

Select Committee on Lifelong Learning - 18 January 2006

Report of the Director of Children's Services

Overview of Children's Social Care Services

Purpose

1. To provide an overview of the responsibilities and service delivery of the Children's Social Care within the Directorate of Children's Services.

Background

2. From 1 October 2005 Children's Social Care which had previously been known as the Children and Families Division of the Directorate of Social Services was integrated into the Directorate of Children's Services under the line management of the Director of Children's Services.
3. The Division is led by the Assistant Director with a management team of 7 Heads of Service and is responsible for the delivery of services to improve outcomes for some of the most vulnerable children in the borough.
4. Specifically the Division responds to the needs of children who require support in some or all areas of their lives to prevent the need for more intrusive provision and allow them to be cared for within their families and communities. Wherever possible, children and their families are supported to access universal provisions within the community but some will need additional support services from time to time.
5. The Division has a key responsibility for child protection, for undertaking investigations and assessments where children have suffered or are likely to suffer significant harm and are in need of protection.
6. Where it is not possible for children to remain within their families, children may become looked after by the Local Authority either by agreement with their parents or through the making of a care order through the legal process. For these children, Members and employees of the Council have a collective Corporate Parenting responsibility to ensure that we improve their life chances and give them the opportunities we would wish for our own children.

Equally when looked after children leave care we have an ongoing responsibility to assist them into further education training and employment so they become successful adults within the community.

7. The Division delivers services to children from birth (pre-birth where there are known concerns relating to parents or previous history) to 18 and in the case of care leavers the responsibility extends up to the age of 24.
8. From 1 April 2004 the line management of the Youth Offending Service which is provided by a multi-agency team moved from Chief Executive to Children's Social Care.
9. The Local Authority is an approved adoption agency which has a responsibility to recruit prospective adoptive parents, make best interest decision for adoption for children who can no longer reside with their families and match them with suitable carers who also receive post adoption support. Children's Social Care discharges this function.
10. Children's Social Care is both a direct provider and commissioner of services within the private and voluntary sector and with key partner agencies.
11. The Division is currently configured into the following areas:-
 - **Assessment services** - We have a duty to undertake assessments of children in need referred to the Division. Four teams of fieldwork social workers and managers together with support staff provide the service through 3 duty/public access points at 25 St James Road, Dudley, Halesowen and Brierley Hill district offices. These teams work with children and families for up to 6 months and undertake initial child protection investigations and assessments.
 - **Care management** - Following assessment, cases will be transferred to Care Management teams if children:
 - need ongoing family support
 - are subject of care proceedings
 - are looked after
 - are on the child protection register

These services are provided by 4 social work teams, 2 in the north and 2 in the south of the Borough.

- **Children with Disabilities** - The Division has a specialist joint agency team with health for the provision of assessment and services for children with disabilities
- **16plus Team** - This is a specialist team for looked after children who are moving towards independence and require support to assist them in making the transition into adulthood.
- **Commissioning and Review** - This section provides independent reviewing officers who review the care plans for looked after children, chair Initial and Review Child Protection Conferences and chair complex Strategy Meetings, for example if there is an abuse of a position of trust such as a teacher or GP or if the child protection investigation involves a large number of children and perpetrators.

The section is responsible for the formulation of contracts and service agreements with providers, for commissioning support to service developments and for quality assurance.

The section maintains the Child Protection Register of which the Head of Service is the custodian, supports Dudley's Safeguarding Children Board and manages a jointly funded Child Protection Development Officer.

- **Children's Resources** - The Division provides placements for children who are looked after through 6 children's homes within the borough, a Fostering and Adoption service and a Residential Family Assessment Centre.

We directly provide family assessment and support services to children and families either in their own homes or through group work and individual support activities within the centre base, through a team of workers who have been specifically trained in preventative approaches. Children's Resources provide a range of in home support services to children with disabilities and their families.

Children's Resources Section manages the social workers who work with the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service, the Education Support Service (jointly with Education colleagues) and the Teenage Pregnancy Coordinator.

- **Youth Offending Service** - This is provided through a multi-agency team. It has a multi-agency management board which reports to the Safe and Sound Partnership. It has specific responsibilities to respond to young people who have come into conflict with the law and to prevent offending and re-offending. The service is a key partner within partnership developments for Children's Services.
12. At the present time Children's Social Care manages the provision of an out of hours service on behalf of social care for both adults and children.
 13. Children's Social Care has invested in a wide range of partnership initiatives. Staff within the Division are active participants in the Children and Young Peoples Partnership and its associated sub groups as well as a range of corporate initiatives. The Assistant Director chairs Dudley's Safeguarding Children Board which was established in April 2005.
 14. In the last Children's Inspection in 2004 the Division was judged to be 'serving some children well with promising prospects'. This was revised in the Annual Performance Assessment for 2005 to 'serving most children well with promising prospects.'

Finance

15. The approved budget for 2005/06 including grants is £18,604m. To this figure Social Service Directorate overheads of £2.13m are also added, giving a total budget of £20.734m.
16. Children's Social Care has a total workforce of 458.

Law

17. The legal framework for the delivery of services by Children's Social Care is set by the Children Act 1989, the Children Act 2004 and Adoption and Children Act 2002.
18. There is specific legislation governing the delivery of Youth Offending Services under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.

Equality Impact

19. The provision of services to children in need and vulnerable children contributes to improving outcomes and life chances for children so that they

are not disadvantaged by their family, social and economic circumstances. Services support children so that they have safe and secure attachments, placements and environments which enable them to achieve independence, economic well being and that they contribute to the development and sustainability of their communities and the borough.

Recommendation

20. That Members note the content of the report.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Freeman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J'.

John Freeman
Director of Children's Services

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