

SELECT COMMITTEE ON GOOD HEALTH

Tuesday, 16th November, 2004 at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT:-

Councillor Burt (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs Faulkner (Vice-Chairman)
Councillors Ali, Mrs. Aston, Boys, Bradney, Harley, Ms Partridge and
Miss. Nicholls

OFFICERS:-

The Head of Personnel and Support Services (Lead Officer to the Committee), Mr. S. Ward (Scrutiny Officer to the Committee), Director of Education and Lifelong Learning, Director of Social Services, Assistant Director of Education and Lifelong Learning (Access and Inclusion Division), Assistant Director of Social Services (Children and Families), Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Development and Environmental Protection), Mr. Sangian (Research Officer - Good Health) and Mr. Sanders (Directorate of Law and Property)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Mr. G.S. Barker - Patients Forums Representative
Mr. N.V.E. Harris - West Midlands Ambulance Service
Mr. R. Coverdale - Director of Strategy and Modernisation, Dudley Beacon and Castle Primary Care Trust

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MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on the 23rd September, 2004 and the Special Meeting held on the 6th October, 2004 be approved as a correct record and signed.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

A declaration of personal interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, was made by Councillor Bradney in Item No. 5 on the Agenda (Inclusion Strategy Action Plan Consultation), in view of his governorship of the Hillcrest School and Community College.

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APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of Councillors Musk and K. Turner.

INCLUSION STRATEGY ACTION PLAN CONSULTATION

A report of the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning was submitted on the formal consultation on the Action Plan on the Inclusion Strategy.

A presentation on the issue was given by the Assistant Director of Education and Lifelong Learning (Access and Inclusion) in which she explained the Cluster Schools approach, it was proposed would be adopted. This would involve provision for language and communication skills, moderate learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorder being provided for in four clusters across the Borough.

It was not viable economically, however, to provide for some areas of special educational needs on a cluster basis and the Assistant Director indicated the facilities that would remain or be provided for pupils with those needs. The latest consultation paper gave details of and named schools where changes in provision were proposed.

The key principles of the Action Plan were to provide for special education to be facilitated locally; to improve on provision in each category of school; to sustain high quality provision; and to attract and retain high quality staff.

In relation to funding, the Assistant Director referred to the Government Initiative "Building Schools for the Future", whereby capital expenditure would be made available for the rebuilding of all secondary schools in the country. While this would impact on the Inclusion Action Plan in that schools could be rebuilt to include special units, it was not yet known to what extent there would be such impact as the funding was likely to be phased.

A question and answer session followed in which the Assistant Director confirmed that the Local Education Authority was considering the issue of special educational provision strategically and that it was not seeking to close any schools, although it might be necessary to do so in certain instances; that a major aim was to re-align provision strategically in order to reduce travelling time for pupils with special educational needs and to make provision more local, thus reducing stress to parents; the current position regarding rebuilding proposals for the Hillcrest school, insofar as special educational needs facilities were concerned; and the nature and extent of the consultation. She also indicated Spring 2005 as the likely date for the submission of the Action Plan through the Council's decision-making machinery.

Reference was made to the availability of an impact assessment on the Action Plan from Birmingham University and it was considered advantageous that such an assessment should be carried out.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the report now submitted and the presentation given be received and noted.
- (2) That the Lead Member for Lifelong Learning be recommended that a full impact assessment on the model proposed for the future provision of special education in Dudley be commissioned from Birmingham University and considered by this Committee before the issue is referred to the Executive and the Council for determination.

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BREAST-FEEDING POLICY

A report of the Scrutiny Officer for Good Health was submitted seeking consideration of the application to Dudley of a breast-feeding policy for staff who wished to return to work, which had been implemented recently by Birmingham City Council.

RESOLVED

That the Lead Member for Personnel and Legal and Property be asked to consider and investigate the application of a similar model for employees of Dudley M.B.C. and that the policy be recommended also to the Health Agencies in the Borough.

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SOCIAL SERVICES PERFORMANCE

A report of the Director of Social Services was submitted inviting the Committee to scrutinise the Social Services performance of the Council in respect of the Social Services Directorate Improvement Plan 2003-07 (DIMP), Department of Health Performance Assessment Framework (PAF) and the Commission for Social Care Inspection Annual Review of Performance Letter dated the 24th September, 2004 (CSCI).

The DIMP had been developed as a four year plan in response to the report of the joint review of the Social Services Authority approved in February, 2003. Under the DIMP there were 52 objectives containing 226 actions across all the Directorate of Social Services's activity under five over-arching themes. The report now submitted indicated that 24 objectives and 153 actions had now been completed and summarised some of the achievements in connection therewith. In connection with this issue, the Director of Social Services confirmed that solid improvement was being made, particularly in the area of adult services.

With regard to PAF, a tabulation indicating performance against targets, which contained a commentary in relation to each respective issue, was appended to the report now submitted. Examples of good performance by the Directorate and the areas in which the Directorate and the Council were working on to improve performance were indicated in paragraphs 2.4.2 and 2.4.3 of the report, respectively. The latter related to the issues of direct payments, looked after children absent from school, the long-term stability of looked after children, adoptions of looked after children and the employment, education and training for care leavers.

In the question and answer session on this section of the report, in reply to a question on PAFD55, the Director of Social Services indicated that a major cause of the difficulty in filling vacancies for occupational therapists was that there were not enough places on courses nationally for the prospective occupational therapists to qualify. This service was, therefore, being re-designed so that lesser qualified assistants could carry out the less complex work under the supervision of an occupational therapist with the time available to the occupational therapist being reserved for clients with more difficult problems. Regarding PFPI161, the Corporate Board had approved a range of initiatives put forward to address the situation, which would involve the Council in providing direct employment opportunities for the young people affected, and which the Children's Champions Group would now take forward.

On the issue of PAFC24, an Action Plan was now in place for looked after children who were absent from school, with the result that matters were improving. The Director of Education and Lifelong Learning made the point that there was some inconsistency between Local Education Authorities in the nature of the statistical information collected and reported on in this subject area. In response to a question on the accommodation and support offered to care leavers, the Director of Social Services reported on the impact to larger centres of the current policy of providing such care in the home and explained the background and method of working of the multi-agency 16+ support team.

RESOLVED

That the report be received and information provided in response to questions noted.

A report of the Director of Social Services was submitted on the Action Plans arising from the inspections of Children's Services undertaken in July, 2004 and the inspections of the Fostering and Adoption services in Dudley, undertaken in January and May, 2004, respectively.

In relation to the Children's Services Inspection, the Council had retained its existing position on the assessment matrix indicating that some people were served well by the Directorate and that prospects for the further improvement of children's services in Dudley were promising. The Director of Social Services reported on the issues that required attention before the Commission on Social Care Inspection Team would be satisfied that most people in the Borough were well served. The Action Plan approved at the meeting of the Executive held on the 27th October, 2004 aimed at addressing these issues was appended to the report now submitted.

In relation to the Fostering Services inspection, the inspection had found that all standards were met or partially met and, in three instances, the standard had been exceeded. The inspection had identified seven requirements with which the Fostering Service needed to comply to fully meet the standards and good practice recommendations. The Action Plan for addressing the recommendations was appended to the report now submitted.

In relation to the Adoption Services inspection, the inspection had found that 15 standards had been fully met and that one had been exceeded. Nine standards were almost met and four standards were not met. The Action Plan aimed at addressing the latter issues was appended to the report now submitted.

In the discussion on the report, the Director of Social Services expanded on the contents of the Action Plans and the progress to date. She also expressed the view that the Social Services Inspectorate had misconstrued Dudley's position in relation to certain performance indicators and, in the case of the purchase of external placements, she challenged the criteria the Inspectorate had worked on.

In response to a question, the Director of Social Services indicated that the improvement plan for services to children with disabilities had been based on the work emanating from the joint review. More respite care for parents with children with disabilities was being provided and arrangements were being made with Sandwell for the provision of a joint facility. In reply to a further question in relation to the inspection of children's services, as to whether a facility existed for information sharing on the issue of carers with disabilities, the Head of Personnel and Support Services indicated that this was achieved through the Corporate Group for people with disabilities.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the report be received and the Action Plans supported

- (2) That the Director of Social Services report to the Chairman on the issue of services to children with disabilities to agree whether or not a further report to the Committee should be made.

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PROGRESS REPORTS ON THE WORK OF THE WORKING GROUPS

(At this juncture a declaration of personal interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct was made by Councillor Bradney in this item, in view of his wife being a client of the Wheelchair Service).

The Chairmen of the respective Working Groups reported orally on the work of the Maternity and Wheelchair Working Groups.

The Chairman of the Maternity Working Group reported on the bodies with which consultation was taking place with regard to the review of maternity, with these including the Primary Care Trust, the National Health Service and other associated organisations. Evidence on drug abuse had been received from MONA. Further evidence was being obtained from MENCAP and the National Children's Trust and Warehouse. Review would include the issue of domestic violence and evidence in this regard was being obtained from Surestart. Because of the weight of evidence, the date for the publication of the report was being deferred until January at the earliest.

In relation to the Wheelchair Working Group, the Project Team had been set up and the first meeting would be held in the next few days, at which a scoping report for consideration at the next meeting in January would be drawn up.

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WHITE PAPER ON HEALTH

The Chairman reported on the Executive Summary of the Government White Paper on health, which had only just been published. This included reference to health and obesity lifestyle issues.

Consideration was given to the manner in which this issue should be addressed, in response to which the Director of Social Services suggested a joint meeting between the Chairman and Chief Executives of relevant health agencies, the Chairman of this Committee and the relevant support officers to the Select Committee.

RESOLVED

That a report on this issue be made to meeting of the Committee in January.

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OSTEOPATHS

RESOLVED

That a report on the availability of Osteopaths, and the demand for the service, be submitted to this Committee in due course.

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CHRISTMAS

This being the last meeting of the Committee before Christmas, the Chairman wished Members and officers present, the compliments of the season.

The meeting ended at 7.50 p.m.

CHAIRMAN