

Minutes of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee

Monday 1st July, 2019 at 6.00 pm
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley

Present:

Councillor A Millward (Chair)
Councillor P Sahota (Vice-Chair)
Councillors J Baines, P Bradley, J Cooper, S Craigie, Z Islam, K Lewis, C Perks
and S Ridney together with M Hammond (Parent Governor Representative for
Secondary Schools).

Officers:

H Ellis – Interim Chief Officer Children's Services, D Harkins – Chief Officer
Health and Wellbeing and Director of Public Health, N Hoskinson – Head of
Education Outcomes, B Kaur – Head of Service Children and Young Peoples
Public Health, M Samuels – Strategic Director People (All People Directorate);
and K Buckle – Democratic Services Officer (Chief Executive's Directorate).

Also in Attendance

Councillor R Buttery – Cabinet Member for Children and Young People together
with three members of the public.

Invitees

Councillor P Lee
One representative of Dudley Youth Council

1. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of Councillors
M Aston and V Wale.

2. **Appointment of Substitute Members**

It was noted that Councillors J Baines and Z Islam had been appointed as
substitute Members on behalf of Councillors V Wale and M Aston respectively for
this meeting of the Committee only.

3. **Declarations of Interest**

No Member made a declaration of interest under the Members' Code of Conduct.

4. **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 6th March, 2019, be approved as a correct record and signed.

5. **Change in Order of Business**

Pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 13(c) it was:-

Resolved

That the order of business be varied and the agenda items be considered in the order set out in the minutes below.

6. **Children's Services Update**

Strategic Director People addressed the Committee, providing an update on the developments within Children's Services and reported on the following:-

- The publication of the report by HM Inspectorate for Probation for the Youth Offending Service Inspection had taken place, following the inspection in April. There were clearly areas that required improvement, however the Service had travelled a long way, with considerable improvements being made. The Service was committed to making further improvements. It was noted that the Service was only three points away from being declared 'Good'.

There would be a media release in relation to the Service Inspection and Members were invited to read the report.

- The SEND service in Dudley required improvement and the issues will be considered by the Cabinet in September. A joint Inspection of the SEND Service by the Care Quality Commission and Ofsted had taken place in May and the results would be published shortly. There remained a long way to travel in relation to improving the Service.

It was noted that currently there were a number of children and young people who had not received confirmation of a school place for September, 2019, which was not a satisfactory position. However, additional members had joined the team in order to strengthen the Service. There had been weaknesses in terms of lack of communication with parents/guardians and there was now a clear instruction that every parent of a child/young person without a school place for September be contacted in order that work could

be conducted to ensure that they all had a school place by the end of the Summer term.

It was stated that considerable time, effort and focus on SEND, to escalate fast progress with the Service was being made.

- In relation to staffing changes, Sue Butcher, former Chief Officer Children's Services had left the Authority in April, having succeeded in her role to improve the Service and would now be working with another Authority. Helen Ellis had been appointed as Interim Chief Officer Children's Services and was introduced to Members.

It was noted that Helen Ellis had been extremely successful in her previous role. There had been a new recruitment to lead on Improvement and Innovation within Children's Services.

Howard Woolfenden Head of Children and Young Peoples Safeguarding and review would leave the Authority at the end of August and a highly experienced Officer had been identified for this position.

- The Wider Inclusion Strategy would deal with the whole issue that Dudley Schools address the needs of all children and young people, with the strategy currently being consulted upon.
- Dudley had been selected to take part in a national Early Years Transformation Academy to ensure that children were ready to learn.
- The Children's Services key Workforce and Development Team (the Centre for Professional Practice) had been recognised for a national MJ Award, achieving second place at the Awards Ceremony. It was noted that the Service had made rapid improvements travelling a very long way.

Resolved

That the information reported at the meeting be noted.

7. **Public Forum**

Representatives from 'We Love Carers' and a Specialist Teacher were in attendance at the meeting and collectively referred to the following:-

- Parents had expressed concerns that they had not been offered a school place for their child for September;
- concerns that children were placed in mainstream education provision that was unsuitable for their needs;
- the amount of successful applicants obtaining Education and Health Care Plans at Tribunals that remained waiting for those Plans to be instigated;

- some of those children in mainstream education have extreme behavioural problems posing not only a danger to other pupils but also staff at the school;
- some schools suggesting to parents that they home educate those children with behavioural issues and problems;
- Out of twelve children identified for specialist educational provision, four would be entering mainstream education in September, 2019;
- concerns in relation to children being excluded from nursery provision.

Those present were recommended to conduct conversations with Officers following the meeting, in relation to individual cases of concern.

The Strategic Director People referred to the difficult and important area of SEND, providing re-assurance that a child currently in specialist school provision would not be removed as long as it was the most appropriate facility and environment for their needs.

Work would continue on the basis that every child would have a suitable school place for September. The position in relation to home educating was one for the parent/guardian to decide. The assumption was that a suitable school place would always be offered.

Funding for SEND was part of the Dedicated Schools Budget and was ring fenced. The Department for Education rules state that the budget cannot be overspent by more than a fixed percentage and currently Dudley were working within that ring fenced budget.

Dudley had a higher proportion of children attending Special Schools, with 793 Special School places in the Borough and the Inspector had indicated that those numbers were significantly higher than in comparable council's elsewhere in the country.

There was no intention to place children into mainstream schools when they required specialist provision, however work in relation to changing attitudes in some schools relating to SEND would be necessary.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People referred to the new Ofsted Inspection Framework that would be introduced. This would have the effect of discouraging schools from excluding pupils, making them more accountable for their support to all pupils, and removing the incentives for them to suggest home education.

It was noted that an Education Action Plan would be introduced in September, with the requirement for children entering education with the appropriate provision, being built into that Plan.

A Member stated that the Borough's Special Schools were the victims of their own success and reiterating assurances that should children require specialist support, they would be placed into mainstream education if appropriate with that support.

The Strategic Director People referred to the processes for Education Health and Care Plans, advising that from 1st April, 2019 a new operating system had been put in place and all final plans were on course to be issued within 20 weeks of the initial request, thereby meeting the statutory expectation.

It was stated that many children should be attending mainstream schools with the correct support, rather than building further specialist provision, with the aim being to reduce demand on that provision. It was noted that evidence nationally suggested that, with the appropriate support, many children with special needs achieved better outcomes if they remained in mainstream education rather than entering the specialist school system, notwithstanding the high quality of those schools.

There was the need to change the culture in relation to mainstream provision and in due course that would enable the Service to work with the budget provided.

Resolved

That the information reported on at the meeting, be noted.

8. **Dudley Child Health Profiles**

A report of the Strategic Director People was submitted on the findings of the Public Health England child health profiles for Dudley.

The Chief Officer Health and Wellbeing and Director of Public Health referred to the Health Profiles intending to facilitate conversations to highlight local issues and priorities to help formulate a scrutiny programme for Members.

The report summarised in which areas there was either good or poor performance in relation to a child's health and wellbeing.

It was noted that Dudley did significantly worse in infant mortality rates, however there were indications that improvements may be emerging in relation to mental health.

Although Public Health England had provided the Child Health Profile data, it was noted that some of the data referred to 2015 and Members requested that more up to date data be provided. The Chief Officer noted that more recent data could be provided for Dudley, but it would not be possible to compare this with the situation in other boroughs, as the latest comparisons were those already provided by Public Health England.

Arising from the presentation of the report and appendix to the report submitted Members asked questions and raised concerns and Officers responded as follows:-

- Dudley was compared with their statistical neighbours, those Authorities with similar populations to Dudley, as selected by Public Health England.
- Although the absolute numbers in relation to infant mortality were relatively small, the rate of deaths in infancy per 1000 live births was still greater than comparable Authorities.
- As the data provided was national, the comparable Authorities would not be neighbouring Authorities but those with a similar population to Dudley.
- Universal work was being undertaken around Family Centres and as Health Visitors were sometimes in situ at those centres, this would be promoted along with the other activities and services available;

It was suggested that a joint Working Group meeting of the Children's Services and Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committees take place in relation to child poverty, infant mortality, sexual and mental health and breastfeeding. The possibility of Task and Finish Groups taking place to formulate recommendations to Scrutiny in relation to each theme referred to above, was also referred to.

Resolved

- (1) That the information contained in the report and Appendix to the report submitted on Dudley Child Health Profiles, be noted.
- (2) That Democratic Services arrange a joint meeting of the Children's Services and Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committees, to consider the health profile themes referred to above.

9. **Annual Scrutiny Programme 2019/20**

A report of the Lead for Law and Governance was submitted on the Annual Scrutiny Programme detailing items for consideration by this Committee during 2019/20.

In referring to the Children's Services (Scrutiny Development) Working Group, it was considered that the Group be re-established to supplement the work of the main Children's Services Scrutiny Committee, and the Chair of the Working Group should be a nomination of all Members of the main Committee.

Members were invited in advance to advise which Working Groups they would attend.

Resolved

- (1) That the items to be scrutinised by this Committee in the Annual Scrutiny Programme for 2019/20, be noted.

- (2) That the Committee confirm the programme of business as outlined in paragraph 10 of the report submitted, subject to the need for flexibility to reflect any changes that might arise during the municipal year.
 - (3) That the proposed arrangements for joint meetings of the Children's Services and Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committees be held to consider items outlined in paragraph 11 of the report submitted, be approved.
 - (4) That Scrutiny Development Working Group(s) be established to provide for the informal consideration and formulation of recommendations to this Committee in relation to items outlined in paragraph 12 of the report submitted, and to comprise of those Members of the Committee who have a particular interest in the items to be considered at respective meetings.
 - (5) That the role of Chair of the Children's Services (Scrutiny Development) Working Group be rotated between all Members of the Committee.
 - (6) That the Lead for Law and Governance, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair, be authorised to make all the necessary arrangements to enable this Committee to undertake its programme of scrutiny work during the 2019/20 municipal year.
 - (7) That the terms of reference for the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee, as set out in the Appendix to the report submitted, be noted.
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10. **School Readiness in Dudley**

A report of the Strategic Director People was submitted on a snapshot of school readiness in Dudley; describing the importance of school readiness; providing an update on places to improve school readiness and sharing Dudley's successful bid to support transformation of the maternity and early years system and contribution to school readiness outcomes.

The Interim Chief Officer Children's Services and the Head of Education Outcomes jointly presented the report submitted making particular reference to the following:-

- Dudley had been selected to participate in a national programme to improve school readiness outcomes, having been successful in a bid for the programme being run by the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF), a national organisation that helped local areas identify what programmes would work for their children and young people.
- Dudley was one of five areas selected to partner the EIF Academy in a 12 month system transformation programme. Each area in the region would utilise the support to develop their own programme, focusing on local

outcomes. The three aspirations for the transformation work in order to develop the programme were referred to.

- From the data examined it had been evidenced that good mental health in young mothers improved school readiness and this would be embedded into the proposed Parenting Programmes.
- There were some very inclusive schools in Dudley, however school readiness in Dudley was poor compared to the rest of the West Midlands and England. The focus would be holistically on the education path from 0 to 25.

The Head of Service Consultant in Public Health requested Members views on how they could contribute to the processes outlined above.

Arising from the presentation of the report submitted, Members asked questions, made suggestions and Officers responded as follows:-

In relation to the characteristics of school ready children, it was noted that should a child not meet one of the characteristics, that would not necessarily result in a child not being school ready.

The Head of Service Consultant in Public Health, referred to the need to focus on a child's environment prior to them entering reception class at school or nursery and a deep dive exercise would be conducted in that area.

Academies would also be involved with the Education Action Plans.

With regard to Toddler Groups and whether those were making a difference to school readiness, the Interim Chief Officer Children's Services confirmed that she would check whether there was a register of those groups, in order to conduct a mapping exercise.

A Member suggested that work should be conducted to focus on ethnicity in Wards, ensuring that mothers were signposted to appropriate services.

Members referred to the complex area of school readiness and encouraged focusing on a holistic approach, investigating all areas that could impact on school readiness.

A Member echoed the need for recognition nationally that families were being affected right across the Borough.

Some children attending nursery who could not interact with other children due to speech difficulties and those that had mental health problems at such a young age were referred to.

A suggestion to conduct work with children's carers in order for them to understand and take responsibility for a child being school ready was made.

A request to examine data for the previous three years. Partnership working was welcomed and a suggestion that key Community Groups be approached.

Following a suggestion in relation to scrutinising the Action Plans, the Chair suggested that a report be submitted to the September/November meeting of the Committee, detailing the work carried out within the various Wards in the Borough, providing statistical information on improvements in Wards in order to demonstrate best practice.

The Chair suggested that all Elected Members be contacted in order to gather intelligence on Toddler Groups and other activities taking place in their areas.

The Head of Service Consultant in Public Health referred to an event taking place on 19th July, 2019 that would engage with families and communities involving voluntary organisations. An invitation to that event would be forwarded to Members of the Committee.

It was agreed that Members would suggest any areas that they may wish to scrutinise on the work being planned to improve school readiness, following consideration of the report and further information referred to above.

Resolved

- (1) That the report submitted on School Readiness in Dudley, be noted.
- (2) That the Strategic Director People, be requested to submit a report detailing the work carried out within the various Wards in the Borough, providing statistical information on improvements in Wards in order to demonstrate best practice, to a future meeting of the Committee.
- (3) That the Interim Chief Officer Children's Services be requested to ascertain whether there was a register of Toddler Groups, in order to conduct a mapping exercise and provide details of best practice, to a future meeting of the Committee.

The meeting ended at 8.15 pm

CHAIR