
OVERVIEW OF SOCIAL SERVICES PORTFOLIO

1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work under my Social Services Portfolio :-

a) Fostering Inspection

The report of the second annual inspection of Darlington Borough Council's fostering service was reported to Cabinet on 24th August 2004.

The National Care Standards Commission undertook the inspection earlier in the year, as part of the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000, the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services, the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, and the Children Act 1989 (as amended).

The overall judgement for the fostering service was that :

- This local authority provides a well-established fostering service, which places children with foster carers on both a long-term and a short-term basis;
- The service actively recruits foster carers;
- Documentation is in place as required, which demonstrates that the agency is functioning appropriately. Liaison with all other relevant agencies takes place on an ongoing basis; and
- The service is able to offer robust psychological support to children and foster carers and this service is of real benefit and value to service users and fostering social workers.

Cabinet noted the findings and recommendations of the report and approved the Fostering Service Action Plan and Statement of Purpose, as all regulatory requirements were met, and good practice recommendations were made to address minor deficiencies.

b) Teenage Pregnancy Strategy Assessment Feedback for 2003-2004

A summary of the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy Assessment Feedback for 2003 – 2004 was presented to Cabinet on 24th August 2004.

Overall the report was satisfactory, noting Darlington's good progress towards the national target with our achieving currently a 26% decrease in under-18 conceptions compared to the 1998 baseline. Nationally, the 2004 target is 15% but due to our original high rate, a 10% target was accepted. This exceeds the 10% target we were set.

Key points from the summary are as follows :

- The relationship with key strategic partners has this year been greatly strengthened;
- Work in schools, especially that undertaken by school nurses is to be commended;
- Good progress has been made in primary care settings, pharmacies and community venues with regard to accessibility of contraception and sexual health information for young people;
- School nurses are again commended for their work in establishing advisory services in schools and developing a new substantial teenage health clinic;
- Multi-agency approaches to housing needs of young parents, is very good and excellent progress has been made in the new supported housing project at Grace Court;
- Support has been improved and offered to young parents, especially with the development of a joint post in partnership with Sure Start to also cover non-Sure Start areas;
- Child care issues and the progress around education, employment and training is slow and needs prioritising;
- The work around development of parenting skills provided by the school nurse team and health visitors is commended;
- Financial contributions made by multi-agency partners, especially from supporting people to support strategy implementation is good;
- 2004/05 actions addressing the needs of boys and young men, ethnic minority groups and links with the secure unit are good;
- It is anticipated that in 2006, the ring fencing of the current £102,000 LIF grant will be removed. The expectation is that Teenage Pregnancy Programmes and Services will then be jointly commissioned, with mainstream funding, by Children's Services Authorities including the Primary Care Trust; and

- The Regional Assessment Panel felt that there is disproportionate expenditure on co-ordination relative to the 04/05 allocation and would expect that having made the Co-ordinator post permanent and extended the responsibilities to cover 2 days per week on sexual health and HIV work, consideration should be given to ensure that extra support is directed towards the effective delivery of the action plan.

Cabinet resolved that the continuation of the current arrangements and the multi-agency implementation of Darlington's Teenage Pregnancy Strategy, be supported, as the feedback from the Teenage Pregnancy unit is positive and Darlington is making good progress towards the aims of the National Strategy.

c) Youth Offending Service Annual Report

The annual performance position of the Youth Offending Service (YOS) for the year April 2003 - March 2004, was presented to Cabinet on 24th August 2004.

The Youth Justice Board (YJB) for England and Wales closely monitors the performance of the YOS on a quarterly and annual basis. The performance is also monitored locally by the Darlington Thematic Partnership (Community Safety). The YJB uses 17 Indicators and 13 Performance Measures to assess performance, 11 of these are monitored on a quarterly basis and 2 on an annual basis. The annual Performance Measures refer to reducing burglary and vehicle crime and to reducing re-offending by young people in Darlington. The YJB scores and ranks all 154 youth offending services nationally.

Darlington YOS has been ranked 1st along with 26 other services for the year April 2003 to March 2004.

d) Authorisation of Approved Social Workers

Further to the duties of the Social Services Authority to comply with Section 114 of the Mental Health Act 1983, 3 Officers within the Social Services Department were given authorisation by Cabinet as Approved Social Workers for a further five year period.

e) Opening of Grace Court

I attended the official opening of Grace Court on 3rd August 2004. Grace Court is a new housing development purpose built for young mothers with babies, and is part of the wider strategy in Darlington led by the Primary Care Trust to tackle the large number of teenage pregnancies in the area.

g) Corporate Parenting & Child Protection Panel

I have sat on the above panel which was recently set up to oversee child protection issues within Darlington, following recommendations from the Victoria Climbié Inquiry.

h) Social Services / Education Meetings

I continue to meet with the Directors of Education and Social Services and the Portfolio holder for Education. These meetings will highlight more joint working areas as we move to a Children's Services as outlined in the 'Every Child Matters' Green Paper.

Councillor Eleanor Lister
Cabinet Member with Social Services Portfolio