
OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES PORTFOLIO

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

Cabinet has received reports on the following:

- (a) **Children Home Inspections** - The Commission for Social Care Inspection undertook unannounced inspections of all Council Children's Homes and the Short Break Centre for children with disabilities between 30th November 2005 and 5th January 2006. I am pleased to report that these inspections which are based on the five outcomes for children and young people were very positive and that action plans for identified areas for improvement have since been submitted. Areas for improvement included Personal Education Plans, Placement Plans, the regularity of external monitoring, Medicine Records, Health Care Plans and formal meetings between staff and young people.
- (b) **Expression of Interest in an Academy for Darlington** –The submission of an expression of interest for an Academy for Darlington to replace Eastbourne School was agreed is being progressed and was considered at Lifelong Learning Scrutiny on 24th April 2006.

2. **Developments in Children's Services**

- (a) An inspection of our adoption services took place in February 2006. The Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) are required to undertake a three yearly inspection of Adoption Agencies. Darlington Council has a unique arrangement with DFW Adoption, a voluntary organisation. To date we have delivered adoption services in partnership, through an SLA, with DFW. The inspection identified a good quality of service to children and families. However, it also raised some issues about the partnership arrangement and how this affected compliance with regulations. This will require further exploration over the next few months and Darlington will be required to establish their own Adoption Panel. An action plan has been agreed with CSCI to address these issues.
- (b) All Looked After Children have been issued with leisure passes which give them free access to swimming at the Dolphin Centre and reduced rates (25%) for access to other core leisure activities. The passes will encourage children to partake in sport and exercise in their leisure time. This also applies to children who have left the care of the local authority but are still supported by the leaving care team. Carers of Looked After Children are also entitled to discounted rates.

- (c) We had a successful opening of the Education Village incorporating Springfield, Haughton and Beaumont Hill Schools, with all pupils beginning the new term in their new premises on 17th March 2006.
- (d) That means the Authority have replaced seven schools this academic year (Harrogate Hill Infant & Junior School with a new primary, Skerne Park & St George's, Middleton St George, Springfield, Haughton and Beaumont Hill). We consider that this is unparalleled across the whole country to replace this many schools with brand new accommodation in one year.
- (e) Ensured our schools had budgetary information for 2006/07 at February half term – six weeks ahead of government requirement of 31st March 2006. All schools were extremely satisfied with their budget allocations.
- (f) Developed our first Children's Services, Children and Young People Plan, although technically this was not required for an excellent authority, it is a useful planning tool.
- (g) Continued to take opportunities where possible and where accommodation allows to integrate Children's Services teams and improve service delivery for children and young people.
- (h) Children's Centres - Four Children's Centres have received designation at Maidendale, Skerne Park, McNay Street and Mount Pleasant – A 'Celebrating Children' event was held at each venue to mark their opening.
- (i) Children's Services team have begun to develop some new models for working with the needs of children, young people and families at the centre. This work is being piloted to support young people at risk of permanent exclusion and it is anticipated this will be developed with the support of the Local Area Agreement.
- (j) The Skills Plus Group continues to thrive. Staff from Darlington College and Pupil Support Services are now looking to roll this programme out for access to all secondary schools across the town. All the year 11 students in this programme have now applied for full-time courses at Darlington College next year.
- (k) Headteachers are now being consulted about the arrangements for the development of School Improvement Partners and their role in supporting the Local authority. The arrangements for secondary schools will be in place for September 2006 and one year later this will be introduced in primary schools.

3. Youth Service Issues

Overview of Children's Services Portfolio – Youth Service information

(a) Bullying and Discrimination

The Youth Service has joined a Borough-wide Steering Group tasked with developing a bullying and discrimination strategy. The Youth Service, in conjunction with colleagues in Connexions and Education Welfare, are undertaking consultation sessions with young people to map out issues from a young person's perspective. The

Steering Group is due to meet again in May 2006.

(b) Youth Matters Update

As part of Government guidance on Youth Matters, Darlington has been allocated £155,000 for each of each two years (2006-07 and 2007-08) for the Youth Opportunity and Youth Capital Funds. These funds must be developed and utilized in conjunction with young people - where young people can act as grant givers and project leaders. The Youth Service is currently studying the guidance criteria and will launch local mechanisms and structures for the Funds within the coming weeks.

(c) Youth Participation Strategy

The Youth Service has developed a Borough-wide Youth Participation Strategy which aims to include and involve young people in decision-making in a much more meaningful way than has happened in the past. Youth workers are currently consulting with young people and other agencies on the Strategy.

4. Visits and Meetings since last Council

- (a) Friday 10th March** - Visit to Hurworth School Maths & Computing College where I met with the Head Teacher and Deputy Head Teacher for a discussion/update.

I attended an open day event at the new state-of- the-art Skerne Park School building. This site also incorporates Libraries and Community Learning, Parkside Neighbourhood Nursery and SureStart Children's Centre. I also had the opportunity to meet with children, parents and staff at this new facility.

- (b) Monday 13th March** - I attended a meeting with Dr Crawford at Darlington PCT for a discussion on children's health issues.

- (c) Friday 17th March** – I was pleased to attend a briefing for Panel Members and Press Launch for Darlington's pioneering Education Village, which opened its doors to 1,400 pupils for the first time after the Easter Break. The £37.3 million school is the first of its kind in the country and will see pupils of all abilities, aged from two to 19 years, taught there.

Students from Haughton Community School, a specialist Arts College, will be taught at the new school, along with those from Beaumont Hill, a special school, which is also a specialist Technology College with a second specialism in vocational education. Youngsters from Springfield Primary School, will also go to school at the purpose-built facility. The three schools have come together under a single federated governing body that will enable staff to share their expertise, making the development unique.

The project has been in the pipeline for six years, with the development taking 23 months to complete. It is the first school of its kind in the country to accommodate pupils with such a wide range of ages and needs. It is also the first such school in the country funded through the government's Private Finance Initiative.

- (d) I also met with Rev Sheila Bamber, Director of Education for the Diocese of Durham (Church of England), sponsors of the Eastbourne Academy Project.
- (e) **Friday 24th March** - I joined a meeting of the Chief Executive for Darlington Borough Council, Director and Assistant Director for Children's Services and Darlington's Secondary Head Teachers. The main topic of the meeting was to discuss developments regarding the Academy proposals, to discuss plans for the Academy and associated issues.

I then visited Beaumont Hill School and had the opportunity to meet with senior pupils, staff and teachers at the school and toured the school's facilities.
- (f) **Friday 28th March** - I visited the King's Academy in Middlesbrough for a tour of the facilities. The facilities at the Academy are very impressive, and it was a wonderful opportunity to view the buildings and meet with teaching staff and pupils.
- (g) **Thursday 30th March** - I attended the Further Education Awards held Tall Trees, Yarm, hosted by Darlington College of Technology.
- (h) **Monday 3rd April** - I met with Sarah Robinson, Principal of Darlington College of Technology for a discussion regarding progress on the new College construction currently taking place for Darlington College. Sarah then accompanied me on a tour of the new facilities in Haughton Road.
- (i) **Friday 28th April** – I visited Longfield School and meet with the Head Teacher, pupils and staff. The School has recently been judged first in the category 'overall excellence in ICT' awarded by the Northern Grid ICT Education Awards 2006/Learning Platforms Conference.

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Cabinet Member with Children's Services Portfolio