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**OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES PORTFOLIO**

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

**(a) Children and Young People's Plan Review 2007**

Cabinet considered and endorsed the draft review of Darlington's Children and Young People's Plan and gave delegated authority to myself and the Director of Children's Services to submit the final review to Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) by 14th June 2007. The Review is being submitted to this meeting for Council approval and is subject of a separate report.

**(b) Children's Services Capital Programme Update**

Cabinet considered recent developments affecting Children's Services capital programme and recommended that a report be submitted to Council to agree financial contributions to assist the targeted capital projects at Hummersknott School & Language College, and Carmel RC College and for financial investment in Dodmire Infant & Nursery School and Mount Pleasant Primary School. These recommendations are subject of a separate report to this meeting of Council.

**(c) School Holiday and Term Dates 2008/09**

Cabinet considered options for school holiday and term dates and approved the calendar attached at **Appendix A**, in order to align with other North East local authorities and to continue to make use of full week breaks as previously suggested by Headteachers, and to assist schools and the Local Authority in planning processes.

2. Developments in Children's Services

(a) One of our Headteachers, Mr Tom Lumley, retires this Summer after 23 years as Headteacher at High Coniscliffe C of E Primary School. Tom will be replaced on 1st September by Ms Wendy Aitken, currently Deputy Headteacher at Reid Street Primary School.

(b) Mr Russ Wallace, interim Headteacher at Branksome Comprehensive School, leaves the school at the end of the Summer term. His replacement is Ms Pat Armstrong, previously Headteacher at Blyth Community College.

(c) All Darlington Primary, Junior, Infant and Nursery schools have been allocated a School Improvement Partner (SIP) who will work with schools from 1st September.

(d) Eastbourne School closes on 31st August and will re-open as Eastbourne Church of England Academy on 1st September, with Ms Alison Appleyard as its Principal.

- (e) Ms Jenni Cooke, Assistant Director, Children & Families, started with the Authority on 25th June. Ms Jan Lefevre (Interim Assistant Director) has returned to her substantive post of Commissioning Manager in Children's Services.
- (f) The Fostering Inspection report has now been published.
- (g) The Inspection of one of our Small Group Residential Homes has been published, with a grade that "All requirements met".
- (h) The Family Intervention Programme has been implemented and work with families commenced.
- (i) We have met with all Head teachers in the town to discuss the requirement to work in partnership to offer full-time education if a young person is excluded for 6 days or more. Head teachers have agreed to this development and are meeting with governing bodies to confirm details. The partnership arrangements will be confirmed early in the Autumn term.
- (j) Reported absence rates for both primary and secondary schools demonstrate an improvement so far this year. Primary schools absence has fallen from 6.2% to 5.2% and secondary schools from 9.9% to 8.7%.
- (k) Primary Capital Programme - This is a Government initiative to renew or replace 50% of the worst condition primary schools nationally over a 15-year period. As a forward thinking local authority which has already substantially invested in the primary school estate, it is probable our funding may be restricted over future years. We are awaiting notification from DfES of the formulaic funding to commence in 2009/10. In the meantime, we were selected as a Primary Capital Programme Pathfinder and secured an additional £6.5m to replace North Road Primary School. This funding will be provided in 2008/9 and consultation with partners and planning on this project has started.
- (l) Other projects previously reported which are ongoing and should be completed soon include:
  - (i) Carmel RC College - a £10m remodel/refurbishment
  - (ii) Cockerton CoE VA Primary School - £3.8m new school build
  - (iii) Federation of Abbey Schools - nearly £480,000 for a new hall
- (m) The £14.5million contract for the refurbishment and remodelling of Hummersknott School and Language College has been awarded to contractors Walter Thompson who will start on site in July 2007.
- (n) In July work will also commence on the site of the former Rise Carr Primary School building to provide refurbished and extended accommodation for Darlington's Pupil Referral Unit and Education Other Than At School service.

### 3. Youth Service Issues

#### (a) Youth Opportunity Fund

As referenced in my last report, I can confirm that £119,231.72 of the Borough's allocation of £155,000 was distributed in year 1 supporting 20 projects and benefiting

an anticipated 1350 young people. £36,000 has been carried over into year 2. A wide variety of projects have been supported.

The Youth Board will consider the first round of grants in Year 2 on 23 June and already in Year 2, 18 projects have been supported via the small grants system. Young people and staff have presented a separate and detailed report and presentation to the Lifelong Scrutiny Committee on 18 June.

(b) Positive Activities (Youth Offer)

The Yo Yo (Your Offer, Your Opportunities) event, held in the Easter holidays in the Market Square, was hugely successful with approximately 1000 children and young people attending the 2-day event. Following this a group of 26 young people have been recruited and have held an initial meeting – this group will remain central to the development of the Youth Offer ensuring young people are firmly involved in this process. A detailed work plan for the Youth Offer is now in place and remains on target for completion by 1 April 2008.

(c) Youth Participation

As detailed in the Youth Participation Strategy, a Participation Network (of professionals from key agencies) has been developed with an inaugural meeting on 6 June. 10 agencies were represented (across statutory and voluntary/community sectors) and will ensure a consistent and coherent approach to young people's involvement in decision-making across the Borough.

The Youth Service has acquired the 'Mi Voice' software which will enable young people to vote via text or Internet. School and College councils are being invited to trial the software for school/college elections and it will be used in the UKYP elections in February 2008 to further boost the number of young people exercising their right to vote for their local member of the Youth Parliament.

To mirror the Children's Trust Development Day (6 July) a similar day event is being planned for young people on 19 July. This is being widely promoted with young people through existing groups and networks.

(d) Headline Activity

Nickstream Lane Drop-in Centre - keys for the facility have now been handed over to Youth Service staff and the centre will be fully operational by August (on resolution of IT issues). A Steering Group of young people are currently working on an official launch/opening event and have also secured Dosh funding to provide equipment in the drop-in facility. Children's Services and Youth Services staff will make initial use of the office accommodation.

(e) Half Term Activity

A full programme of activities were on offer to young people across the Borough from Saturday to Saturday and included both day-time and evening provision. Evaluation and feedback on the week's activities is being collated into a single report which can be made available to Members.

(f) New Blood Live

This initiative is being driven by young people who again secured a significant amount of funding from The Dosh, and is delivered in conjunction with the Youth Service, The Forum and adult volunteers. It enables up and coming young artists and bands to practice and show case in front of a live audience. 90 young people attended the first session in May and further sessions are planned for 5 and 19 of July.

(g) Review Project

This is a brand new project which will recruit and train young people to review movies, bands, book, sporting vents and town events and then post reviews and footage on the Council web site and magazines, and in the local press. Interest has been tremendous and 30 young people have signed up for the project. Key events and dates have already been identified including the Carnival, formal opening of the Pedestrian Heart, Great North Walk, and opening games of the new football season.

(h) Lesotho Trip

There is approximately one month to go for the RAID group prior to their visit to Lesotho and they are on course to fund raise the full amount required. Fundraising culminates in a Gala Dinner at the Football Club on 29 June. The group were also successful with an application to the Mediabox funding which will enable the whole trip to be recorded and a 20 minute documentary produced when the group return. Press coverage on this initiative continues to be regular and positive.

(i) Skateboarding (Skate Jam)

In response to the profile of young people skating, particularly in the Town Centre, the Youth Service is working with partner organisations and young people to hold a Skate Jam event outside the Town Hall on 7 July. The event aims to engage young skaters in a dialogue to promote safe and appropriate skating across the Borough and will seek to build sustainable solutions including peer coaching and a young skaters network.

(j) CDRP Action Week

The Youth Service coordinated a series of events for young people as part of the recent Action Week in the central division. All activities were well received by young people and by partners although the bad weather postponed high profile events scheduled for the town centre and North park. These have been re-arranged for the summer months.

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

(a) 27th April

A day of school visits to meet with Headteachers, staff and students at: Branksome Comprehensive School; Carmel RC College; Hurworth Primary School; and Hurworth School, Maths & Computing College.

(b) 11th May

I attended the launch of the Play Work Network at Maidendale House. As a member of the Children's Trust I attended a reference group looking at the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) Review. These were weekly focused

meetings scrutinising the CYPP before the submission of the review to Ofsted.

- (c) 18th May  
I visited George Dent Nursery School and Skerne Park Primary School within the Coleridge Centre. I later attended another meeting of the CYPP Review Reference Group.
- (d) 25th May  
I visited an alternative education service being provided in premises at Belgrave Street where I met with the young people who are engaging with this alternative curriculum provision, and saw first hand the lessons and courses they are involved with.  
I later visited 2 schools (Red Hall Primary School and Eastbourne School), and joined a further meeting of the CYPP Review Reference Group.
- (e) 11th June  
I attended a meeting of the Children's Trust, which endorsed the CYPP Review.
- (f) 15th June  
I visited Gurney Pease Primary School and later attended an event at Carmel RC College, in the presence of the Prime Minister, the Rt Hon Tony Blair MP, and Darlington's MP, the Rt Hon Alan Milburn MP, in recognition of the major project being undertaken to remodel and replace some of the College's buildings under the Government's Targeted Capital Programme.
- (g) 22nd June  
I attended a meeting chaired by David Heaton, OBE who is leading on an Enquiry Group set up by the Darlington Partnership.
- (h) 25th June  
I met with the incoming Headteacher of Branksome Comprehensive School, Ms Pat Armstrong.
- (i) 27th June  
I met with Debbie Haywood, the Director of Teaching and Learning for the Education Village.  
I later attended the presentations to Skills+ programme students at the Darlington College.
- (j) 29th June  
I visited Hurworth Primary School, and later the Education Other Than At School service (EOTAS) at McMullen House.

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