

SELECT COMMITTEE ON LIFELONG LEARNING

Wednesday 18th January, 2006 at 6.00pm
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Councillor Mrs Ridney (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs Dunn (Vice Chairman)
Councillors Boys, Mrs Coulter, Hart, Johnston, Mrs Pearce, Rahman,
Rogers, Ryder and Wright; Mrs Capell and Mr Hatton; Mr Dudley and Mr
Smith; Mr Nottingham and Mrs Simms

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Councillor Vickers – Cabinet Member for Lifelong Learning

OFFICERS

The Director of Finance (As Lead Officer to the Committee), The Director
of Children's Services and the Assistant Directors of Children's Services
(School Effectiveness) and (Children's Social Care) and Mr Sanders
(Directorate of Law and Property)

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MINUTES

It was reported that the minutes of the Special Meeting of the Committee
held on 16th January, 2006 would be submitted to the next meeting of the
Committee.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No member declared a personal or prejudicial interest, in accordance with
the Members' Code of Conduct, in respect of any item to be considered at
this meeting.

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APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of Mr
Guest, Mrs Hewitt-Clarkson and Mrs Roe.

OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES

A report of the Director of Children's Services giving an overview of the responsibilities and service delivery of children's social care within the Directorate of Children's services was submitted.

The Children and Families Division of the former Directorate of Social Services had been integrated into the Directorate of Children's Services from 1st October 2005 to deal with children's social care and the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Children's Social Care) gave a presentation on the key responsibilities of the division. These included those for child protection, the delivery of services to children from birth to the age of 18 and, in the case of care leavers, up to the age of 24, line management of the youth offending service, the responsibilities of the Council as approved adoption agency as both a direct provider and commissioner of services with the private and voluntary sector and key partner agencies on children's social care issues. The division was currently configured into teams dealing with those specific work areas and a summary of the tasks involved in the respective areas and the staffing engaged on them was given in the presentation.

A question and answer session followed in which the Assistant Director indicated the current position regarding the allocation of looked after children to a qualified social worker. The Assistant Director also reported on the methodology of monitoring such allocations. The Lead Officer to the Committee referred to looked after children as being one of the most significant issues on which the Select Committee was required to be satisfied as to performance and indicated that reports on the issue would be submitted to the Committee over the year. In response to questions on looked after children whom were placed in the Borough from other authorities, the Assistant Director explained the procedures involved regarding notification.

At the conclusion of the presentation, the Director of Children's Services suggested that, to familiarise themselves with this area of work, the Committee might wish to visit relevant establishments over the year.

RESOLVED

That the report and the presentation be received and noted.

ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND THE JOINT AREA REVIEW

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on the Annual Performance Assessment of Children's Services (APA) and the Joint Area Review, concentrating particularly on the process for the APA and feedback received following it and advising the Committee of the preparations for the forthcoming Joint Area Review of Children's Services which was scheduled for March, 2006. A presentation on these issues was given by the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Children's Social Care), in which she made specific reference to the gradings awarded to the Council under the APA in relation to contribution to children's, education and social care services in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people and for the Council's overall capacity to improve its services for children and young people, all of which were rated at grade 3. Key areas of good performance and areas for improvement were summarised in paragraphs 11 and 12 of the report, respectively. It was indicated in paragraph 13 that the APA letter had concluded that, as an Authority, Dudley was aware of its strengths and weaknesses.

In relation to the role the Select Committee should play in scrutinising services, the Lead Officer to the Committee indicated that this needed to be captured in scrutiny of improvement plans. The Director of Children's Services indicated that this was a matter that would be considered by the Terms of Reference Working Group in recommending the allocation of the Committee's work. A report containing the recommendations of the working group would be submitted to a future meeting. The Assistant Director of Education (School Effectiveness) drew attention to the continued need to keep under review issues concerning school attendance and absences in term time and indicated the intention that reports on these issues would be submitted to Committee on a regular basis. Reference was made by the Chairman to training that might be necessary for members on certain aspects, including mental health issues.

Regarding the Joint Area Review, the Committee noted the key elements and the timescales involved and the Director of Children's Services reported on the six key areas selected by the APA for scrutiny.

In the question and answer session that followed, the Assistant Director of Children's Services (School Effectiveness) indicated that a report providing an evaluation of provision to 19 year olds would be submitted later in the year and would indicate performance against targets. Attention was drawn to the need for a regular review of out of borough placements, in response to which the Director of Children's Services stated that it was important that provision was made within the Borough as far as possible as there could be difficulties for a child placed outside the Borough when that child returned.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the report and the presentation be received and noted.
- (2) That the information provided to the APA on the Council's self assessment, as referred to in paragraph 13 of the report now submitted, be circulated to the Committee.

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REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF FOUNDATION STAGE EDUCATION
WITHIN DUDLEY BOROUGH

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on the quality of education provided by schools at private, voluntary and independent settings for children in the Borough in the age range of 3-6 years. (the 'Foundation' stage)..

The report indicated the settings in which the foundation stage curriculum was delivered in the Borough and the nature of the curriculum, as recommended in the guidance from the Department for Education and Skills; referred to the manner in which transfer to reception was effected; and described the way in which the Directorate of Children's Services provided support to the private, voluntary and independent sector in the provision of foundation stage education. Reference was made to the support given by Early Years Advisers and development officers in the Early Years Childcare team and the role of the Quality Assurance Scheme, 'Growing Together'.

OFSTED was responsible for the inspection of the quality of education in primary schools. For private and voluntary sector settings, direct responsibility lay with the settings themselves, together with OFSTED. There was a requirement for those organisations receiving Nursery Education Grant that certain quality standards were met. The report summarised the nature of the inspection framework.

In the discussion on this item, the Director of Children's Services described the Council's role as lead agency for Children's Services provided by the Council, the voluntary sector and other agencies. He indicated the intention that, in future, the terms of reference of the Select Committee dealing with children's issues would have regard to the quality of foundation stage education. He also indicated the proposal of Government that, under the Children Bill, the Sure Start Grant would be incorporated within the Revenue Support Grant.

In relation to Appendix 3 to the report, the Assistant Director of Children's Services (School Effectiveness) submitted a correction to describe the performance of Tenterfields Primary School as very good.

RESOLVED

That, subject to the correction to Appendix 3 submitted by the Assistant Director of Children's Services (School Effectiveness) in respect of Tenterfields Primary School, the report be received and noted.

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REVENUE BUDGET STRATEGY 2006/07

A joint report of the Director of Children's Services and Director of Finance was submitted consulting the Committee on the proposed revenue budget and Council Tax for 2006/07.

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet's budget proposals for 2006/07 be received and noted but that the Cabinet be notified that some aspects of the Children's Services budget may have to be revisited later in the year, particularly in the field of out of Borough placements, in view of the substantial reduction of the budget for Children's Services in real terms in 2006/07.

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QUARTERLY CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT

A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee was submitted on the performance of the Council in respect of matters under the responsibility of this Select Committee, for the second quarter of 2005/06. No particular issues were drawn to attention.

RESOLVED

That the report be received.

The meeting ended at 8.15 pm

CHAIRMAN
SLL/41