by the Council's Corporate Board of chief officers. Accountability and responsibility issues were being reviewed and a report would be made to the Committee on the outcome at a future meeting. In the question and answer session that followed the presentation of the report, the current position regarding social worker staffing and recruitment was indicated by the Assistant Director. In response to a question on whether there were particular areas where members of the Council could play a role, the Assistant Director indicated that consideration was being given to the development of community involvement issues and that she would be happy to engage members on a community approach. She also referred to the inclusion of Lay Members on the Safeguarding Board. The manner in which child protection co-ordination was undertaken in schools was also outlined to include the internal review of Safeguarding arrangements.

(I) **School Performance and Support for Schools – The Progress of Dudley Schools as measured by OFSTED Inspection**

A report was submitted indicating the outcome of OFSTED inspections in Dudley schools over the period from September 2005 to December 2008. Dudley had no schools deemed to require a Notice to Improve or to be in need of Special Measures. Reference was made to the involvement of Dudley in a pilot project on a new inspection framework, which OFSTED were proposing to implement nationally. Under the pilot, schools were to be judged against a higher criteria than hitherto.

In March 2009 the latest data on the performance of schools in the Borough was tabled, with particular reference made to the Key Stage 1 Early Years, confirming that the number of children who scored six or more points would be ready for the next stage of learning. However, children who attend reception classes would be behind the National Average in relation to communication, language and literacy skills. 72% of children had scored six points or more, which was an increase of 13% of children that would be educationally ready to enter Key Stage 1 learning within 2008, thus evidencing continuing improvements. Following the inspection of all schools and nurseries, staff were well equipped to deal with the needs of children. In relation to science results, Dudley Borough was just slightly below the national average. Key Stage 2 results show improvement and the Authority is now in line or above in all three subjects – English, maths and science. The Black Country Challenge funding continued to be allocated for the provision of additional facilities that would be utilised to enhance the pace of change in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. It was indicated that schools where children started from low bases had progressed significantly with the trend data showing year by year improvements. Further reports outlining progress will be presented to Committee during the year.

(m) **Youth Facilities and Youth Working – Youth Service Consultation**

Following a restructure in 2008 the Youth Service publicly consulted on a proposed Youth Offer for 13 to 19 years olds within the Dudley Borough. The response received was both positive and identified a number of potential partnership developments. An analysis report of responses and outcomes went to Select Committee Working Group in January and an update on working progress in May. As a result of the Offer the Service has now produced a 2 year Service and Area Plans, the latter being presented for ratification at the latest round of Area Committees.

The Service continues to develop key working partnerships in order to improve and increase the facilities on offer to young people locally. During the summer we will carry out the annual youth survey in order to ensure that we continue to offer young people what they want when they want it.

(n) **Other issues considered**

– Quarterly Corporate Performance Management

The Quarterly Corporate Performance Management Reports for 2008/09 were received during the year. Particular attention was made to the number of teenage pregnancies in the Borough and the percentage of 16-18 year olds not in employment, education or training, achievement of the stretched targets for which would bring financial reward.

Dudley are exceeding the stretched target for the percentage of schools achieving National Healthy Schools standards at 100%. We are ahead of target to reduce the percentage of Looked After Children, with three or more placements. The Borough has no schools in the category of serious weakness or special measures. We are below target for the percentage of young people in care, aged 16 or over with at least one GCSE at A* to G and the ratio of Looked After Children in employment, education and training. Children's Service is judged to have been good in the 2008 Annual Performance Assessment.

It was agreed that an additional contextual report on factors affecting performance measures would be produced quarterly, whilst in some areas, improvement would be required.

- Young People not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETS)

Whilst not meeting stretch targets, performance was better than the average of the Council's statistical neighbour authorities. Since November 2004 the proportion of 16 to 18 year olds who were NEETS had fallen from 9.6% to 5.5%. Work is being undertaken with schools and post -16 colleges in particular re-engaging with those people who dropped out of education or training. The Council was seeking to develop an action plan to further reduce the number of NEETS to be embedded in the target youth support plan.

A report would be brought to a future meeting on the position regarding the guarantee of a place in education and/or training for every 16 and 17 year old in the Borough (the September Guarantee) in respect of young people who may have learning/physical disabilities and were placed out of Borough and returned to the Council's area.

- Dudley Health Promoting School Services

Progress on the Health Promoting Schools Service for the period from April to December, 2008 summarised the support offered by this partnership service to all schools, pupil referral units and alternative providers in the Borough, together with key outcomes.

- Dudley's Parenting Support and Family Learning Strategy

A report outlined the main strands of the Dudley Parenting Support and Family Learning Strategy. Reference was made to The Dudley Parenting Map, and that tiers three and four would deal with complex needs where specialist support was required. Incentives would be offered to parents/families to access services offered by Children Centres, to include family days together in order that they could undertake recreational activities, that may not be otherwise available to them and this would encourage quality family time.

- Equality and Diversity Action Plan 2009/10

Particular reference was made to the Equality Impact Statement, explaining the proposed actions for promoting equality and diversity by the Directorate during 2009/10. Further development work would be required and increasing specific targeting support would impact upon young children. The Pathfinder Initiative would maintain support to young people, in order to provide them with an understanding of their communities, to prevent them from harming communities in the future.

- Dudley Grid for Learning (DGfL) Update

A presentation on the Dudley Grid for Learning portal/Learning platform reported the benefits from new technology, resulting in major changes, whereby most schools had interactive white boards that retained information in relation to lessons, and that information could be recalled. Learning platforms provided secure access for online learning materials and research had shown that children who utilised technology to learn had been performing better, and were more likely to remain at school and continue with their further education when they reached the age of sixteen. Using Computers for Pupils Funding from DCSF enabled the Directorate to provide four hundred and forty disadvantaged secondary pupils, and all secondary Looked After Children with a laptop computer to enable them to continue their learning at home and further funding had been acquired to provide home access to Information Communication Technology for targeted groups including year five and six looked after children, pupils in danger of becoming not in employment, education or training, (NEETS), young offenders and teenage parents. It was hoped in the future that the directorate could address other children's Information and Communication technology needs. Options would continue to be investigated in order to continue to provide a managed service to all schools after January, 2011.

7. Conclusion

2008/09 has been another busy, but extremely interesting year for the Select Committee and marked a year of continuing improvement with many good judgements being recorded. Whilst maintaining our focus on the important general education and social care issues, we have significantly developed our involvement with and input to the broader children's issues and the "Every Child Matters"

outcomes. Improving outcomes for all children and young people in the Borough is our overriding objective, but in our role as corporate parent, improving outcomes for Looked After Children remains a key priority.

Finance

- 8. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report at this stage.

Law

- 9. The requirement for the Committee to make an annual report to the Council is contained in Article 6 of the Constitution.
- 10. The relevant statutory provisions regarding the Council's Constitution are contained in Part II of the Local Government Act 2000, together with Regulations, Orders and Statutory Guidance issued by the Secretary of State.

Equality Impact

- 11. The Committee has taken equality and diversity issues into account whilst scrutinising the areas of work described, particularly in relation to front-line service delivery and issues such as attendance and exclusion and engagement of potentially disenfranchised groups in normal service delivery.
- 12. The work of the Select Committee in 2008/09 was targeted at services for children and young people and their views were heard and considered in the Committee's deliberations.

Recommendation

- 13 That the Annual Report, as set out above, be noted.



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Chairman of the Select Committee on Children's Services