

**OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES PORTFOLIO**

1. Since the last meeting of Council and under my Children's Services Portfolio, Cabinet agreed the use of £600,000 capital funding for use by the Federation of Abbey Schools, following a successful bid to government under the targeted capital fund bidding process. The new school hall will provide Abbey Schools with a much-needed facility to offer improved sports and arts teaching, and the new hall will also provide extended school facilities which will aid the school in its aim to be at the heart of the local community.
2. Developments in Children's Services
  - (a) The Annual Performance Assessment (APA) for Children's Services was published on 1st November 2006, conducted jointly by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI), the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), and the North East Strategic Health Authority (SHA). The purpose of the assessment is to evaluate the outcomes for children in the area and the contribution of Council services to those outcomes. The APA contributes to the overall Corporate Performance Assessment rating for the Council. The results are shown below:

<b>APA final judgements for <u>2006</u></b>	<b>Grade awarded</b>
<b>Areas for judgement</b>	
The contribution of <i>the local authority's children's services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people	<b>3</b>
The council's overall <i>capacity to improve</i> its services for children and young people	<b>3</b>
The contribution of <i>the local authority's social care services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people	<b>4</b>

The table below provides a descriptor for each score:

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Service descriptors</b>	<b>Capacity to improve descriptors</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>A service that delivers well above minimum requirements for users</b>	<b>Excellent / outstanding</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>A service that consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>A service that delivers only minimum requirements for users</b>	<b>Adequate</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>A service that does not deliver minimum requirements for users</b>	<b>Inadequate</b>

This is an excellent result for Darlington and I would like to extend my thanks to the Director and staff for their work in achieving this.

- (b) I am delighted to report the overwhelming success of an event held on 26th October at the Forum Music Centre in which we celebrated the artistic and creative achievement of Looked After Children in Darlington. Young people displayed artwork, film screenings and live performances of music, songs and poetry. A large and varied audience who work with these young people attended the event.
- (c) I am pleased to report that Branksome School was subject of an Ofsted monitoring visit on 1st and 2nd November 2006 and was moved out of the “special measures” category. This is good news for all managers, teachers and staff at the school who have worked hard to improve teaching and learning, as well as pupils and parents with children at the school or due to attend in September 2007.
- (d) On Friday 29th September 2006, the Authority received confirmation from the Department for Education and Skills that Ministerial approval had been gained for the Expression of Interest in an Academy to replace Eastbourne School. The proposal will now move to ‘Feasibility Stage’ which will see the plans for improvement in attainment, consideration and identification of the Academy specialism and building design proposals further developed.
- (e) Members appointed Andrew Dunn to the post of Assistant Director, School Improvement. Andrew is currently employed by Redcar and Cleveland Council and we look forward to welcoming him to the Council in December 2006.
- (f) The inaugural meeting of Darlington’s Children’s Trust took place on 25th September, chaired by the Director of Children's Services. Every local authority is required to set up a Children’s Trust with a variety of stakeholders as its members. I shall continue to report on the work of the Trust at future Council meetings.
- (g) The annual Children’s Services Conference takes place on 28th November at Hallgarth Hotel, Coatham Mundeville. Attendees will include Head Teachers, Chairs of Governors, key officers from stakeholder agencies, as well as Local Authority officers. We are delighted that the Schools Commissioner, Sir Bruce Liddington, has agreed to attend to speak at the conference.

### 3. Youth Service Issues

#### (a) Vibe Awards

The awards evening on 9th October was enjoyed by a packed Civic Theatre. The audience enjoyed a wide range of performances and celebrated the achievements of over 200 young people.

#### (b) Local Democracy Week – 16-21 October

The Youth Service facilitated a wide range of events for young people and adults. 14 young people from Primary School Councils attended an audience with the Mayor; 34 professionals attended the launch of Hear By Rights standards; 37 young people participated in the school/college council question time; 36 young people attended the launch of youth participation strategy and Voice and Action Group, and 57 professionals/young people attended the Politics Dinner organised by the MYP and her Deputy.

(c) Youth Opportunity Fund

This Fund represents a tremendous opportunity for young people to identify and implement activities and projects for themselves and for an increase in ward and estate based provision. Training sessions for adult facilitators and promotional materials have been prepared. Recruitment and training of young people to the Youth Board is ongoing.

(d) Highlight Activity

A programme of activity was offered at Harrowgate Hill at half term. Approximately 100 young people participated in a range of activities (DJ workshops, urban dance, sports, skate park, giant games challenge).

Over the past 6 months the Youth Service has worked with young people and TACADE, developing an Accredited Gambling Awareness Course. The Youth Service is currently developing activities that will accompany the Accreditation.

On Saturday the 11th of November a group of Asian young people from Peacemakers in Oldham will be visiting Darlington to take part in workshops and training organised by the Youth Service and the young people involved in the project. 31 Young People are involved in the Accreditation, with an additional 145 young people involved in the development of the Course.

The Introduction to Youth Work Course started on Sept 18th and will be completed on 11th Dec. The cohort of young people involved in the course is progressing and are due to start placements in the coming weeks. Feedback from OCN (Accrediting Body) has been extremely positive with comments contributing to a nomination for good practice award.

25 Young People working towards/already received accreditation.

The Youth Service has been nominated for the CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development) Award – a regional award for Training Organisations.

In December The Youth Service will be hosting a Celebration of Achievement and Accreditation Event at Darlington Football Club. The event will focus on the achievements of young people involved in accredited courses run by the Youth Service throughout the year, with over 100 awards expected to be handed out on the night. Over 350 young people have received accreditation throughout this year to date.

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

(a) Friday 22nd September

Together with relevant officers, I met with Tony Hanson, the Project Director for “Hoop Dreams”, a project set up to help disadvantaged young people through the use of basketball to encourage team play and develop confidence.

I later visited St Bede’s RC Primary School where I met the Headteacher, staff and pupils.

(b) Friday 29th September

I visited Dodmire Infant and Junior Schools, followed by a visit to Dodmire Junior School. This was a good opportunity to meet with the respective Headteachers,

visit the school facilities, and see first hand the children's lessons.

(c) Monday 2nd October

I visited St John's CE Primary School where I met with the Headteacher, staff and pupils.

I then visited St Augustine's RC Primary School, where again I had time to discuss relevant educational topics with the Headteacher.

I later visited St Teresa's RC Primary School, where I viewed the school's facilities, surveyed the children's artwork and offered my best wishes to the current Headteacher, Mr Eddy Robinson, who retires at the end of this term.

(d) Thursday 12th October

I met with the interim senior manager at Branksome School, and his management team to find out what improvements are being made in relation to the school's improvement programme.

I later attended a presentation event at The Colerdige Centre. This celebrated the successes made by parents passing their annual achiever awards.

(e) Tuesday 17th October

I attended Eastbourne School where I met with the School Council. This was a good opportunity to meet with the young people to hear their views on a variety of topics of importance to them.

(f) Wednesday 18th – Friday 20th October

I attended the National Children and Adult Services conference held in Brighton. A full and interesting programme of speakers, workshops and seminars was enjoyed, together with an opportunity to meet with fellow Lead Members from other authorities to discuss good practice and current developments in Children's Services nationally.

(g) Monday 6th November

I joined the Director's meeting with Children's Services Advisors from Government Office North East (GONE) at their "Priorities Meeting" with the Council. This was a good opportunity to discuss how GONE view Darlington's Children's Services, whilst also sharing their priorities for improving performance.

(h) Wednesday 8th November

Together with the Director of Children's Services, I attended the Children's Services' Network's Annual School Improvement Conference in London.

(i) Thursday 16th November

I was pleased to escort the Lead Members for Children's Services for Stockton and Middlesbrough Councils respectively around the Education Village school buildings and facilities.

5. Finally, as Members will be aware, this will be the last Council meeting attended by the current Director of Children's Services, Margaret Asquith. I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of Council and the residents of the Borough to thank

Margaret for her dedication and commitment to improving outcomes for Darlington's children. During her time at Darlington Borough Council she improved the Social Services star rating from 1 to 2 stars (now further improved to 3 stars), and in Children's Services has improved our APA grades. She leaves Darlington with our very best wishes for similar success at Bolton Council.

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