

Select Committee on Health and Adult Social Care – 22 March 2010

Report of the Director of Children's Services

Infant Mortality

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to inform the Committee about the findings of the National Support Team (Department of Health) visit to Dudley to investigate Infant Mortality in the summer of 2009 and subsequent progress in addressing the issues that were identified.

Background

2. Overall the infant mortality rate in Dudley has declined over time. It is higher in the most deprived quintile of our population. From 1990-2007 the Dudley rate has fluctuated around the national trend which is declining.
3. Dudley is identified as having 20 or more infant deaths in the Routine and Manual Social Group in the period 2002 – 04 and this is what “triggered” the visit by the Department of Health Infant Mortality National Support Team.
4. The Department of Health National Support Team report did not provide a single grade or judgement. It reports that there are many strengths in Dudley which are contributing to the reduction of infant mortality e.g. “high level of commitment by the key agencies to improve health and well being”, “NHS Dudley recognises the importance of public health and has invested in a well resourced team”, “there is evidence of good partnership working around health and social care”.
5. The report also identified a number of actions to improve the current position and these can be summarised as follows
 - Improve the quality of available data to inform planning and performance management
 - Reduce the rate of teenage conceptions
 - Reduce the prevalence of maternal obesity and the prevalence of smoking in pregnancy
 - Optimise pre conception care e.g. early booking and reduce maternal and infant infections
 - Improve infant nutrition
 - Raise levels of educational attainment

6. Activities to address identified issues
- a) None of the issues identified by the NST came as a surprise. In most cases action plans were already in place to bring about improvements and our work has mainly been to maintain the existing momentum.
 - b) The Children's Trust has agreed to take responsibility for coordinating the borough's response and strategy and this is the most appropriate multi agency group.
 - c) Dudley Group of Hospitals have put measures in place to improve the available data about infant mortality so that this can be used to inform planning and performance management.
 - d) There were already extensive plans in place to reduce the rate of teenage pregnancy which was a priority in the Children and Young People's Plan before the NST visit. There are two main elements to our response (i) is to work with schools and colleges to help improve education about sex and relationships and (ii) to provide better access to adolescent sexual health services and contraception. The latter approach entails making more services available within education settings in an appropriately discrete and confidential manner.
 - e) Colleagues within the Dudley Health Service have developed a strategy to make the early identification of smokers and those at risk as a result of being over weight a routine element of ante natal care. This will then enable more effective action to be put in place to combat these problems.
 - f) An audit is to be conducted to ascertain the reasons why some women are very late in accessing ante natal care because they are "late bookers" for the service. A better understanding of the reasons for this will enable us to develop an effective strategy to reduce the number of late bookers in future
 - g) Attempts to improve infant nutrition focus upon efforts to increase the rate of breast feeding in particular. A range of strategies are being put in place from better education in schools, making more facilities available and the appointment of breast feeding "buddies" and coordinators to make sure that suitable levels of encouragement and support are available
 - h) Raising levels of educational attainment is an ongoing priority for schools, colleges and the local authority. Considerable progress has been made in this respect in recent years with almost unbroken improvement in test and examination results for the last ten years. Allied to this we are now also supporting schools to develop their personal and social education programmes which provide the opportunity for a more rounded focus on e.g. parenting skills as well as academic achievement.
7. The National Support Team has also offered Dudley staff the opportunity to learn about good practice in other parts of the country and we are making good use of this opportunity.

Finance

8. The programme of activity being developed following the NST visit is being funded entirely from within existing resources.

Law

9. The NST visit and subsequent activity is part of a consensual review and support programme.

Equality Impact

11. The recommendation and content of this report is intended to promote the health and well being of all families and children.

Recommendations

12. That the Committee notes this report.



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