
OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES PORTFOLIO

1. Since the last meeting of Council and under my Children's Services Portfolio, Cabinet has received the following:

(a) Children's Services Capital programme 2007/08

Cabinet considered and agreed the proposed Children's Services Capital Programme 2007/08, approving the release of capital funding of £19.462m through the Local Asset Management Plan Agreements; and

(b) School Admission Arrangements for 2008/09

Cabinet considered and approved the changes required to the Local Authority's Admission Policy for 2008/09 and the co-ordinated arrangements for all schools within the Borough.

2. Developments in Children's Services

(a) Two of our Headteachers retired at end of the Spring term. They are Dave Hayllar, Headteacher at Heathfield Primary School and John Warburton, Headteacher at Harrowgate Hill Primary School. The incoming Headteacher at Heathfield Primary School is Nick Blackburn, and at Harrowgate Hill Primary School, a co-headship appointment of Helen Morgan and Carole Hancocks.

(b) Specialised Diploma submission outcome published on 28th March 2007:

(i) Construction - unsuccessful - need to re apply

(ii) Health and Social - unsuccessful - need to re apply

(iii) Creative and Media - approved for delivery September 2009 (subject to meeting certain conditions)

(iv) IT - approved for delivery September 2009 (subject to meeting certain conditions); and

(v) Engineering - approved for delivery September 2009 (subject to meeting certain conditions).

(c) The Targeted Team (Specialist School Support Team (together with Safer Schools Partnership at Eastbourne) became fully staffed and operational from 19th March 2007.

(d) Within the Domestic Abuse Team there are jobs out to advert with a closing date of the end of March 2007.

(e) On 2nd March, Lord Adonis, the Minister with responsibility for Academies, and The Rt Hon Alan Milburn MP had a very successful visit to Eastbourne School to discuss progress being made towards the academy to replace Eastbourne School. Co-sponsors Mr David Crossland and The Rt Revd the Bishop of Durham were

also present and toured the school meeting staff and pupils.

- (f) Good progress is being made towards establishing the academy in current buildings on 1st September 2007. Extensive consultation has taken place with staff, pupils, governors, parents and the wider community since the start of the year. The Council and sponsors have received support from 85% of those responding to the academy brochures distributed in January. The Council's Cabinet has approved the site on Hundens Lane, adjacent to the current school, as the preferred site for the new buildings to be constructed over the next two years.
- (g) Children's Services welcomes Justine Stewart to the department as Workforce Development Strategy Manager. Justine joins the Authority from Brighton and Hove, where she was successfully employed in a similar role. Justine brings with her a wealth of practical experience in social care as well as the knowledge of workforce development issues.
- (h) Schools received their annual budget statements from the finance team in late February, giving details of the funding made available to us for schools from government in the form of Direct Schools Grant. Headteachers commented favourably on the quality of supporting information provided by the team.

3. Youth Service Issues

(a) Youth Opportunity Fund

A second round of applications was considered by the Youth Board on 10 March and approximately £70,000 was approved for a further 8 youth projects again covering a wide range of projects and activity ranging from football teams to Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme to St John's Cadets and a project promoting live youth music in the Borough. A range of smaller bids are also in developmental as the Dosh becomes more recognised by young people and youth groups across the town.

There will be a carry-over of funding into year 2 but these are within acceptable Government limits. I will report on the end of year financial position (and outline 2007-08 funding rounds) in my next report.

(b) Positive Activities (Youth Offer)

The Youth Offer Coordinator has been appointed and will be able to commence duties on 2 April 2007.

Young people have named the high profile event, scheduled for 12 and 13 April, Yo Yo (Your Offer, Your Opportunities). Publicity material is being distributed to young people and the event has already been promoted in the local press. The event will be a combination of taster activities, showcasing existing groups and opportunities as well as beginning dialogue with young people on the development of their local offer.

(c) Highlight Activity

(i) **Nickstream Lane**

Work has commenced on development of the drop-in centre and multi-agency community base in Nickstream Lane. It is anticipated that the provision will be open

and available from the beginning of May. The facility will be monitored and evaluated with a view to replication in other wards in the town.

(ii) Presentation at the House of Lords

5 young people, representing the group, which has worked with the national organisation TACADE to develop gambling resources for work in schools and youth groups, attended the official launch of the materials at the House of Lords at the beginning of March. The group delivered a short presentation on their involvement which generated positive coverage in the local press. The Chief Executive of TACADE commended the group sending a message which stated:

‘I would just like to say a huge THANK YOU to all of you and all the young people who came to the launch yesterday. It was a great success and enjoyed by everyone. I have had numerous comments, particularly about how well the young people did standing in front of the great and the good and speaking so confidently about the gambling issues and the project. Please convey my very massive thanks to all the young people who were involved in the project either with the photo sessions or at the launch. They are a great credit to Darlington and their achievements should not be allowed to fade away unrecognised.’

(iii) Northlands Youth Club

In response to community concerns about the lack of provision in the North Road area the Youth Service is working in partnership with Northlands Methodist Church and has recently opened a youth club in the church buildings on North Road. Attendances have been positive and we intend to build on this within the club and within the wider community as a whole.

(iv) Bus Buddies

Young people from Darlington, including the Member of the Youth Parliament, have been heavily involved in a regional campaign to push for cheaper, safer and more reliable bus services for young people in the North East. The campaign has attracted interest from regional MPs and recently featured in Young People Now – a national magazine focusing in national youth issues.

(v) Voice and Action Group

Members of the Voice and Action group participated in a training and development residential last week at which they began analysis of a snapshot survey undertaken with a range of youth groups across the town. The Group will be reporting headline figures to the Children’s Trust and I intend to provide further details in my next report.

(vi) Middleton St George

In conjunction with the Parish Council and local volunteers plans are underway to re-develop the basement area of the local Community centre as a youth facility for young people in the village. Young people are being invited to a planning day at the beginning of the Easter holidays so that they can become more involved and begin to shape the facility. This is a positive piece of collaborative working.

4. Visits and Meetings since last Council

- (a) 26th February – I had briefings with managers in Children's Services.
- (b) 27th February – I met with Sally Orlopp from Tees Valley Connexions.
- (c) 2nd March – I joined the ministerial visit to Eastbourne School by Lord Adonis.
- (d) 6th March – I sat on the Corporate Parenting Panel.

I later attended a visit with Councillors Copeland and Nutt to Red Hall Community Centre, part of the Young Carers Project, as part of the Social Affairs & Health Scrutiny Committee's Mental Health Review.

- (e) 16th March – I had briefings with managers in Children's Services.
- (f) 20th March – I sat on the Members' Appointments Panel for the selection of an Assistant Director in Children's Services, responsible for Safeguarding and Specialist Support. Members appointed Jennifer Cooke, currently from Middlesbrough Council, who will take up her post in late Spring or early Summer.

I later met the School Council at Eastbourne School Council.

- (g) 30th March – I visited Harrowgate Hill Primary School and joined the Headteacher (John Warburton) in his retirement celebrations.

I later had briefings with managers in Children's Services.

Councillor Chris McEwan
Cabinet Member with Children's Services Portfolio