
OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES PORTFOLIO

1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the areas for work under my Children's Services Portfolio :-
 - (a) **Review of Primary School Education in Darlington** – Following a review of Primary Education in Darlington, which was carried out by the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee, agreement has been given, subject to the completion of statutory procedures, to the closure of Rise Carr Primary School and the amalgamation of Albert Hill Nursery with Gurney Pease Primary School. It is also proposed to reduce the size of Corporation Road Primary School, and after building alterations to develop a Multi Use Games Area on site. These three specific courses of action are intended to address identified long term issues regarding school places in terms of condition, sufficiency and suitability of provision. To ignore the problem would store up more significant problems in five to ten years time, which could impact on the life chances of future generations of Darlington Pupils. The final decision regarding the closures and amalgamation will be taken by the School Organisation Committee.
 - (b) **Children's Services Configuration for Darlington Borough Council – Proposals** – Consideration has been given to the initial stages in the development of Darlington's Children's Services, including arrangements for the establishment of the Children's Services Department. Approval was given to the proposed Assistant Director structure and the proposals for the future structure and integration of Darlington's Children's Services Department. Future and interim arrangements for Adult Learning, Youth Services and the Youth Offending Team/Early Interventions Teams were also agreed.
 - (c) **Child Protection for Schools and Education Settings – Policy and Guidance Document** – Approval has been given to a revised Child Protection Policy and Child Protection Handbook 2005 for schools and education settings, which has been produced by the Education Department, working in close partnership with other agencies. This Policy and Guidance has been produced because this Council believes that the protection of children and young people is important, but equally in recognition of the fact that all of those working with children and young people need support and guidance in carrying out this important duty.
2. In addition to weekly briefings with the Director of Children's Services and Assistant Directors, I have embarked upon a weekly series of introductory visits and meetings with staff who work in children's services, together with attending strategy and case meetings as an observer to develop my knowledge of key areas. I have also toured the Education Village site at Haughton Road. Other visits have included the following:

- (a) 28th January 2005
Attended with senior managers from the Council, a meeting of Darlington's Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) / Learning Disability Service at Darlington Primary Care Trust. Visited Branksome School, where I met the Head Teacher.
- (b) 3rd February 2005
Met with senior managers in Education for a general induction on their work remit, including school development, performance, and new initiatives in school services. Met with senior managers in children's social services including an overview of family group conferencing and child protection issues.
- (c) 10th February 2005
Met with senior managers in the school improvement service, and visited the pupil referral unit and education other than at school (EOTAS) services to meet with staff and children.
- (d) 11th February 2005
Met with senior managers in the special educational needs service; senior managers in children's health services at the Primary Care Trust; and the 14-19 Trust.
- (e) 21st February 2005
Attended the education senior management team meeting; met with education personnel officer; and locality manager for the Connexions service; attended the Social Services departmental management team meeting, where I met with all middle and senior managers within Social Services.
- (f) 1st March 2005
Met with managers in children's services, from the educational psychology, and the finance sections. Met with the Chief Executive of the Education Village development; met with managers responsible for service planning for 2005/06.
- (g) 4th March 2005
Attended the Investors in People ceremony at the pupil referral unit, which was awarded to managers and staff by the Rt Hon Alan Milburn MP.
- (h) 11th March 2005
Met with the Head of Children's Social Services, and Chair of Darlington's Area Child Protection Committee, and attended a meeting of that committee as an observer; met with senior managers regarding Connexions service.
- (i) 18th March 2005
Together with the Director of Children's Services, attended the official launch of the new Darlington College of Technology site in Haughton Road, led by the Rt Hon Alan Milburn MP; visited the Early Interventions and Youth Offending Team managers and staff.

(j) 23rd March 2005

Met with senior managers in Children's Services; visited Longfield School to meet the Head Teacher, staff, and pupils and to view the premises/facilities. Visited Gurney Pease School to meet with teaching staff and view the school facilities.

(k) 24th March 2005

Visited the Children with Disabilities team at Harewood Lodge, where I viewed the facilities and met with staff and managers; met with the Leaving Care team manager and staff; met with managers in the school improvement service; from Sure Start and the Early Years sections.

3. I am pleased to report that the Council has received a very positive inspection report from the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) for Dunrobin Children's Home. This was in respect of a full inspection of services and procedures at the Home which took place in January. The Inspectors were very impressed with standards at Dunrobin, reporting that there were no shortfalls in the service, and that in fact one Standard had been exceeded, and was defined as "commendable". I visited Dunrobin shortly after my appointment as Cabinet Member for Children's Services, and am due to visit again later this month to pass on my appreciation to the staff and management.

Councillor Chris McEwan
Cabinet Member with Children's Services Portfolio