

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 22nd March, 2012 at 6pm
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Councillor Mrs Dunn (Chairman)
Councillor Attwood (Vice Chairman)
Councillors Ashad, Crumpton, Hanif, J Jones, Miller and S Turner; Reverend Wickens; Mr Songole and Mr Tinsley; Mr Bruton and Mrs Verdegem; Mr Taylor and Mr Duffield

OFFICERS

Assistant Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services (Policy, Performance and Resources) – Lead Officer to the Committee; Acting Director of Children's Services, Assistant Directors of Children's Services (Education, Play and Learning) and (Quality and Partnership) and Mr Sanders – Directorate of Corporate Resources.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Mr D Farnworth (NHS Dudley) and Ms S Marshall (Health Provider for Children's Services)

36 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of Councillors Mrs Billingham and Mrs Greenaway.

37 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

A declaration of personal interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, was made by Councillor Crumpton in respect of all items on the agenda in view of the employment of his sister as a supply teacher in Dudley schools.

38 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 25th January, 2012 be approved as a correct record and signed.

39 ORDER OF BUSINESS

RESOLVED

That, pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 13(c), agenda item number 7 be considered as the next item of business.

40 STANDARDS REPORT – PERFORMANCE DATA

(During consideration of this item, Councillor Attwood declared a Personal Interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, in view of his governorship of St Joseph's Roman Catholic Primary School, Stourbridge, which was referred to in the report and the discussion as one of the top 100 state schools for attainment)

The Committee received a report of the Acting Director of Children's Services on the performance of schools in the Borough in relation to:

- Early Years Foundation Stage
- Early Years Foundation Stage Ethnicity data
- Key Stage 1 National Curriculum Assessment
- Key Stage 1 Ethnicity Assessment data
- Key Stage 2 National Curriculum Assessment
- Key Stage 2 Ethnicity Data
- Key Stage 4 Ethnicity Assessment Data
- Key Stage 5
- Looked After Children Assessment Data – Key Stages 1,2 and 4
- Trends Over Time – Key Stages 1,2 and 4

In introducing the report, the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Education, Play and Learning) confirmed that the figures provided comprised the final validated data results.

In relation to the Early Years Foundation Stage, the Assistant Director confirmed that the statistics reflected a year on year improvement in achievement levels, which also indicated a narrowing of the gap in performance between pupils in areas of deprivation in the Borough in comparison with pupils in other areas of the Borough. In this regard, the Assistant Director referred to the significant contribution made by the early intervention measures taken.

In response to a question from a member regarding the percentage points shown in the report regarding reading and writing, in which he described English and Mathematics as the essential subjects for career prospects in later life, the Acting Director of Children's Services explained that when children entered early years education they did so at varying levels of ability and academic background and that the Early Years Team therefore consulted with schools and settings in order to provide a rounded platform to enable pupils to engage. The Acting Director referred to consultancy support available from the directorate and to the co-ordination arrangements with schools and settings.

In response to a question on language and communication, the Senior Early Years Development Adviser then confirmed the priority given to speech and language at the Early Years Foundation stage nationally and described the manner in which Dudley was engaging with the 'Every Child a Talker' programme in settings and schools. She indicated, however, that the impact of the programme had yet to be fully assessed. In response to another question, the Senior Early Years Development Adviser referred to the practice of outdoor learning in improving the achievement levels of male pupils.

In relation to Key Stage 1, the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Early Years, Play and Learning) reported on the improvement in attainment in all areas at this Stage shown in the statistical information on Reading, Writing and Mathematics. Whereas Dudley's attainment levels had been significantly lower than the national average, these had now caught up in most cases and exceeded the mean in some instances. The percentage of pupils achieving level 3 had been a particular area for development in 2011/12 and the figures were now above the national expectation levels. Further to consideration of the tabulation in the report on the attainment of pupils by ethnic heritage at Key Stage 1, the Assistant Director agreed to discuss with the member who raised the issue measures that could be taken to improve the attainment levels of pupils from the Yemeni Community.

In relation to the statistical information for Key Stage 4, the report indicated that Dudley's attainment levels on GCSE 5 A* to C results, including English and Mathematics, now equalled the national mean for all schools and were one percentage point above the average of state funded schools. Statistical information on Key Stage 5 was only available for 6th forms as the Borough only had statutory responsibility in this area.

RESOLVED

That the report and the areas for development indicated therein be noted.

(During consideration of this item, Councillor Hanif declared a Personal Interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, in the item in view of his Lay Membership of the Dudley and Walsall Mental Health Partnership Trust)

A report of the Acting Director of Children's Services was submitted advising the Committee of the outcome of the OFSTED inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Services in Dudley, which had taken place between 28th November and 9th December 2011. Action Plans had been formulated in response to the recommendations in the inspectorate report and those for consideration at this meeting were appended to the report now submitted.

In introducing the report, the Lead Officer to the Committee indicated the intention that the issues on which inspection judgements had been measured as being outstanding or good would continue to be monitored. He indicated further that Action Plans would be submitted on the services measured as Adequate (no services had been judged as Inadequate) and referred to the manner in which these would be presented to meetings of the Committee over the year.

The Action Plans referred to this meeting were then considered. The Plans contained the following information:

- The particular area for improvement
- Action required
- Current position statement
- Organisations involved
- Personnel/organisation key

In relation to the Action Plans for which National Health Service agencies were specified as the key organisation, Ms Marshall or Mr Farnworth, as appropriate, amplified the actions required in response to the areas for improvement and indicated the current position. The same information was provided by the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Quality and Partnership) in respect of the Action Plans on which the Council was the lead organisation.

Particular reference was made in the discussion by the Health Service Representatives to the work being undertaken to develop a common assessment framework to align the differing practices of concerned agencies, in order to enable consistent and robust records. In relation to the issue of Key Workforce Groups, Ms Marshall reported on appointments to two posts to the Operational Management Team. An appointment to lead the Safeguarding Team had been made and the officer appointed was currently on three months' notice from her present employment. A discussion ensued on the nature of case conferences in which Ms Marshall acknowledged that the ability to enable participants to have the confidence to make positive contributions was crucial to their success.

Regarding the issue of health organisations being committed to the 'Township' model, for the purpose of multi agency locality teams, where the preferred course of action would be for teams to be located under a single management umbrella for the township, it was recognised that there might be some difficulties in achieving this. The Acting Director of Children's Services confirmed that a one stop shop for each township, covering all agencies, including the Police, was the Council's preferred alternative. Mr Farnworth anticipated further discussion would be needed by the Clinical Commissioning Group.

In response to a question from a member, the Acting Director of Children's Services confirmed that, since the baby Peter case, a more cautious approach from all relevant agencies in dealing with safeguarding issues brought to their attention had resulted in a higher number of cases being referred to Social Care that had previously been the case. The Acting Director of Children's Services referred to a national system available for assessing and evaluating cases which might be helpful in providing a threshold for intervention if necessary.

The Assistant Director of Children's Services (Quality and Partnership) then advised on action being taken and progress to date on the issue of the sufficiency of Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) capacity to enable the full implementation of quality assurance responsibilities, including on data collation and report to relevant bodies. In so doing, in response to a question, the Assistant Director clarified the background and remit of IROs and the manner in which they were independent of Children's Services.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the report now submitted, together with the Action Plans submitted to this meeting, be received and noted, together with the information on progress reported.
- (2) That the representatives of the Health Authority be thanked for their attendance and invited to return to present further progress reports in due course.

A report of the Acting Director of Children's Services was submitted advising the Committee about the changes to education and its provision in Dudley that would result from the provisions of the Education Act 2011.

In introducing the report, the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Education, Play and Learning) confirmed that further reports would be submitted to the Committee as and when particular relevant provisions of the Act came into force.

In response to a question, reference was made to the provision in the Act with regard to the establishment of Universal Technical Colleges, in the light of the indication in the report that the Department for Education was considering a proposal to create such a College in the Borough. The Acting Director confirmed that there had been no dialogue between the Council and the Department for Education in this regard. In discussing the relationship between Children's Services and Academies, the Acting Director indicated that Children's Services were working with schools that had been granted Academy status as far as possible.

Reference was made by one member in relation to the eligibility of teachers employed by Academies to be elected to serve as teacher representatives on the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee, in response to which the Assistant Principal Officer (Democratic Services) indicated that the matter was currently being looked at.

RESOLVED

That the report be received and noted and that subsequent reports on the impact of the changes in the Act be submitted to the Committee in June and September, 2012.

43 SCHOOLS OFSTED OUTCOMES

A report of the Acting Director of Children's Services was submitted presenting the latest analysis on the performance of Dudley Schools in OFSTED inspections.

Reference was made by one member in relation to children being absent in term time when not unwell, in response to which the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Education, Play and Learning) indicated that this was a matter within the remit of Heads to determine. The Acting Director of Children's Services referred to the availability of the schools' complaints procedures should a parent be dissatisfied with a Head's decision.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted

44 THANKS FROM CHAIRMAN

This being the last meeting of the Committee in the current municipal year, the Chairman expressed her thanks to the Vice Chairman and members of the Committee, the Lead Officer to the Committee, the Acting Director of Children's Services and the other officers involved with the Committee for their support during the year.

The meeting ended at 8.25 pm

CHAIRMAN