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**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE –  
ANNUAL REPORT 2010/11**

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I am pleased to present the Annual Report of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee on behalf of its Members. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the many officers of the Council who have assisted us with our work during the year and especially our Lead Officer George McQueen, Assistant Director - Planning and Resources and Allison Carling and Karen Graves from Democratic Services.

Special thanks are also extended to Councillor Cyndi Hughes, the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, who has attended and contributed to our meetings.

**Healthier Lives for Children and Young People Living in County Durham and Darlington** - We were involved in a joint piece of work with all Scrutiny Committees in relation to scrutinising elements of the Director of Public Health's Annual Report 'Healthier Lives for Children and Young People Living in County Durham and Darlington'. We looked at ways of reducing teenage pregnancy and conception rates and the support and encouragement of social and health education in schools.

We requested all School Governing Bodies to consider the delivery of quality assured, evidence led, age appropriate, sex and relationship education programmes and services taking account of the needs of their children and communities; we fully supported the proposed development of an integrated, multi-agency mode of school health in consultation with the whole school community; and requested a review of the position in six months time taking into account any proposals for alternatives to the 'clinic in a box' approach in schools.

Following our recommendations we were pleased to note and support the good work currently being undertaken within schools to ensure quality sex and relationship education programmes are provided and support the work with young people, parents and carers and practitioners to ensure awareness and knowledge of the sexual relationship issues.

**Review of Children's Services (Social Care) Children's Homes** – We received a report on the authority's Children's Homes and an update following the most recent Ofsted Inspections which provided us with an overview of the strengths and concerns in relation to the current service.

In the last 5 years 24 young people have left residential with positive outcomes and there are currently 162 looked after children who in the main are with commissioned foster care. The Children's Services Project Team are continually looking at the residential services and potential options for service provision and as part of the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership looking to improve the range of provision in the North East. Members have agreed to undertake a Review of Children's Residential Services at a future date.

**Local Democracy Week** –As part of this authority’s celebration of Local Democracy Week we had 33 children from our Primary Schools in attendance for a special meeting. The children who attended a reception hosted by the Mayor prior to the meeting received presentations on Carbon Management and Progress on the Darlington Key Stage 2 to 3 Transition Programme. They discussed their thoughts on ways to save energy within their schools and expressed their worries and what they were looking forward to when they make their transition from Primary to Secondary school. The views of the pupils fed into the transition strategy.

Overall it was a very successful meeting and from the feedback received, enjoyed by all who attended and took part

**Community Use of Facilities** – As part of this Scrutiny’s ongoing review of Multi Use Games Areas and community usage we received a report to outline the development of a Community Use Guidance document including a key element to facilitate the opening up of a school for community use, the Community Access Agreement. This document will detail which facilities are available and also commits to the type of activity that will be supported. We have requested a report back on the feedback from the school governors and the take up of Community Access Agreements by the schools.

**Academies and Free Schools** - We received an update on the legislation introduced by the Academies Act 2010 providing for Community and Aided schools to take Academy status, provided certain criteria is met. This legislation could have an impact on this authority whereby schools can choose to become academies which would be free from local authority and national government control and have greater freedom on how they use their budgets.

**Government White Paper – The Importance of Teaching** - We also received a report to outline the Government’s policy for schools and education and the main clauses in the White Paper and the likely effects in Darlington. The White Paper is divided into sections covering Teaching and Leadership; Behaviour; Curriculum, Assessment and Qualifications; New Schools System; Accountability; School Improvement and School Funding. We were particularly interested in the removal of the requirement on schools to complete the Self Evaluation Form; teachers having powers to physically restrain pupils and be able to search and confiscate; the emphasis on schools’ responsibilities for excluded pupils; the possibility of Pupil Referral Units being granted Academy status; the introduction of the English Baccalaureate and Performance tables aimed at encouraging schools to drive the take up of individual science subjects, humanities and especially foreign languages, both modern and ancient; and the removal of the contextual value added (CVA) measure. We will continue to receive updates on the implications of the White Paper.

**School Closures During Inclement Weather** - During the period of unusually severe weather conditions in November, 2010 many of our schools were closed for a day or more during the week commencing 30th November, 2010 and Members were keen to understand the considerations head teachers were obliged to make before calling an emergency closure. We discussed the advantages and disadvantages of the school closures and the overall impact of closures on families and the possible options for providing ‘learning portals’ for those pupils who wish to continue their studies at home

**Medium Term Financial Plan** - We have given a great deal of consideration to the financial position and the pressures facing the Council over the next few years and have examined the draft Medium-Term Financial Plan. All Scrutiny Committees have assisted with the budgetary process by holding special meetings to consider those elements of the proposals which were within their remits and to make recommendations to Cabinet. We also received a presentation from the Youth MP, Ben Million who played us a DVD produced to show the views of young people if the youth project was to be cut.

**Other Areas –**

**School Admissions** - We received a report regarding the placement of pupils in Reception Classes and Secondary Schools for the 2010-11 school year and were very pleased to note that the number of parents receiving a place at one of their named preferences is higher than the national and local averages. 92 per cent of families received a place at one of the secondary schools of their choice and at primary this was 94 per cent. This figure is likely to have increased as a result of subsequent successful appeals

**School Standards in Darlington** - We continue to monitor school standards in Darlington and received information on the cumulative standards of attainment and achievement in 2010. Members were pleased to note that performance overall was very encouraging with the Early Years Foundation Stage above target by 1.4 per cent; Key Stage 1 was improving and performing well both regionally and at a national level; Key Stage 2 was more difficult to compare with thirteen primary schools not taking part in SATs testing however comparing year on year teacher assessment progress in Key Stage 2 had also risen; and at Key Stage 4 an improving trend had been maintained in pupils achieving five or more A\* to C grades including English and Maths with 56.4 per cent in 2010 compared to 53.9 per cent in 2009.

**Service Planning and Service Plan Performance Monitoring** – We have continued to scrutinise and monitor the four service plans including those elements of the Sustainable Community Strategy ‘One Darlington : Perfectly Placed’ for which this Scrutiny has responsibility.

**Overview of the Support and Challenge Provided to Darlington’s Community Schools by the Schools Improvement and Development Services** – Consideration was given to the development of the role of school improvement partners (SIPs) nationally, to their functions and those of Lead Officers in the Schools and Improvement and Development Service. We also examined the possible future impact on the service as a result of the Education White Paper and the decision from the Department for Education on the future of the role of the SIPs and will continue to monitor the impact on the service.

**Raising Expectations – Enabling the System to Deliver – 16-19 Learning Commission** – We received an update following the transfer of funding and commissioning responsibility for the delivery of high quality education and training for young people aged 16-19 from the Learning and Skills Council to individual Local Authorities from April, 2010. Following discussion on the transfer of funding and commissioning responsibilities it was suggested that there may be a training need for Members after the spending review.

**Mid Year Savings and Impacts for Schools** – We examined mid-year budget cuts as a result of in-year grant reductions and the Council having to reconsider its medium term financial plan which amounted to a reduction in spending of £539,000 related to Children’s

Services. We agreed to continually monitor the changes brought about by the need to re-design services and agreed to closely monitor the potential impact on service provision.

**Children's Social Care Services, Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Report 2009/10** – We received the Annual Children's Services Care Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Report 2009/10 and the breakdown of complaints, compliments and comments received for Children's Social Care during 1st April, 2009 and 31st March, 2010.

**Annual Report of the Local Admission Forum 2010** – We received the Annual Report of the Local Admissions Forum 2010 which outlined some of the Admission to School practices and procedures this authority operated for the previous academic year. For the 2010/11 period, 92 per cent of families were allocated a place at a secondary school of their choice, whilst at primary school entry the figure was 94 per cent.

**Young Carers** – We have examined the future of services for young carers, currently commissioned by the Children's Trust with resources from this Council and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS).

**Educated Other Than at School (EOTAS)** – We received a report on Darlington's EOTAS (Education Other Than at School) services which included information on The Phoenix Centre, a pupil referral unit for permanently excluded pupils; The Bridge, a pupil referral unit for pupils who would benefit from alternative provision with a focus on vocational opportunities; the Home and Hospital Teaching Service for young people with severe medical problems; and Elective Home Education.

**Annual Assessment of Darlington's Children's Services** - We considered the outcome of the annual assessment of Children's Services in 2010 by Ofsted summarising the judgements carried out in the preceding 12 months in each local authority area and other related data. The submitted report highlighted that the outcomes for children and young people are improving in Darlington and services for looked after children were graded as 'good' overall. Services for safeguarded children were also graded as 'good' overall. The Committee noted that the Minister of State had written to Ofsted to inform them that he was bringing forward legislation to end the annual assessment of children's services.

**Councillor Eleanor Lister on behalf of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee**