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**OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES PORTFOLIO**

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1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the areas of work under my Children's Services Portfolio: -

(a) Targeted Capital Fund 2005

On Wednesday 12th October 2005, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) wrote to the Director of Children's Services announcing the results of the 2006-2009 Targeted Capital Fund. Nationally the total allocation spread across 90 successful local authorities amounts to £1.1 billion, and is part of a schools' capital allocation of some £5.5 billion this year, rising to £6.3 billion by 2007-08. Hummersknott School and Language College was successful with the bid and was awarded £11,632,800 to be matched with Council funding of £2,736,152 and DfES formulaic capital funding of £172,048. The total investment in the school will reach £14.541m. Funding allocations will be phased over the three-year period 2006-07 to 2008-09 in the proportions 25%, 50% and 25%. Carmel RC Technology College was also successful with its bid and was awarded £9,115,200 to be matched with Governor contributions of £1,012,800, equating to a total funding for the project of £10.128m. The recent funding secured to invest in the physical infrastructure of our secondary estate will contribute to delivering tremendous improvements in the environments in which our teachers teach and our children learn.

(b) Proposal for an Academy for Darlington

In October, the DfES invited Darlington Borough Council to submit an Expression of Interest in the Academies programme to create a new City Academy to replace the existing Hurworth and Eastbourne Schools respectively. An Expression of Interest is the first formal stage a Council proposing to develop an Academy must complete. While an academy was not the basis of our original bid for funding, the Council is confident that it offers a fantastic opportunity to create an environment that will provide an excellent education for our children. Following on from the development of Darlington Education Village and over £24 million of investment into Hummersknott and Carmel Schools respectively (see above), an Academy offers an important opportunity to deliver further secondary school transformation in the Borough.

(c) Parenting Contracts & Parenting Orders

The Council is in the process of consulting Schools, Governors and Members around the possible introduction of parenting contracts and parenting orders to help to address children's behaviour in schools. This work will complement the work developed last year around parenting orders to improve school attendance. The Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003 introduced new powers for Local Authorities and schools

to enter into a parenting contract and parenting orders to help address children's behaviour and attendance at school. Officers are currently competing some further work with the DfES around when parenting contracts or orders might be implemented.

(d) Connexions Service in Darlington

Members have approved proposals to proceed with plans for the disaggregation of the Tees Valley Connexions Company and delegate activity to Local Authorities. Connexions Tees Valley is a successful sub regional company delivering services to support information, advice and guidance for young people. The disaggregation of Connexions presents an opportunity in Darlington to ensure that Connexions services for young people are planned and delivered in line with those of Children's Services.

(e) Response to Government Consultation Green Paper "Youth Matters"

The Council has responded to the Government's Green Paper "Youth Matters". The proposals aim to radically re-shape services for young people through the provision of an Integrated Youth Support Service. This will involve a range of related services including the Youth Service, Connexions, Voluntary Sector and other mainstream services. It gives young people a say on modelling services, providing better information, advice and guidance on those issues which really matter to them. The integrated Youth Support Service will also ensure that young people with more serious problems receive an integrated package of support.

2. The Youth Service continues to develop and improve its services, and I list below recent activities and developments.

(a) Recruitment of 6 part-time Youth Support Workers to be deployed in centres and projects – The Youth Service is developing a 'pool' of trained staff who can work flexibly across the Borough in supporting youth clubs and projects.

(b) Young People's Achievement Event on 16th September – presentation of peer education certificates to young people from Hurworth and Branksome Schools and screening of 'Every Child Matters' video (as prepared by young people from a range of centres/projects). This video was presented to the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee on 18th October.

(c) The Youth Service budget has increased by £340,000 from 2006-07 to meet national Resourcing Excellent Youth Services standards. All of this resource will be dedicated to front-line delivery staff and plans are currently being prepared to consider the most effective and appropriate way to deploy the resource across the Borough.

(d) The Youth Service worked in partnership with the Northern Echo, Darlington Partnership, and Alpha Radio to stage the 11th Annual Vibe Awards. These took place event at the Civic Theatre on 4th October. This annual awards ceremony celebrates the achievements of local young people. The awards were considered to be hugely successful as it hosted the largest participation in recent years. In total, 138 young people aged between 8 – 19 years were nominated by members of the public covering a range of categories including Drama and Music, Art, Sport, Contribution

to the Community, and achievements Against All Odds.

(e) Completion of Post Ofsted Improvement Plan which was passed to, and signed off by, the Government Office North East. This Plan will be implemented between now and July 2006.

(f) Continued involvement to developing Borough-wide Youth Strategy. There have been a series of agency meetings leading up to a major consultation session with young people planned for 3rd December. It is intended that information gained from this consultation session will support and inform the development of the Youth Strategy through to completion in June 2006.

(g) A presentation of Duke of Edinburgh Awards took place on 31st October hosted by the Worshipful the Mayor and attended by young people and parents. 16 certificates were awarded to members of the Open Award Group, including 3 gold awards. This was a high profile event to recognise these young people's commitment and achievement.

(h) On 2nd November an event entitled "Politics Rocks" took place, to mark the beginning of the electoral process for the UK Youth Parliament (UKYP). The event offered young people the opportunity to hear more about UKYP, to meet the present incumbent Member of UKYP and to register as a candidate for the elections planned for February 2006.

### 3. Education White Paper

On 25th October 2005, the Department for Education and Skills published the Schools White Paper "Higher Standards, Better Schools for All - More Choice for Parents and Pupils". This important document highlights the future vision for education nationally, and its implications for the Local Authority will be assessed and be the subject of a report to be presented to a future Cabinet.

### 4. Visits and Meetings since last Council

16th September – meeting with school improvement officer responsible for national secondary strategy. Visit to the safeguarding children team at Central House and informative discussion on Family Group Conferences. A visit to Beaumont Hill School to meet teaching staff and pupils.

20th September – I attended and gave a speech at the Digital Video Showcase event at Carmel RC Technology College.

23rd September – I met with the Director of Children's Services and the Chairs and Joint Chairs of the Lifelong Learning and Social Affairs & Health Scrutiny Committees to discuss joint work. I met with managers to discuss Youth Service Data, and the Youth Strategy, also a joint meeting with the senior managers in Youth Service and Cabinet Member for Leisure

30th September – met with senior school improvement officer at the Centre for Teaching and Learning. A very interesting meeting with the newly appointed Chief Executive of Co Durham & Darlington Fire & Rescue Service, Ms Susan Johnson.

This took place at the Pupil Referral Unit where we discussed issues of fire safety and prevention with the students and Ms Johnson. Met with Pam Eccles and Terry Dabbs from the regional Learning and Skills Council, to discuss improving services for young people.

7th October – I was pleased to attend the official opening of Harrowgate Hill Primary School, which was conducted by the Rt Hon Alan Milburn MP. The facilities at the new school are very impressive, and it was a wonderful opportunity to view the buildings and meet with teaching staff and pupils.

20th October – National Social Services and LGA Education Conference for 2005. This 3 day event took place in Birmingham this year, and I was pleased to be able to attend for one of the days. This was the first “joint” conference, following the Children Act 2004 and the requirement for local authorities to establish a stand alone Children’s Services. A series of plenary sessions took place and it gave me the opportunity to increase my knowledge of children’s services issues nationally and to meet with counterparts in other authorities.

28th October – I joined the Director’s regular meeting with Pam Eccles and Liz Orr from the Learning & Skills Council. I also attended a joint meeting with the Director of Children’s Services, and the Chair and Chief Executive of Darlington Primary Care Trust was very useful to discuss joint health issues for children in the Borough.

31st October – I met with managers to discuss the Aim Higher initiative; met with senior managers regarding the Youth Strategy; met with officers in the Children’s Services department generally. Attended as an observer the Lifelong Learning and Scrutiny Committee.

10th November – I attended a national network meeting for all Elected Lead Members for Children’s Services held in London and hosted jointly by the Improvement and Development Agency (I&DeA), and the Audit Commission. The Senior National Advisor for Children’s Services from the I&DeA set the scene of the “current landscape” nationally, followed by a session on supporting lead members with the “Every Child Matters” programme – this was led by the Programme Director for Children’s Services at the LGA. A commissioning workshop took place to consider a range of issues affecting lead members, including how do local communities establish what they need to commission, and what support do elected members need to ensure commissioning guidance is in place and followed. These were most useful in my training and development for my key statutory role. The afternoon sessions dealt with leadership, and each local authority’s Annual Performance Assessment and Joint Area Reviews – this was led by the Audit Commission.

**Councillor Chris McEwan**  
**Cabinet Member with Children’s Services Portfolio**