

UPDATE ON EFFECTIVENESS OF QUADRANTS

Report of the Director of Children, Schools and Families

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1. Purpose of the report

- To update Scrutiny committee on the outcome of the Quadrant Scrutiny Meetings.
- To make proposals for future Scrutiny on the effectiveness of Quadrant working.

2. Summary

The report outlines:

- The meetings held in the Quadrants.
- Issues raised.
- Proposals for future work.

3. Conclusions

Members are invited to comment on the report and agree recommendations on the way forward.

4. Background

- 4.1** A report to Scrutiny Committee was received on 22 January 2003. This report outlined an overview of progress in delivering direct services to children and families since 2001 and provided detailed information on three key areas of work which are high profile and represent cross professional working.
- 4.2** It was agreed that further scrutiny of Quadrant data, issues and challenges would be organised for groups of Members meeting front line staff and managers in each Quadrant.

5. Member Visits

Member visits took place in each of the Quadrants during April and May. The Twilight sessions followed a consistent framework namely:

- An overview report and briefing from the Quadrant Manager.
- Presentation of 3 case examples on Child Protection, Special Educational Needs and Attendance, by front line staff.
- Discussion of issues and challenges and questions from Members.

6. Key Issues Arising from the Quadrant Manager Overview Report

- 6.1** There was an acknowledgement that there have been many challenges over the past 2 years but that Quadrants have continued to provide good quality services and the benefits of CSF are to be seen.
- 6.2** Benefits discussed included:
- Casework benefiting from different professional groups working together with a common purpose and aims.
 - Staff learning about each other's roles and responsibilities and cases are now "ours" not the responsibility of Social Services or Education.
 - Unified Casework Framework is making a difference i.e. role of the Case Co-ordinator, Oracle data base etc.
 - Improved working with Client Services resulting in quicker response to handling referrals.
 - Preventative work established e.g. CSF Workers in schools.
- 6.3** There is still much to be done but the structures and systems are in place to enable the aims of CSF to be achieved.

7. Key Issues Arising From Visits

A number of themes were raised across the Quadrant meetings as follows:

7.1 Timescales for Statements of Special Educational Needs

The scrutiny report indicated that timescales for completing the Statements were met for 100% cases if we included exceptions.

The exceptions were delays in receiving information from Health colleagues. This delay was raised as a concern as the failure of Health to provide timely information was delaying appropriate support for children and meant CSF was not always meeting national targets.

7.2 Volume of Work and Thresholds for Intervention

Each Quadrant reported between 350 and 500 social care referrals being received each month.

To manage the volume priority had to be given to responding to children at risk of harm. Children not at risk but who would benefit from family support were waiting for Social Work Services.

7.3 Recruitment and Retention of Qualified Staff

The overview report in each Quadrant outlined the vacancies of qualified staff. Members discussed the issue of experienced staff leaving (often to promoted posts within CSF or to other Authorities) and being replaced by inexperienced staff who require considerable mentoring, coaching and training. This was impacting on Quadrants' ability to allocate work not deemed 'high risk'.

7.4 Children out of School

A number of issues arose in relation to attendance and exclusions.

7.5 Many schools record attendance electronically and either send Education Welfare Officers their returns or allow the EWO to inspect their registrations. However, a small number of schools have been resistant to this and EWO's have not been able to closely monitor electronic attendance records and intervene at an early stage.

7.6 Considerable discussion was generated about "Education Otherwise" and the role of the LEA. Parents can chose to educate children at home, are not required to follow the National Curriculum and the LEA powers of inspection are limited.

7.7 Members expressed concern at the difficulty in finding places for excluded pupils and casual admissions. Members expressed the expectation that the Behaviour and Achievement Strategy and new funding would impact on this problem.

7.8 Risk to Staff

A number of cases presented highlighted the complexity of work, the link between risk to children and parental violence, drug or alcohol abuse or mental illness. Members were concerned about the impact on staff.

7.9 Accommodation

Apart from West Quadrant, all Quadrants are on split sites which can pose difficulties for teams – feelings of isolation, increased travelling, lack of close collaboration with staff in other teams, accessibility to managers and finance staff etc.

7.10 IT Systems

Staff reported lack of access to PC's and initial difficulties experienced with the Oracle System.

7.11 A number of local issues and questions were dealt with during the meeting or subsequently as casework matters.

8. Proposed Way Forward

8.1 Further scrutiny on any of the issues identified (or others) could be organised by a topic group of the Scrutiny Committee. This would create an opportunity to carry the scrutiny forward and examine in more detail issues raised.

8.2 A rolling programme of Scrutiny of Quadrants could be put in place by having an annual event in each Quadrant in the Spring, areas of concern identified for a working group and reporting back to Scrutiny Committee annually in the Autumn.

9. Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising out of this report.

10. Rural Issues

None.

Background papers used in this report

Report to Scrutiny Committee 22 January 2003 on the Effectiveness of Quadrants.