

ANNUAL SOCIAL SERVICES CONFERENCE 2004

Report By: Head of Social Care (Children)

Wards Affected

County wide

Purpose

1. To report the business discussed at the Annual Social Services Conference held in Newcastle, 20th – 22nd October 2004.

Financial Implications

None

Background

2. The Social Services conference this year was under the theme, "Communities that Care, Services that deliver". This is the major conference of the social care calendar. Its participants are Directors of Social Care, Councillors from many local authorities and representatives from the wide-ranging groups in the voluntary and independent sectors. It is jointly run by the Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS) and the Local Government Association (LGA). The October meeting marks the end and beginning of the term of office of President of the ADSS (a current serving Director of Social Services) and is the opportunity for discussing and debating a whole series of issues, which form the backdrop of the social care environment.
3. The attendees from Herefordshire were Councillors Mrs M.D. Lloyd-Hayes, Mrs J.A. Hyde; the Director of Social Care and Strategic Housing, Sue Fiennes and the Head of Social Care (Children), Henry Lewis. The Council's presence was further felt by being one of the authorities that had a five minute film on work going on in Herefordshire, "Independence Matters". This Committee saw an early version at its last meeting. The film was shown throughout the conference before main sessions and will be shown to this Committee at the meeting.
4. Policy and practice have a central role in the shape and content of the conference. Government ministers regularly address conference (this year Rt Hon Charles Clarke, Secretary of State for Education and Skills and Rt Hon John Reid, Secretary of State for Health) as well as spokespersons from across the political spectrum. Dominant themes are often evident in the conferences. This year the profile of the changes in children's services was high as well as discussion of the implications of this for the shape and delivery of social care on the local authority. This was demonstrated in speeches from the Ministers.

5. The Conference format is divided into whole conference plenary sessions and a series of policy sessions, which attempt to cover a spectrum of social care topics. The Herefordshire delegation tried to cover as many areas as possible which included diverse topics such as Safeguarding children; arrangements for leaving hospital; approaches to commissioning services; the new arrangements for performance management and inspection; issues concerning the training of the workforce; mental health; privately fostered children as well as looking at the implications for social care with the changes envisaged as a result of the children act.
6. Throughout the three days of the Conference there is a large “market place” opportunity for social care providers to show what they are doing in providing services across the whole range of needs. These range from nationally known organisations such as NSPCC and MENCAP to smaller organisations who may be providing specialist functions. It is an opportunity to learn more, make contacts and follow up at a later date.
7. The conference is also an opportunity for policy comments to be made by Government. This year was the first time that one session was shared with another conference, the Chief Education Officers. Mr Clarke addressed both social care and education leaders on the new role expected from local authorities in leading the changes in children services in the next few years. This was a significant session as from next year many authorities (as Herefordshire) will have combined the functions of education and children’s social services in to the role of Director of Children’s Services. The Secretary of State emphasised the challenges of a local and central government partnership if there was to be effective leadership in bringing about the changes for children as envisaged in the green paper Every Child Matters.
8. Whilst the children agenda was a dominant theme in Newcastle, the Head of Social Care (Children) will try to reflect some of the other themes that the conference considered in a presentation to the Committee.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the report be noted.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- None