

Meeting of the Council – 16th July, 2007

Annual Report of the Select Committee on Children's Services

Purpose

1. To consider the annual report of the Select Committee on Children's Services for the review of the 2006/07 year.

Background

2. Article 6 of the Council's Constitution requires Select Committees to report annually to the full Council on their workings and to make recommendations for future work programmes and amended working methods if appropriate. Select Committee Chairmen, at their meeting held on 26th October, 2006 agreed that the annual report of the Select Committee on Children's Services be made to the July meeting of the Council.
3. The start of the 2006/07 Municipal Year marked the transformation of the former Lifelong Learning Select Committee into the new Select Committee on Children's Services with the following Terms of Reference:-

"To fulfil all of the overview and scrutiny functions of a Select Committee as they relate to Children's Services and, in particular, the functions and responsibilities of the Council under the Children Act 2004 and associated regulations and guidance, including:-

- (a) *The roles and responsibilities of relevant partners;*
- (b) *Listening to and involving children.*

With the objective of improving the well-being of all children in the Council's area by developing the "Every Child Matters" outcomes."

4. Given the size and makeup of its membership, the Select Committee perpetuated its predecessor's procedure of establishing Dedicated Working Groups to undertake detailed scrutiny and review. The following Working Groups met several times during the year:-

Corporate Parenting – to scrutinise arrangements for discharging the Council's corporate parent responsibilities including "Out of Borough" placements.

School Support – to ensure schools receive appropriate support and advice from the Council.

Health Issues – to discharge the Council’s statutory responsibility for Health Scrutiny in relation to Children and Young People.

Listening to Children and Young People – an informal group, including children and young people representatives and others to engage with and consult young people.

5. The Committee also appointed a dedicated Working Group to review the consultation procedures for school closures (see paragraph 9(g)).
6. As well as addressing the broader “Every Child Matters” Agenda and Outcomes, viz:-
 - Be Healthy
 - Stay Safe
 - Enjoy and Achieve
 - Make A Positive Contribution
 - Achieve Economic Well-Being

the Committee (and Working Groups) also considered three Key National and local issues:-

- Improving Outcomes for Looked After Children;
 - Reducing Teenage Pregnancies;
 - Managing Out of Borough Placements
7. 2006/07 was also the first full year of operation of the new Children’s Services Directorate and the Select Committee and its Working Groups (see paragraph 4) devoted time to assimilating and reviewing its wider responsibilities for Children’s Social Care and associated services.
 8. The Committee work programme for the 2006/07 Municipal Year included:-
 - Proposed School Closures
 - Compliments and Complaints Procedures
 - Equality and Diversity Annual Report and Plans
 - Joint Area Review Outcomes and Action Plan
 - Green Paper – “Care Matters”
 - Capital Strategy
 - Setting Priorities with DFES and local Partners
 - Youth Service Inspection Report and Action Plan
 - Local Area Agreements
 - Children and Young Persons Plan
 - Revenue Budget Strategy 2007/08 – 2009/10
 - Schools Budgets
 - Standards Report – Performance Data
 - Quarterly Performance Monitoring

9. The following issues from the Committee's Work Plan are worthy of specific mention:-
- (a) Joint Area Review (JAR) – The overall assessment of which graded Children's Services in Dudley as good, Grade 3 on a scale of 1 – 4 where 4 is outstanding. This places the Authority well into the upper quartile of local authority areas that have been inspected under the JAR Framework. The Committee were extremely pleased to see the outcome of the review, which also made recommendations for improvement. The Committee will review the implementation of those recommendations, one of which, for example - Improving Access to the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) – has already been considered by the Health Issues Working Group. Other recommendations related to physical health of children and young people, improving outcomes at both the foundation stage and post 16, implementing the agreed special education needs strategy and increased provision of programmes to prepare young people for employment.
 - (b) Outcomes for Looked After Children – By most measures, outcomes for looked after children in the Borough are improving, but more needs to be done. Following concerns about the failure to meet targets for Personal Education Plans (PEP) for Looked After Children, the Committee has been monitoring closely the implementation of an action plan in this area and notes gradual improvement. Both as Corporate Parent and the largest employer in the Borough, the Committee believes the Authority needs to take a clearer lead in offering work placements to children in care and will monitor the issue, and others in relation to looked after children, closely in the future.
 - (c) Teenage Pregnancy – Central Government has set ambitious and challenging targets to reduce the levels of teenage pregnancy by 2010 and strict targets for reduction in the Borough have been included in the Local Area Agreement. It is pleasing to note that the levels of teenage pregnancy in the Borough are reducing in line with local targets, although the achievement of targets for future years will require more targeted and intensive work.
 - (d) School Performance in 2006 and Key Stage Results – Where Dudley continue to achieve at or just above the national average in most measures.
 - (e) Youth Service OFSTED Inspection Report – Which concluded that overall the Authority provides an adequate youth service for its users and offers satisfactory value for money. The review identified a number of strengths and a range of areas for development. The Committee will monitor the implementation of the improvement action plan.
 - (f) Support for Schools – Through its Working Group on School Support, the Committee continued to monitor and review the support provided to schools, focusing on the outcome of school Ofsted reports and feedback from headteachers and governors. Out of a total of 35 school Ofsted reports considered, 13 schools and 1 sixth form were judged "Satisfactory", 15 schools and 1 sixth form were judged "Good" and 1 school and 1 sixth form were judged "Outstanding". The Working Group monitored progress on the 2

schools issued with Notices to Improve and the 1 school in Special Measures. Overall the Working Group were pleased to congratulate the schools concerned on their performance levels and noted generally excellent support for schools from the local authority.

- (g) Review of Consultation on School Closures – We undertook the review at the request of the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services and make a number of recommendations about the optimum period for consultation (and the follow-on representation period), the detail which should be included in consultation documentation, how the consultation should be brought into the public domain, what specific consultation activity should be undertaken and who should be consulted. Our recommendations are presently being considered by the Director of Children’s Services and the Cabinet Member and we look forward to improvements in the policy being implemented.
- (h) Listening to Children and Young People – The Working Group met three representative groups of children and young people – Members of the UK Youth Parliament, the Youth Council and Decision Making Kids – to hear about the work undertaken across the Borough and at regional and national levels, to make sure that children and young peoples’ voices are heard. The Working Group also received the results and conclusions of work undertaken in the Borough on how children and young people want to be heard and listened to by policy and decision makers. Training events, run by Dudley children and young people, to help managers and senior staff understand how children and young people want to be listened to and involved in service delivery, are being planned.

10. Conclusion

Although 2006/07 has been a transition year for the Select Committee, we have been able to maintain our focus on the key and important “Education Issues” whilst at the same time, beginning positively to address the broader children’s issues and particularly the “Every Child Matters” outcomes. The Committee’s Work Plan for 2007/08, which will build on the work undertaken in 2006/07, will therefore include:-

- JAR Improvement Plan
- Integrated Youth Provision and Targeted Youth Provision within Dudley
- Outcomes for Looked After Children
- School Performance and Support to Schools
- Reducing Teenage Pregnancy.

Finance

11. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report at this stage.

Law

12. The requirement for the Committee to make an annual report to the Council is contained in Article 6 of the Constitution.
13. The relevant statutory provisions regarding the Council’s Constitution are contained in Part II of the Local Government Act 2000, together with Regulations, Orders and

Statutory Guidance issued by the Secretary of State.

Equality Impact

14. The Committee has taken equality and diversity issues into account whilst scrutinising the areas of work described, particularly in relation to front-line service delivery and issues such as attendance and exclusion and engagement of potentially disenfranchised groups in normal service delivery.
15. The work of the Select Committee in 2006/07 was targeted at services for children and young people and their views were heard and considered in the Committee's deliberations.

Recommendation

16. That the annual report of the Select Committee for the review of the 2006/07 year, as set out above, be approved.



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CHAIRMAN OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN'S SERVICES