

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

14th September, 2009

PRESENT – Councillor Hughes (in the Chair); Councillors Armstrong, Burton, Curry, Davies, Francis, Galletley, Long, J. Lyonette and Richmond.

(7)

APOLOGIES – Councillor Lister.

ALSO – Councillor Chapman (Cabinet Member) and Mr. B. Morehead (Member of the Public).

STATUTORY CO-OPTees – Mr. M. Frank. (1)

NON-STATUTORY CO-OPTees – Mr. R. Egan, Mr. F. R. Fisher, Mr. D. Moyes, Mr. N. Rees and Mr. C.J. Taylor. (2)

ABSENT – Canon S. Bamber, Mrs. V. Mitchell, Ms. S. Robinson (3)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Murray Rose, Director, George McQueen, Assistant Director (Planning and Resources), Andrew Dunn, Assistant Director (School Improvement and Development), Mervyn Bell, Head of Youth Service, Chris Archer, Head of Service, Early Years Childcare and Development, Rob Thompson, Lead Officer, Transition and Transformation and Catherine Shaw, Sex and Relationship Education Officer, all within the Department of Children's Services.

CYP16. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS – There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

CYP17. MINUTES – Submitted - The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meetings of this Scrutiny Committee held on 29th June, 2009.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes be approved as a correct record with the addition of Mr. C. Taylor to the attendance.

CYP18. SCHOOL STANDARDS IN DARLINGTON – The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide Members of this Committee with the cumulative standards of attainment and achievement recorded by schools in Darlington in 2009 in national tests.

The submitted report highlighted that overall performance in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile for children achieving 78 points, including 6 points in all Communication Language and Literacy Development and Personal Social and Emotional Development elements has improved by 2.5% (maintained schools and independent schools) since 2008. The improvement in Local Authority schools is greater at 3.2%. The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile Threshold attainment was 50.6% which is greater than the regional average and the national results.

At Key Stage 1 school performance was up in 9 out of the 11 indicators in 2009 and have consistently improved over a three year trend at Level 2 plus and compared within a regional and national context, Darlington is the most improved.

At Key Stage 2 it was reported that results are above the national average and Darlington was ranked as the most improved authority. Key Stage 3 results are now based on teacher assessment and these results were also attached to the submitted report.

At Key Stage 4, 51.1% of pupils achieved five or more A* to C grades including English and Maths compared to 47.7% in 2008 and a three year trend analysis of the data supplied by schools was also attached to the submitted report.

The submitted report also gave details of how the authority intend to continue to improve school standards by a continued programme of collaboration across the local authority and schools in Darlington and with other stakeholders to share and develop good practice, promote a problem solving approach in partnership and with other practitioners, opportunities to lead networks and groups to achieve clear outcomes, the building of capacity for school improvement across the town and improved outcomes, effective professional development.

Members of this Scrutiny Committee discussed with the Assistant Director, School Improvement and Development the statistics provided in the report and were encouraged by the improved results. Discussion also ensued around the affect of gender and socio economic differences and the effect on results and the initiatives in place to ease transition in to school, especially for boys and it was agreed to undertake a Task and Finish Review Group to look at these elements in more details.

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be noted.

(b) That a Task and Finish Review Group be established with Councillors Burton, Curry, Hughes, Mr. Moyes, Mr. Frank and Mr. Egan to look at school standards and the outside factors which may have an effect on them and what work is being undertaken to address these issues.

CYP19. PROGRESS ON THE DARLINGTON KEY STAGE 2 TO 3 SCHOOLS

TRANSITION PROGRAMME – The Director of Children’s Services submitted a report (previously circulated) to outline the existing provision and planned developments for school pupil transition from Key Stage 2 to 3. The submitted report also outlined early proposals for widening the scope of transition and recommendations for further research into the length of the transition period.

The submitted report gave details of the progress of the 11 Transition Action Groups that were initiated during the Summer of 2008 to improve the transition experience for pupils in Darlington moving from primary to secondary school phases. It was reported that one Transition Action Group has had significant impact in schools and evaluation of the project “One Book For Darlington” will be completed in the Autumn term 2009. The findings of the “One Book” project will inform the commissioned project brief on curriculum development. The Transition Action Groups also met to look at the developing the use of Summer Schools and the link between secondary school specialisms and summer school themes and curriculum continuity. The summer schools pilot groups will implement these changes in Summer 2010.

The submitted report also gave details of the Transition Conference that was held in November, 2008 for a wide range of stakeholders, including schools and the Local Authority. Focused discussions were on updates from the Transition Action Groups, inputs on language transition and assessment through an offshoot of the transition programme “Assessing Pupil Progress pilot”, early transfer, the role of parents and curriculum continuity.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

CYP20. ADMISSIONS TO SCHOOLS ANNUAL REPORT TO THE SCHOOLS

ADJUDICATOR – The Director of Children’s Services submitted a report (previously circulated) to advise Members of the Annual Report 2008/09 (also previously circulated) agreed by the Local Admissions Forum which must be submitted to the Schools Adjudicator.

It was reported that the Adjudicator can pass comment on the report and require admission authorities to review or amend their oversubscription criteria or practices, to bring them up to the nationally acceptable standard. The format of the report and the information to be contained within it is prescribed by the Adjudicator’s office.

Particular reference was made to the percentage of first preferences met by the authority which is 84.2%, slightly exceeding the national average of 83.2%. For families gaining a place at one of their three stated preferences, Darlington achieved the national average of 94%. Reference was also made to the extensive work that has been undertaken by the Admissions Team and the Choice Advisor personally meeting with parents who have not made a choice and also with the travelling community to assist wherever possible with completing the application form and understanding the whole process.

A request was made by a Member of this Scrutiny Committee for all Members to be provided with a breakdown of the numbers for secondary preferences.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

CYP21. SCHOOL FINANCE – The Director of Children’s Services submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide Members of this Scrutiny Committee with an overview of the Scheme for Financing Schools and the formula which provides each school with its budget share. The submitted report also highlighted the role of the Schools Forum, which is a body with decision-making powers composed of Headteachers, Governors, Diocesan representatives and representatives of the post 16 and early years sectors, which must agree the Scheme for Financing Schools.

The Scheme for Financing Schools includes the checks and balances that will be applied by the Authority properly to audit funds, and to take action of financial management is found to be inadequate.

The submitted report also gave details on the Dedicated Schools Budget; the Formula that schools budgets are calculated by and the drivers i.e. pupil numbers and the non pupil elements relating mainly to the upkeep of the school premises; the Minimum Funding Guarantee; the Consistent Financial Reporting framework that all schools must use to facilitate benchmarking and comparison between schools; Budget setting and balances; Financial Management Standards in Schools; and the Schools Forum.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

CYP22. INTEGRATED WORKING – The Director of Children’s Services submitted a report (previously circulated) to inform Members of this Scrutiny Committee of the developments of Integrated teams to improve the early intervention and prevention services in Darlington.

The submitted report referred to the Children Act 2004 which has a requirement on the Local Authority, with its partners, to improve the outcomes for children and young people by reviewing services and how they are provided, including the integrating of services.

The submitted report also referred to the development of the Integrated Service Manager role which aim it is to improve lines of accountability for services which will have the child, young person and family at its centre. Under each Manager there will be three Co-ordinators for Children's Services, Young People and the Family Whole.

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be received.

(b) That this Scrutiny Committee receive future reports regarding the impact of integrated services on children, young people and families.

CYP23. PRIMARY CAPITAL PROGRAMME PROGRESS OF WORK – The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (previously circulated) to inform Members of the progress of work being undertaken as part of the Primary Capital Programme.

The submitted report outlined works in relation to the re-build of North Road Primary School and substantial refurbishments and re-modelling of 16 other schools in Darlington.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

CYP24. CONNEXIONS SERVICE IN DARLINGTON – The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (previously circulated) to inform Members of the structure, operation and performance of the Connexions Service within Darlington.

The Connexions Services was established in 2000, through the Learning and Skills Act, as a result of a series of governmental policy papers "Bridging the Gap" to provide more holistic information, advice and guidance to young people aged 13-19 (or up to 24 for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities). The Service leads on the delivery of the 'September Guarantee' – the provision of an offer of learning to all young people leaving Year 11, or aged 17 who are not in education, employment of training (NEET) and EET.

It was reported that the NEET performance target for Darlington is 5.7% by 2010/11, and current performance is 6.9 % (2008/09) and the target for this year is 6.3% (2009/10). Nationally the NEET figure puts Darlington 80th out of 150 Local Authorities.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

CYP25. SEX AND RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION POLICY – The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (previously circulated) to advise Members of the recommendations included in the Darlington Children's Trust Sex and Relationship Education Policy.

The submitted report highlighted how sex and relationship education is being delivered across the Borough and the continuous programme of education that is being developed accordingly with external professionals and partnership working to ensure the best way of working for the young people and children.

The Sex and Relationship Education Policy aims to support the improvement of the long term health of children and young people in Darlington whilst also supporting other local and national strategies including 'Every Child Matters'; the Children's Plan; National Healthy Schools Programme; Darlington's Children and Young People's Plan; the NHS 2009-2010 Delivery Plan and the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

CYP26. THE COMPREHENSIVE AREA ASSESSMENT: ANNUAL RATING OF COUNCIL'S CHILDREN'S SERVICES FOR 2009 – The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (previously circulated) to advise of the new arrangements for grading children's services functions in a local authority area.

In May 2009, Ofsted published a series of documents detailing how its inspection of children's services will be conducted under the new Comprehensive Area Assessment. The previous rating system for children's services was based on evidence of performance and outcomes in each of the five every child matters criteria. The new criteria will be based on 3 blocks of judgments ie.. the findings from regular and ongoing inspection (Block A); findings from safeguarding and looked after children inspections (Block B); and performance against Every Child Matters indicators from the National Indicator Set (Block C).

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

CYP27. WORK PROGRAMME 2009/10 – Pursuant to Minute CYP64/Apr/09, the Director of Corporate Services submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that further consideration be given to this Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme and Review topics for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2009/10.

The submitted report gave the background to the work programme and it was requested that Members give consideration to a schedule (also previously circulated) which had been compiled detailing the dates of meetings of this Scrutiny Committee together with those plans, strategies and reviews which could be considered at each of those meetings.

The changes to the Work Programme since the last meeting of this Committee were also highlighted together with the reasons for any additions or deletions.

The Chair gave an update on the Multi Use Games Areas and the Language Learning Review Groups and that progress was ongoing.

A question was raised by a Member of this Scrutiny regarding progress on the Building Schools for the Future and the Director of Children's Services advised that amendments have been made to the submission and notification of the decision should be received late November early December and will be reported to this Scrutiny at that time.

RESOLVED – That the Work Programme 2009/10 be noted.

CYP28. POLICY REVIEW - (1) Review of Progress on Policy Review Items – There was no progress to report.

(2) Review Items Final Report Back – There were no reports to consider.

(3) Responses of the Executive to Reports of this Scrutiny Committee – There were no responses to consider.

CYP29. EXECUTIVE CALL-IN - (1) Call-In Items Relating to Key Decisions of the Executive - There were no call-in items.

(2) Other Call-In Items - There were no call-in items.