
OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PORTFOLIO

1. Since the last meeting of Council and under my Children and Young People Portfolio, Cabinet has received the following:

- (a) Cabinet approved the measures being taken to raise attainment across the Borough and supported the school improvement strategy, designed to raise attainment for children and young people in Darlington and to highlight attainment as a result of the impact of those initiatives and developments.

2. Developments in Children's Services

(a) Inspection of Youth Offending Service

The Youth Offending Service was inspected during 11th – 15th February. Outcomes from this inspection inform the Joint Area Review of Children's Services which in turn informs the Council's Corporate Assessment.

The verbal feedback given by the Inspectors was a largely positive picture with some areas for improvement. Particular areas of strength include the team's work in the Courts, and parenting and prevention work.

The draft report is expected in May 2008.

(b) Joint Area Review

The Joint Area Review (JAR) of Children's Services commences on 31st March 2008 for a period of two weeks. Eight inspectors will focus on Safeguarding; Looked After Children; Children with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities; and work with 14-19 age groups.

The Inspection team has received a number of documents (policies, procedures) and will look at ten individual case files in detail. The team will interview service users, a range of practitioners and professionals involved in delivery of services to children, in addition to senior managers and Elected Members.

(c) Children 'Looked After' by Darlington Borough Council

There are currently 141 children and young people "looked after" as at 31st January 2008 by Darlington Borough Council.

In January 2008 three young people ceased to be "looked after", while two (aged under 1 year and 15 years) became "looked after".

The term "looked after" applies to individuals where a legal order is in place, and those where there is a parental agreement that a child lives away from the family home. Currently 101 children are subject to a legal order.

(d) Child Protection

There are 51 children on the Child Protection Register – as at 21st February 2008.

Registration identifies the most significant protection issue – currently the breakdown of these issues (criteria) is:

Neglect	31
Physical Abuse	14
Emotional Abuse	4
Sexual Abuse	2

(e) Locality Work

Locality profiles have now been developed and shared with all five localities. These include a range of data that relates to children and families which have been collated on a very local basis. This is to assist in informing how services should be delivered in each part of the Borough. Further locality workshops are planned which will enable local priorities to be agreed.

(f) Children's Centres

The latest Children's Centre in the Borough – Dodmire Children's Centre - was officially opened by the Mayor of Darlington on Friday 22nd February, and Haughton Children's Centre has been officially designated as a Children's Centre.

(g) Attendance Conference

A successful 'Attendance Conference' was held on 8th February and became a celebration of improvement as school attendance rates continue to improve. The latest figures show that Darlington is the 5th most improved Authority for attendance at Secondary school level, and 7th most improved at Primary School level.

(h) Transition between KS2 and KS3

Teams developing policy and practice for Darlington's Children and Young People have continued their work around Transition between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 and improving behaviour across the Borough.

(i) School Condition Sub-Group

The School Condition Sub-Group has met on two occasions to ensure that all Darlington schools are receiving support in line with the Protocols and Procedures for Engagement with schools agreed last year by Cabinet.

(j) Darlington Leadership College

In March we launched the Darlington Leadership College. Local Authority Officers, working in conjunction with Darlington Headteachers, are co-ordinating this development which will lead to accreditation designed to enhance leadership and management skills.

(k) NEET

Officers have been successful in bidding for £640,000 of European Social Fund monies to be targeted at reducing the NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) population amongst Darlington's 16 to 19 age group. The NEET Reduction Partnership continues to report to the Darlington 14 to 19 Trust.

(l) 14-19 Skills Centre

Officers have been successful in bidding to the Learning Skills Council for £25,000 to fund a feasibility study around the development of a 14 to 19 Skills Centre in

Darlington. The final report will be published in July 2008.

(m) Chair of Governors meeting

In February a meeting was hosted for Chairs of Governors during which we looked at standards issues across the Borough and the wider Children's Services agenda.

(n) Youth Opportunity Fund

A third funding round for 'The Dosh' in December saw three projects supported with £17,500 funding. A final round for Youth Capital funding only will take place on 8th March.

The Council successfully bid for national underspend funding and received an additional £3500 to our annual allocation of £155,000.

Government has confirmed that Youth Opportunity funding will continue for the period 2008-2011.

(o) Positive Activities (Youth Offer)

A final stakeholder session was held on 16th January (via a morning and an evening meeting) which was again well attended by key organisations. Planned work continues toward an official launch of the Positive Activities Youth Offer via a day long event in South Park on 12th April 2008.

(p) Youth Participation

Voting to the UK Youth Parliament elections has taken place over a week long period from 25th February using software to enable young people to vote online.

Four candidates stood for election and Emily Christer was successful in her campaign and took over from Ashleigh Trevarrow as our Youth MP at the election count event on 3rd March 2008.

(q) Headline Activity

Young people from the Nickstream Lane Youth Forum were chosen for their contribution to the community at the Best of Darlington Awards in February.

(r) Positive media coverage (press, radio and the BBC website) has been generated for the 'My Generation' project looking at the history of music in Darlington since the 1950's.

(s) The RAID group (Raising Awareness in Darlington) held a formal launch of their DVD on their trip to Lesotho at the Arts Centre on 13th February. The group presented on their experiences of the trip and their planned work with schools and youth groups.

(t) A full programme of activity was on offer over the February half term including a dance project at Carmel RC College, a football tournament and a range of sessions on Friday night and Saturday day time.

3. Visits and Meetings since last Council

(a) Friday 18th January

I attended a meeting of the Academy Advisory Group.

I chaired a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

I later visited Hurworth Primary School to meet with the Headteacher, visit classrooms and speak with staff and pupils.

- (b) Saturday 19th January
I chaired a “Talking Together” event in the community in Middleton St George.
- (c) Monday 21st January
I attended a meeting of SACRE (Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education).
- (d) Wednesday 23rd January
I attended the Learning and Culture Partnership meeting.
- (e) Thursday 24th January
I visited Whinfield Primary School to meet with the Headteacher, visit the school’s facilities and to speak to children and staff.
I then travelled to Harrowgate Hill Primary School to meet the co-Headteachers, visit classrooms, teachers, and pupils.
I chaired the Local Authority Governor Appointments Panel.
I attended a meeting of the Children’s Trust.
- (f) Friday 1st February
I visited various examples of alternative education provision for young people at Key Stage 4.
- (g) Friday 8th February
I visited the Looked After Children team at Central House.
An Attendance Conference was held at Hallgarth Golf & Country Club during the afternoon which I was pleased to be involved with throughout the afternoon and to officially ‘close’ the event.
- (h) Wednesday 13th February
I met with the Principal of Eastbourne Church of England Academy at the school.
- (i) Friday 15th February
I chaired a IDeA North East Lead Member Network event at the Education Village.
- (j) Thursday 21st February
I met with the young people who had put themselves forward as candidates for Darlington’s Youth MP, to replace Ashleigh Trevarrow.
- (k) Monday 25th February
I attended a Cabinet / Corporate Management Team development day at Headlam Hall Hotel.
I later visited Gilling Children’s Home to meet with staff and the young residents.
- (l) Tuesday 26th February
I met with the Director of Public Health to discuss issues affecting children and young people.
I later had an evening meeting with members of the Uniformed Youth Services in order to reinforce my support for the valuable work they do.
- (m) Friday 29th February
I attended the celebration event held at the Football Club to mark the end of

Ashleigh Trevarrow's term as our Youth MP.

(n) Tuesday 4th March

I attended the Beacon Status awards ceremony in London, where the Council had been nominated for two awards, one being in the category for services for Looked After Children. Although unsuccessful, to be one of the four Authorities nominated is a huge achievement for everyone who works to improve outcomes for our looked after children, including our foster carers, two of whom also attended the event.

(o) Wednesday 5th March

I visited Dunrobin Children's Home, met with the registered manager, residential care workers and talked with the young people who live there.

(p) Friday 7th March

I visited the YMCA provision in Darlington to speak with its manager, and learn more about work they are doing with young carers.

I later visited Beaumont Hill Technology College to meet with the Director of Inclusion and visit the facilities, observe classes and activities, and talk with staff and young people.

I later participated in the University of Teesside Academic Awards event and parade – the first time it has been held in Darlington.

Councillor Chris McEwan
Cabinet Member with Children and Young People Portfolio