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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) School Holiday and Term Dates 2006/07

Following consultation with schools, neighbouring authorities and staff representative organisations, approval has been given to the proposed holiday and term dates and associated professional development arrangements for the 2006/07 school year.

(b) Children's Centres Capital Programme 2004/06 – Release of Funds

Capital Funding of £647,491 and associated Revenue Funding of £353,627 has been released to enable work to proceed on Darlington's Children's Centres capital schemes. A minimum of 100 additional childcare places will be made available by March 2006, and also the creation of easily accessible services for 2,302 pre-school children and their families in the most disadvantaged areas of the Borough.

(c) Youth Service Activities

**TEXTVIBE & EVIBE** - The youth service, in conjunction with Leisure & Arts, has initiated two innovative projects to improve communication with young people. A text messaging service was launched in June that allows information to be sent to young people or consult on an issue and ask for their opinion. The youth service is also developing a web page for young people and has employed a young person to work with other young people.

**Young Person's visit to India** - Chris Thomas, a member of the youth service and Darlington Youth Assembly, recently returned from attending a Summer School in India. The Summer School is an annual international event for young people to meet and share ideas about working with young people. Chris reported many adventures but felt the best part was meeting a man called Arvind Gupta who is a science teacher at Pune University. Arvind teaches children from poor families how to make toys out of discarded items and the science behind each toy.

**Extra Provision during summer holidays** - Darlington Youth Service has improved the range of youth provision over the summer holidays. This included an exciting programme of activities on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday afternoons for teenagers at the Eastbourne Project Centre (next to the Sports Complex). Also for the first time, local youth clubs stayed open during August.

**Blitz Bus** - Darlington Youth Service and Darlington and District Youth and Community Association have also worked in partnership to expand the offer for young people over the summer holidays.

2. I have conducted the following meetings and briefings in my role as Cabinet Member as part of my ongoing familiarisation of the portfolio role for Children's Services:

3. August 2005

I visited the youth service Summer Jam programme which had an exciting mix of activities from DJ workshops, a visit by the Army with a mock climbing wall, football, basketball & tennis coaching, arts & crafts, hair & make up and indoor sports.

I took the opportunity to visit Maidendale House to bring myself up to speed regarding Children's Centres.

I had an introductory meeting with our newly appointed Chief Executive, Ada Burns.

I met with Angela Jorgenson, Aim Higher Co-ordinator. The Aimhigher portal has been developed to provide those contemplating entering HE with access to the necessary information from which to make effective decisions.

Breastfeeding was the topic for discussion at a special meeting of Social Affairs & Health Scrutiny Committee held on 15th August.

As a member of the Corporate Parenting Panel, I continue to take responsibility for the Council's corporate parenting role and monitor performance information on the Children's National Threshold Performance Indicators and activity around Child Protection/Looked after Children on a quarterly basis. It is pleasing to report that for the period 2004-2005 that the top PAF banding was achieved in 14 out of 19 key indicators which demonstrates excellent progress for the Council in a number of key areas.

4. Exam Results

'A' level results for Carmel Technology College is excellent and up on last year.

|      |            | Carmel                                |       |
|------|------------|---------------------------------------|-------|
|      |            | Achieving 2 or more A Levels (A to E) |       |
|      |            | Number                                | %age  |
| 2005 | ALL PUPILS | 65                                    | 96.9% |

GCSE results are as follows achieving 5 x GCSE passes at A\*-C grade:

|              |         |
|--------------|---------|
| Carmel       | - 90.5% |
| Hurworth     | - 79.3% |
| Hummersknott | - 71%   |
| Longfield    | - 44%   |
| Branksome    | - 42%   |
| Haughton     | - 39.6% |
| Eastbourne   | - 32%   |

The overall average for the Local Authority is 56.4% (up 7.5% on 2004), another excellent result.

#### 5. September 2005

On 9th September I paid a visit to Darlington Young Carers Project to take a look at the work they do.

I also spent some time with ward members, visiting Haughton School and the Education Village site to review progress of this exciting and innovative project.

Pauline Murray, Sure Start Strategic Manager gave me an update briefing on Early Years issues, specifically Children's Centre Development, Childcare Bill, including consultation period (due to end in October). She highlighted key elements and proposals within that Bill.

My regular meetings with Children's Services senior managers and stakeholders continue and I plan to include visits to schools in the autumn term.

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