

SELECT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Wednesday, 26th March, 2008 at 6.00pm
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Councillor Nottingham (Chairman)
Councillor Ms Boleyn (Vice Chairman)
Councillors Blood, Mrs Dunn, Ms Foster, Hanif, Hill, Ms Partridge, Rahman,
and Wright; Mr Billingham, Mr Jones, Mrs Simms, Mr Smith and Rev
Wickens

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)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Councillor Mrs Walker (Cabinet Member for Children's Services)
Mrs S Sharp – Chairman of Governors of Holly Hall School, Mrs J Homer
– Parent of pupil at Holly Hall School and six other parents from Holly Hall
School

49

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of
Councillors Mrs Coulter and Mrs Roberts; Mr Hatton, Mrs Roe and Mrs
Verdegem.

50

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

A personal interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct,
was made by Councillor Ms Boleyn in respect of agenda Items numbers 5
(Standards Report – Performance Data) and 13 (Notice Given Under
Select Committee Procedure Rule 8 by Councillor Ms Partridge) in so far
as the latter item related to Building Schools for the Future in view of her
governorship of Maidensbridge Primary School and her membership of
the Kingswinford Schools Association.

Declarations of a Personal Interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, were made by the following members in Item number 13, in so far as it related to Building Schools for the Future, in view of their governorships of the schools indicated:

Councillor Blood - Belle Vue Primary School
Councillor Mrs Dunn – Cradley C of E Primary School and Huntingtree Primary School
Councillor Hanif – Rufford Primary School
Councillor Hill – Earls High School
Councillor Mrs Walker – Wollescote Primary School and St James CE Primary School
Mr Jones – Redhill School
Reverend Wickens – Castle High School

Councillor Nottingham declared a Personal Interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, in item 13 in so far as it related to Building Schools for the Future in view of his governorship of one of the schools possibly involved in the bidding process.

Councillor Rahman declared a Personal Interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, in agenda item number 13 in so far as it related to Building Schools for the Future in view of his being a parent of a pupil at Northfield Road Primary School.

51

SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was reported that Councillor Ms Foster was serving in place of Councillor Mrs Coulter and Councillor Rahman in place of Councillor Mrs Roberts for this meeting of the Committee

52

ORDER OF BUSINESS

RESOLVED

That, pursuant to Council procedure rule 13 (c) items 13 (Notice Given Under Select Committee Procedure Rule 8 – Councillor Ms Partridge) and 9 (Youth Provision) be considered in that order after item number 5 and that paragraph 3 of item 12 (Update on Topical Issues: Building Schools for the Future) be considered in conjunction with that issue in respect of Agenda Item 13.

STANDARDS REPORT – PERFORMANCE DATA

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted setting out the latest data available on the performance of schools in the Borough from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 5 (inclusive). The report also provided a Foundation Stage ethnicity report, looked after children assessment data in key stages 1 – 4 (inclusive) and indicated trends over time in those key stages.

A film made in conjunction with pupils of Holly Hall School, showing work undertaken in various key stages, was presented.

The report compared Dudley's performance to national averages, neighbouring authorities and the Council's statistical comparator authorities. In most instances figures compared favourably and showed an improvement over the review period and the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Early Years, Youth and Education Services) expanded orally on the background and indicated action being taken where attention was needed. In response to a question, she confirmed that a further report would be submitted on the issue of Looked After children, in which a full explanation would be given of the role of the Virtual School and Virtual Headteacher.

In response to a further question, the Assistant Director explained the activity taking place within the Directorate at nursery and reception level to improve literacy, numeracy and other manipulative skills and the monitoring arrangements put in place in this regard. On the issue of Personal Education Plans, the Director of Children's Services acknowledged the amount of work necessary to ensure that the plans were in place for all pupils and confirmed that this would be a key function for the Children's Specialist Services and for the Virtual Headteacher who would support their use to raise standards. Replying to a question on pupil's progress at Foundation Stage, the Director emphasised the importance of parenting skills.

Certain members referred to the implications of the reduction in the budget on the Ethnic Minority Advisory Service, in response to which the Director indicated that a report to the Committee would be made on the proposed utilisation of the approved budget.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) That the Director of Children's Services report to a future meeting on the financial support the Council is receiving from Black Country Challenge.

- (3) That the pupils of Holly Hall School who contributed to the making of the film be thanked for their work and that the presentation material be circulated to members of the Committee by memory stick if technically possible.
 - (4) That, in future, the figures in the Standards Report provide a breakdown by ethnic group for foundation stage.
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ETHNIC MINORITY ADVISORY SERVICE

Notice had been given by Councillor Ms Partridge, pursuant to Select Committee Procedure Rule 8, that she wished an item on the Ethnic Minority Advisory Service (EMAS) to be included on the Agenda for this Meeting.

Councillor Ms Partridge explained that she was seeking a timetable for a review of the services and what would not be delivered by the Service, in consequence of the reduction in the budget for 2008/09

The Assistant Director of Children's Services (Early Years, Youth and Education Services) indicated that a draft structure for provision was being worked upon with a view to meeting the current needs of schools and that this would be consulted on with staff and unions. The EMAS grant was distributed direct to schools and the way in which it was utilised differed between schools. Provision would therefore be measured against what was considered to be the current needs of individual schools and a paper would be prepared and consulted on setting out proposals for the use of the approved budget. The paper proposed a new structure which, ultimately, would be submitted to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services for approval. While there would be a reduction in staffing, given the budget reductions, consultations on the paper and a new structure would be undertaken with staff, schools and the community before the issue was referred to the Cabinet Member for determination.

RESOLVED

That the situation be noted and that a report back to the Select Committee be made on the utilisation of the reduced EMAS budget.

BUILDING SCHOOLS FOR THE FUTURE

Notice had been given by Councillor Ms Partridge, pursuant to Select Committee Procedure Rule 8, that she wished an item to be included on the Agenda for this meeting on Building Schools for the Future (BSF).

The purpose of the referral was to consider the background to the decision of the Cabinet approving the detail of the bid to be made to the Department for Children Schools and Families for the wave 6 B programme under the Building Schools for the Future initiative. The approved bid excluded academy status for Holly Hall School, a project which had been included in earlier proposals. At the invitation of the Committee, the Chairman of the Governing body of Holly Hall School, Mrs Sue Sharp and a parent of a pupil of the school, Mrs Jean Homer spoke advocating the inclusion of Holly Hall as an academy in the bid and expressing disappointment that it had not been proceeded with.

In response, the Director of Children's Services explained that Dudley had initially been placed in waves 7, 8 and 9 of the BSF programme, for starting between 2012 and 2014, but had been brought forward to wave 6B which would enable a start to be made in 2010. The bid had been made in consultation with the Office of the Schools Commission and they had advised that the bid for an academy at Holly Hall School did not meet the criteria for approval. The Council's bid had therefore been amended in the terms approved by Cabinet, met the criteria and was expected to be successful. While the bid could still be subject to change, an academy at Holly Hall School was not a realistic proposition, since it failed to meet the government's criteria.

During consideration of this issue, Councillor Ms Foster wished to place on record her deep disappointment that she now understood that it might not be possible for all pupils at Pensnett School and Community College to obtain an academy place, given the removal of the Holly Hall proposals from the Council's bid.

RESOLVED

- (1) That an update report on the bid be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.
- (2) That the report on the Building Schools for the Future Programme be submitted also to Area Committees.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PLAN

The Director of Children's Services reported orally on the content of this Plan, a proof copy of which was circulated

The proof set out the priorities of the Council for the period from 2008 to 2011, together with individual objectives under the Plan and the measures and indicators that would be applied.

In the discussion, one member noted that the “Enjoy and Achieve” part of the Plan did not include objectives or performance measures and indicators for Foundation Stage pupils.

In relation to stretching set nationally educational standards, the same member suggested that the baseline was perhaps too low.

RESOLVED

That the oral report now given, and the proof copy of the Children and Young People’s Plan, as circulated, be received and noted.

57

THE DUDLEY PLAY STRATEGY

A report of the Director of Children’s Services was submitted advising the Committee of the details of the Dudley Play Strategy, further to the success of the Big Lottery Fund approval by the National Awards Committee in July 2007, and of an application made to the Department for Children Schools and Families for further monies under their Play Pathfinder initiative.

The report set out the projects approved by the Big Lottery Fund and indicated the Council’s responsibilities, and progress made to date, in that regard. The report also indicated the nature of the schemes that would be provided for should the Play Pathfinder application be successful and confirmed that, while no match funding would be required, the sum of £500,000 revenue would be available to provide for staffing necessary in public parks under the initiative.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the contents of the report be noted.
 - (2) That no issues for further scrutiny be identified.
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58

11 MILLION - TAKE OVER DAY 2007

The first national 11 million “Take Over Day” had taken place on 23 November, 2007, the purpose of which was to celebrate the importance of children and young people in society by allowing children and young people to take part in activities that affected their day to day lives at a national, regional and local level.

A report of the Director of Children's Services was now submitted, giving the background to the Day including the aims of the Children's Commission for England and summarising the activities that had taken place and the bodies which had assisted. The report also noted some of the activities undertaken by different pupils.

The Children's Commissioner had been delighted with the way in which the day had been received and the Director of Children's Services confirmed that it had been a great success locally.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the contents of the report be noted.
- (2) That the promotion of the 11 million Take Over Day for 2008 be supported.

59

YOUTH PROVISION

An oral report on the work of the Youth Provision Working Group of this Committee in 2007/08 was given by the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Early Years, Youth and Education Services).

In this regard, she indicated that the Working Group had considered matters relating to the Government's current requirements with respect to youth support; work taking place to develop a targeted youth strategy; the history of youth provision and the influence of changes to electoral ward boundaries thereon. The report also covered the recommendations contained in the review of the Dudley Youth Service carried out in June, 2007 and issues raised at the Targeted Youth Conference Presentation held in the autumn of 2007, together with the next steps in the development of the Dudley Youth Service. The forthcoming meeting on 31 March 2008 would consider new ways of working for the Dudley Youth Service for September 2008 and beyond and an update would be given on the Dudley Targeted Youth Support Plan.

RESOLVED

That the work of the Working Group over 2007/08 to date, and the issues proposed for consideration at the meeting to be held on 31 March 2008, be noted.

60

PAYMENT TO FOSTER CARERS – FEES AND ALLOWANCES

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted indicating the current position regarding payment of fees and allowances to foster carers and discussing the wider implications of the structure currently in place in the light of particular issues of concern and current investment needs.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the concerns expressed in the report, regarding the implications to the Council of the current fee structure and lack of investment in the fostering service particularly having regard to increasing private sector involvement, be noted.
- (2) That a further report be submitted to the first or second meeting of the committee in 2008/09 to consider a way forward in the light of the implications described.

61

QUARTERLY CORPORATE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT

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

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

62

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 green paper 'Raising Expectations: Enabling the System to Deliver', the Key Stage 4 Engagement Programme and the current situation regarding Building Schools for the Future, detailed consideration in respect of the latter having been given under agenda item number 13.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

63

QUESTIONS ASKED UNDER COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 11.8

Pursuant to Council Procedure rules 11.8 and 11.9, the questions below were asked by Councillor Ms Partridge. The questions and the responses given, which were circulated in writing at the meeting, were as follows:

Question 1

The government is making funds available for youth services. Would you please advise what, if any barriers, there are which would prevent Dudley making an application and if it is the Council's intention to apply for these funds.

Response

Funding that has been made available:

- (a) Youth Opportunity Funding - £338k. This will be allocated to Dudley in 2008/09. This funding is made available to Young People between the age of 13 and 19 to develop positive activities. There is a bidding process and young people review the bids and award funding from a young people's panel.
- (b) Short Breaks for Disabled Young People. Dudley is a Pathfinder authority for this initiative and the Youth Service is part of the strategy group. Funding will be released to support disabled young people who attend youth projects.

Funding to Bid for:

Dormant Bank and Building Society Accounts Bill. This bill is awaiting its second reading in the Commons. The assets will be distributed by the Big Lottery Fund and one of the priorities will be young people. Once information is available the Council intends to apply for this funding and currently we know of no barriers that would prevent us from making an application.

Question 2

There has been recent speculation in the press about the possibility of a university for Dudley. Would you please advise which select committee would have responsibility for this and how hypothetically any application would be progressed by Dudley MBC

Response

Responsibility for the possible development of a university in the borough does not specifically fall within the terms of reference of a single Select Committee. In such a case we would discuss this with the Select Committee Chairmen and ask them to agree the relevant Select Committee which would probably be either Children's Services or Regeneration Culture and Adult Education.

Question 3

Would you please confirm what consultation process is currently being used by the children's services directorate.

Response

We use the Children's Services Communication and Consultation Policy for all consultations that are sent out from our Directorate. This document is available on the Internet, please find link below

<http://www.dudley.gov.uk/council--democracy/council-directorates/children's-services/policies>

This policy is currently being revised and all revisions to the document will be consulted upon. Any revision of the consultation policy (after 1 April 2008 to be known as the Community Engagement Policy) will be in line with the overall Council consultation policy, which is also available on the website. Please find link below

<http://www.dudley.gov.uk/council--democracy/consultations>

The meeting ended at 8.30 pm

CHAIRMAN