

---

**OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES PORTFOLIO**

---

1. Since the last meeting of Council and under my Children's Services Portfolio, I report the following information.
2. Developments in Children's Services
  - (a) DfES have alerted the council to an opportunity to bring forward the construction of the new academy, which will reap earlier benefits for young people in Darlington. Children's Services staff are working with DfES colleagues to evaluate the feasibility of this. As part of this process, we would look to open the new academy in its current buildings and work with sponsors to bring in the new vision and ethos at that point. This will also bring additional funding to spend on the current buildings and environment to assist the development of the academy
  - (b) The Council was successful in its bid to become part of the DfES pilot programme for its Primary Capital Programme, the equivalent of the secondary school Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme. We have been awarded £6.5m to replace North Rd Primary School. The school are already working with pupils to consider what they would like to see in the new school.
  - (c) Andrew Dunn, the new Assistant Director, joined the department on 11th December 2006. As well as familiarising himself with the service and meeting with key personnel, Andrew has begun visiting the schools to introduce himself to Headteachers.
  - (d) Andrew will also be taking over responsible for the management of the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) from Alison Walton and a letter has gone out to the PRU Management Team informing them of this. A letter has also gone out to all secondary schools enlisting their support in getting the PRU out of 'special measures' in readiness for the next Ofsted inspection.

3. Youth Service Issues

- (a) **Youth Opportunity Fund**

Following Cabinet on 5 December the operational plan for the Youth Opportunity and Youth Capital Funds have been approved and youth service staff are moving to promote and publicise the funds widely to young people and youth groups (via press releases, web site, posters, information postcards and existing networks). Young people are being encouraged to submit applications to the first funding round (deadline 15 January). Two training sessions for potential adult facilitators were held on 18 and 28 November and to date 19 facilitators have been trained.

### **(b) Positive Activities**

The Government has released guidance on a new statutory duty, which will fall on local Authorities, as part of the Education and Inspections Act, to secure sufficient opportunities for young people in their leisure time. These opportunities must be shaped by young people and the Authority must work with partners in the voluntary/community and private sectors.

The development of this local 'Youth Offer' is integral to product 10 of the Local Area Agreement and work is in hand to respond to and implement the new guidance.

### **(c) Chartered Institute of Personnel Development**

Following from my last portfolio report I am very happy to report that the Youth Service were winners of the Organisation Award from the CIPD. Youth Service staff were presented with their award at a dinner at Middlesbrough Football Club on 17 November.

### **(d) Communications Strategy**

Youth Service staff have been working with colleagues within the Communications Unit and have prepared a communications strategy. Detailed communications and marketing plans will follow for each high profile activity that follows. To date positive media coverage (newspaper and radio) has been maintained.

### **(e) Highlight Activity**

The Voice and Action Group (a core group within the Youth Participation Strategy) held its first meeting on 22 November and have met fortnightly since. The group is confirming its remit, role, priorities for action and links to key decision-making bodies (including the Children's trust and Darlington Partnership). I attended the group's first session and have made plans to link with them on a regular basis.

An activity session for young women was held at Corporation Road Baptist Church on 2 December and aimed to reach out to Asian young women within the neighbouring wards. 19 young women attended and participated in a range of activity including henna, dance, jewellery making and art. Sessional evaluation was very positive with the young women asking for more activity days and more regular sessions. Youth Service staff are responding to these requests.

As part of product 7 of the Local Area Agreement, two consultation and activity sessions have been held within Lascelles ward. Sessions were held at St John's School and were promoted with a leaflet drop to all houses in the ward. Young people were offered the opportunity to try out graffiti and t-shirt art, rock climbing and sports coaching. At the same time staff have been surveying young people on issues within the ward and what young people would like to see happen. Over 40 young people attended the sessions (a number on both days!) and responses will be used to plan activity in the new year.

Over 100 young people, family and friends attended the Young Voices event at Darlington Football Club on 12 December. This was essentially a celebration event for young people who have participated in and successfully completed accredited courses

offered by the Youth Service including Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, gambling Project, Peer Mentoring Course and Initial Training Course. Young people received certificates on the night and were able to view a range of DVDs of their work.

#### 4. Visits and Meetings since last Council

(a) Friday 17th November

I visited Eastbourne School to meet with the Headteacher to update me on progress being made at the school this the new term.

I met with our Youth MP, Ashleigh Trevarrow to discuss her role and current work she is undertaking as a member of the Youth Parliament in the Borough.

(b) Tuesday 21st November

I met with Rosi Lister from Tees Valley Arts, Clare Taylor, Headteacher from St Bede's RC Primary School, and Maureen Dixon, Headteacher at Dodmire Infant and Nursery School at the Forum Music Centre in Darlington, to discuss the creativity agenda for young people in Darlington and opportunities for further development.

(c) Friday 24th November

A further visit to Eastbourne School to offer my support, and monitor the school's plans for improvement in attendance and performance.

I then visited Holy Family RC Primary School where I had the opportunity to meet the Headteacher, other staff and pupils and to see the facilities on offer for children at the school.

I later visited Cockerton CE Primary School to meet the Headteacher and again view the school buildings and facilities.

(d) Monday 27th November

I visited Bishopton/Redmarshall CE Primary School to meet the Acting Headteacher and other staff at the school who have recently been awarded a good Ofsted Inspection report.

I later visited both Mowden Infant and Mowden Junior Schools to meet with their respective Headteachers. Again, an opportunity to discuss issues relating to these schools and to view the school facilities.

A meeting of the Children's Trust took place this day which I attended in my capacity as Lead Member.

(e) Tuesday 28th November

I was pleased to open the Darlington Annual Children's Services Conference & Awards Ceremony held at Hallgarth Hotel, Coatham Mundeville. The day was well attended and offered a varied and interesting programme. The theme of the event was 'Integrating the Services for Children and Young People – The Challenge for Attainment, Behaviour & Attendance'. I was delighted that the Schools' Commissioner, Sir Bruce Liddington was able to travel to Darlington to speak to the conference on personalisation, and his own role at the Department for Education and Skills.

The day was rounded off with musical entertainment from Hummersknott School's Sign Language Choir, and from a group of our Looked After Children in association with the Forum Music Centre. After dinner, I hosted an awards ceremony to celebrate success in a range of different services for children in the Borough.

(f) Friday 8th December

I visited Reid Street Primary School in the town, where I met with the Headteacher, staff and children and toured the school building.

(g) Thursday 14th December

I was involved in the Member Appointments Panel interviewing candidates for the post of Director of Children's Services and was pleased to offer the post to Murray Rose, currently employed at York City Council. Mr Rose is due to start with Darlington Borough Council in Spring 2007.

(h) Friday 22nd December

I met with Janet Potts, Programme Director at the National Breakthrough Programme for Raising Boys' Achievement Improvement Foundation, and joined her presentation on this programme to the Children's Services Senior Management Team.

**Councillor Chris McEwan**

**Cabinet Member with Children's Services Portfolio**