

SELECT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Wednesday, 23rd January 2008 at 6.00pm
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Councillor Nottingham (Chairman)
Councillor Ms Boleyn (Vice Chairman)
Councillors D Blood, Hanif, Hill, Ms Partridge, Ms Roberts, Mrs Rogers,
and Wright; Reverend Wickens; Mr Jones, Mr Smith; Mr Billingham, Mrs
Simms; Mrs Roe and Mrs Verdegem

OFFICERS

The Director of Finance (as Lead Officer to the Committee), the Director
of Children's Services, the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Early
Years, Youth and Education Services), and Mr Sanders (Directorate of
Law and Property)

37 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No member declared a personal or a prejudicial interest, in accordance
with the Members' Code of Conduct, in respect of any matter to be
considered at this meeting.

38 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence for the meeting were received and accepted on
behalf of Councillors Mrs Coulter and Mrs Dunn and Mr Hatton.

39 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 15th
November, 2007, be approved as a correct record and signed.

40 **SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

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

ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted advising the Committee of the process by which the Annual Performance Assessment of Children's Services (APA), required under the Children Act, 2004, had been carried out and which summarised the feedback received from OFSTED under the Assessment. The full APA letter was attached to the report now submitted.

The report indicated that, in terms of the overall effectiveness of Children's Services and also in each of the seven specific areas assessed, Dudley had received a grading of three (good) out of a top score of four. The gradings preceded the overall Comprehensive Performance Assessment for the Council.

The key areas of good performance were summarised in paragraph 9 of the report and areas identified for improvement in paragraph 10.

In the discussion on the item, a request for demographic information on school exclusions was made by one member, in response to which the Director of Children's Services agreed to report to a future meeting.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the information contained in the report on the APA process be noted and the contents of the APA letter, welcomed.
- (2) That the Director of Children's Services convey the congratulations of the Committee to the staff concerned for the excellent APA gradings awarded.

OFSTED - TELLUS 2 SURVEY RESULTS 2007

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted indicating the results of the 2007 OFSTED Tellus 2 online survey published on 14th November 2007 which asked children to respond on the issues on whether they considered themselves healthy, whether they felt safe in their local area, how well they felt they were helped to enjoy life and achieve success, and whether they considered they had good opportunities to make a positive contribution to society and achieve economic well being. The questions in the survey had been designed to reflect the priorities set out in the Government's Every Child Matters Initiative.

The report of the Director of Children's Services summarised both national findings and the findings for Dudley. In relation to the national findings, HM Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills had determined that young people were healthy, sporty, community – conscientious about school but that they had concerns about bullying, and how to obtain better advice on careers, sex and relationships. HM Chief Inspector had also considered it clear that more needed to be done to address children and young people's worries and concerns in the areas of how safe they felt; examinations and tests; and what would help to enable them to learn better and where to go for help if they had a problem.

In Dudley, the confidence level of children was significantly higher than the national average in the areas of alcohol, smoking and drug issues information and advice; the figures for Dudley were lower than the national average in the number of pupils stating that they had not been bullied in school over the previous four weeks but higher than the national average for pupils who had stated that their school dealt well with incidents of bullying; and a higher number of pupils in Dudley than the national average felt that their views on the running of their school were listened to. The percentage number of pupils who had reported that they had been intoxicated during the survey period was higher than the national average, notwithstanding that the quality of information and advice they received on alcohol issues was also higher, and as many as 33% of children had stated that they did not feel safe on public transport, this being 6% above the national average.

In the question and answer session that followed, the Director of Children Services recognised that drunkenness among children was a problem and indicated that the issue would be covered in the Children and Young People's Plan, which would be submitted to the Committee in due course. He also indicated that the concerns of children in relation to travelling on public transport would be drawn to the attention of the relevant agencies.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the contents of the report be noted.
- (2) That it be noted that the issue of drunkenness will be covered in the Children and Young People's Plan, which will be submitted to the Committee in due course.
- (3) That the concerns of children on travelling on public transport be drawn to the attention of CENTRO and the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership.

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted advising the Committee of the machinery introduced by government for local authorities to apply for funding under the Transforming Primary Education Initiative and which also sought consideration of the consultation document prepared in relation to the development of proposals for Dudley MBC.

In relation to the projects proposed for re-building over the period from 2009 – 2012, the Director of Children's Services confirmed the expectation that the three schools referred to in the consultation paper would continue to be required in their current locations for the foreseeable future. In relation to the effect on pupil numbers at other schools anticipated in consequence of parents inevitably preferring new or reconstructed schools to older premises, the Director confirmed that any programme determined needed to provide for flexibility.

RESOLVED

That the report be received and that the contents of the consultation paper be noted.

REVENUE BUDGET STRATEGY 2008/09

A joint report of the Director of Children's Services and Director of Finance was submitted on the proposed revenue budget strategy for 2008/09 and the medium term financial strategy for the period from 2008/09 to 2010/11 in so far as it related to Children's Services.

In introducing the report, the Director of Finance referred to the issues which needed to be considered in formulating the budget strategy and Council Tax levels for 2008/09, the action that needed to be taken to address gaps between available resources and spending levels and the implications of the assumptions concerning specific areas of risk and uncertainty identified in the 2007/08 budget strategy and the medium term financial strategy approved in 2007. He then discussed the particular proposals of the Cabinet to meet additional spending pressures across the Council identified for 2008/09 and later years and the measures proposed within the Children's Services budget to meet that expenditure.

At this juncture, representatives of Dudley Ethnic Minority Communities United, led by Ms Hart and Mr Hussain, made oral representations in support of the retention of the full budget allocation made in 2007/08 to the Dudley Ethnic Minority Advisory Service (EMAS). A number of members of the Committee also indicated their support for the continuing resourcing of the Service in full. Correspondence between Dudley Ethnic Minority Communities United and the Director of Children's Services, sent under cover of a letter dated 10th October, 2007, was also circulated.

In the representations made for the retention of the current expenditure on EMAS, the points alleged by the protagonists included the following;

- That the implications of making savings from the EMAS budget should be considered before a decision was made.
- The support of EMAS was necessary to provide an opportunity for black minority ethnic children to reach the academic standards of other children, given particularly that the Pakistani boys and African Caribbean boys continued to make substantially less progress than the overall population.
- That a diminution of funding would be contrary to the community cohesion strategy approved by Cabinet in December, 2007.
- That the cut in budget provision proposed was very small in the context of the Children's Services and Council's overall budgets.
- That EMAS had always delivered significant value for money.
- That to reduce expenditure of the service would be contrary to race relations legislation.
- That, before making the savings, the Council should question whether it was acting fairly in relation to the black ethnic minority community
- That the service delivered by EMAS had always been to a high standard and had enabled pupils to achieve academically in excess of what was likely to have been possible had the service not been available.

In summary, the protagonists for EMAS were of the opinion that the facility had served to raise aspirations of many black and ethnic minority children which, in turn, had enabled those who had attended the service to have had greater life chances. They advocated strongly that funding should continue at its current level. The Director of Finance confirmed, however, that the funding level proposed would continue to make provision for new entrants to the country in the Borough to learn the English language. It was moved and seconded that a special meeting of the Committee be held to discuss EMAS funding in further detail but, on being put to the vote, the motion was lost.

Other issues raised in the questions on the proposed budget, as presented, included matters relating to funding for Building Schools for the Future, the Youth Service, Single Status and support for children at risk, to which the Director of Children's Services and the Director of Finance responded. In relation to children at risk, the Director of Children's Services reported on the considerations that had to be determined for each child, and the cost implications, and the Director of Finance reported orally on the current position on Single Status in so far as it related to the teaching profession.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the Cabinet's budget proposals for 2008/09 and the medium term financial strategy for 2008/09 to 2010/11 be accepted, in so far as the issues for which this Committee is responsible are concerned.
 - (2) That the Cabinet be advised of the points made by the protagonists in support of EMAS, as recorded above.
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COMPLAINTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLIMENTS – CHILDREN'S_ SOCIAL CARE SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT

Pursuant to the representations and claims procedures in the Children Act 1989, a report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted providing information about the performance of the Children's Services Directorate in receiving, monitoring and responding to social care compliments and complaints.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the complaints, comments and compliments Children's Social Care Services Annual report for the period from 1st April 2006 to 31st March 2007 as attached to the report of the Director of Children's Services now submitted, be received and noted and the information contained therein accepted.
 - (2) That the annual report be made available as a public document.
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RESPECT AGENDA

Further to a request made at a previous meeting for members of the Committee to be updated on progress with regard to the Respect Agenda, a report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted indicating the manner in which the Agenda would be progressed and monitored in accordance with the wishes of the Cabinet. The report submitted to the meeting of the Cabinet held on 31st October, 2007 on the matter was attached to the report now submitted.

RESOLVED

That the report of the Director of Children's Services and the report submitted to the Cabinet, be noted.

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QUARTERLY CORPORATE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT

The Quarterly Corporate Performance Management report in respect of the activities relating to the terms of reference of this Committee for the second quarter of 2007/08 was submitted.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

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UPDATE ON TOPICAL ISSUES

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on recent and forthcoming issues pertaining to the terms of reference of the Committee. The matters covered included the Children's Plan, published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families, Black Country Challenge, the Children and Young Persons Bill and the Learning and Skills Bill.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

The meeting ended at 8 p.m..

CHAIRMAN