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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** – Following consultation with trade unions, schools and neighbouring authorities, Cabinet agreed the school holiday and term dates for 2007/08.
  - (b) **Children's Services Capital Programme** – Cabinet agreed the 2006/2007 capital investment programme for schools and released funding of £6,088,834 to undertake the agreed works.
  - (c) **A Children's Trust** – Cabinet agreed to establish a Children's Trust for Darlington as part of the overall governance arrangements of the Local Strategic Partnership. The Trust, which will be a partnership chaired by the Director of Children's Services, will have a key role to play in improving the outcomes for children and young people in Darlington.
  - (d) **Information Sharing Index** – Cabinet received a report on the development of a national Information Sharing Index for children and the implications for its implementation within Darlington.
  - (e) **Expression of Interest in an Academy for Darlington** – Cabinet agreed to submit to the DfES an Expression of Interest for a Church of England sponsored Academy to replace Eastbourne Comprehensive School.
  - (f) **Primary Capital Programme** – Cabinet received information concerning primary school capital investment and the Primary Capital Programme that aims to renew or replace 50% of all primary schools nationally over a 15 year period. In addition, Cabinet approved the submission of a proposal to a pilot programme for the replacement of North Road Primary School.
  
2. **Developments in Children's Services**
  - (a) Members appointed Gill Walker to the post of Assistant Director effective from Monday 26th June 2006. The portfolio includes inclusion, pupil support, early years and health.
  - (b) The Inclusive Leisure Fund was launched on 22nd June 2006 by the Rt. Hon Alan Milburn MP, to support disabled children to access mainstream play, leisure and out of school activities.

- (c) School attendance – Our attendance strategy continues to be developed with the introduction of authorised absence school pass system, this is a year ahead of schedule. There is also the introduction of new registration absence codes in September this year, so that data analysis will become more robust.
- (d) Behaviour in schools – we continue to develop our work with Headteachers to reduce numbers of exclusions in Darlington. The Local Area Agreement and development of a multi-disciplinary team will assist this work.
- (e) The students participating in the Skills Plus programme enjoyed a successful awards ceremony on 21st June 2006 at Darlington College. Alasdair MacConachie OBE presented the awards to the students. These young people have improved their attendance and results, and there is also 100% sign up for post 16 courses.

### 3. Youth Service Issues

- (a) **Youth Participation Strategy** - The Youth Service has developed a Borough-wide Youth Participation Strategy. The strategy seeks to develop a stronger voice and influence for young people in decision-making processes. Links have been established with the emerging corporate Community Engagement Strategy.
- (b) **Youth Service Staff Recruitment** - All recently recruited full-time staff have now started within the Service bringing the Community Based team up to full strength. All staff are now working on the development of rolling three month plans for their respective localities. Further configuration of existing staff teams is enabling a greater thrust to locality based teams and delivery.
- (c) **Youth Opportunity and Capital Funds** - The Youth Service have been in negotiation with both Key Fund and Changemakers to develop a delivery plan for Darlington, to be signed by July 2006. The Funds will be widely promoted across the Borough with a view to first grants going out to young people's projects from October onwards. This is additional Government funding to support the development of the Youth Matters agenda and will see £155,000 coming into Darlington each year for two years (2006-07 and 2007-08).
- (d) **Girls' Work Pilot Project** - In direct response to criticisms within the Youth Services Ofsted inspection, the Youth Service is developing the 'Girl's Night In' project as a way of engaging with more young women across the Borough. Throughout June and July a series of different activities (street dance, hair and beauty, sports, DJ workshops) will be on offer in a range of locations (Hurworth, Education Village, Branksome, Skerne Park, Middleton St George and Longfield).

### 4. Visits and Meetings since last Council

- (a) **12th May 2006** - Visits to St George's CE Aided Primary School and Carmel RC Technology College, to meet with the Head Teachers, other teachers, staff, and pupils.
- (b) I was given a tour of the new facilities of SureStart Centre and Mount Pleasant School and informed about the range of activities delivered.

- (c) **18th May 2006** – I joined an official tour of the Education Village’s facilities, which included members of the Government’s Education and Skills Select Committee. The Select Committee travelled from the House of Commons to meet staff, pupils and parents as part of its Special Educational Needs Inquiry, looking at the educational provision for pupils with special needs.
- (d) **19th May 2006** – I visited High Coniscliffe CE Primary School and met with the Head Teacher, who provided me with an update on progress within the School. I then joined a meeting of members of the School Council.

I visited Gurney Pease Primary School where I met with the Head Teacher, staff and pupils and toured the school’s facilities.

- (e) **26th May 2006** – I visited Alderman Leach Primary School and had the opportunity to meet with teaching and non-teaching staff and pupils at the school.

I had an interesting meeting with Lynne Athey at the Education Village to discuss the Student Council.

- (f) **6th June 2006** – I visited the Pupil Referral Unit at Gladstone Street and met with teachers and pupils.
- (g) **9th June 2006** – I was pleased to attend the official opening of Resource Centre at Longfield School which was officiated by the Mayor. The facilities are impressive and it was a good opportunity to meet with teaching staff and pupils.
- (h) **15th – 19th June** – together with the Leader of the Council, the Worshipful the Mayor of Darlington, and the Director of Children’s Services, I participated in a civic visit to our twin town, Amiens, France. The Council was invited by the President of the Amiens Region to attend its “Fête dans la Ville” to mark the signing of a partnership agreement between Amiens and Tulsa, Oklahoma, USA. This visit proved both interesting and informative and benefits our continued strong links between Amiens and our Borough.
- (i) **23rd June 2006** – I sat on the interview panel for the Assistant Director posts in Children’s Services.
- (j) **3rd July 2006** – I met with Heather Long at the Centre for Teaching and Learning, Red Hall Primary School. Heather provided me with an update on Healthy Schools initiative.

I was pleased to visit Borough Road Nursery School, to meet with the Head Teacher, other teaching staff and the young children who attend the school.

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