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**LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – ANNUAL REPORT 2004/05**

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I am pleased to present the Annual Report of the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee to Council on behalf of the Members of that Committee.

In the first instance I would like to thank all the Elected Members and Co-opted Members on the Committee for their input into its work over the past year. I would also like to thank the very able Officer support given to us over the last year and also Councillor Harker, the Cabinet Member who held the previous Portfolio for Education and Councillor McEwan, Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Children's Services for their contribution and attendance at our meetings.

The Committee has been involved in examining a wide variety of learning opportunities during the past Municipal Year and a synopsis of these are below.

At the beginning of the year consideration was given to the outcome of the Strategic Review of Primary Education, which will be used to formulate the future of Primary Education in the Borough. Monitoring has also been undertaken on the recommendations of various past Task and Finish Reviews, such as the Use of Medium Density Fibre Board in Schools, Special Educational Needs Assessment for the Very Young and Educational Attainment of 'Looked After' Children especially in relation to policies to improve their access to employment.

Consideration was given to the implementation of a new software package, Performance Plus with particular reference to the Education Best Value Performance Indicators. Members welcomed this software package and envisaged that it would provide a number of benefits to the Scrutiny Committee in undertaking its monitoring role.

During the year the Committee considered and commented on several Plans and Strategies as follows: the Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy, Improvement in the Education of 'Looked After' Children – Local Joint Strategy of Education and Social Services Department, the Local Social Inclusion Strategy and the National Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners.

The Committee were particular pleased to note the progress made with the implementation of the Best Value Review of Education Services and the expansion and development of the Behaviour Support Team.

As a follow-up to the Committee's Task and Finish Review on the Reporting of Racial Incidents in Schools, it received a report on the number, nature and outcomes of racist incidents in schools in the Borough during the academic year 2003/04 and in this connection it was particularly interesting to hear about workshops which had been held in Secondary Schools in the Borough which had involved the pupils producing anti-racist leaflets. As a spin-off from this Mr. T. Lindsay, Director of Darlington Racial Equality Council (REC) gave an informative presentation to the Committee on the REC's role in promoting the equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups.

Several other interesting and informative presentations by Officers of the Council were heard by the Committee in relation to Workforce Innovation and the Council's Forward Plan. The Committee was particular pleased to welcome Mr. Stanley Bradford, Regional Change Adviser - North East who gave

a presentation entitled “Every Child Matters: Change for Children”, which detailed the national framework for the reform of children’s services in accordance with the Children Act 2004.

Following consideration of an Audit Commission: Survey of Schools’ View of their Local Education Authority 2004 it is proposed to set up a Task and Finish Review Group to consider the results of this Survey in more detail.

Whilst considering the Local Authority’s support for amalgamated schools, the Committee were pleased to hear the views of the Mrs. S. Williams, Head Teacher of the newly established Whinfield Primary School on the support given during its amalgamation.

Consideration was given to an analysis of pupil performance in Darlington in 2004, which indicated that significant gains were made this year in the performance of pupils at Key Stage 2. The gains of 2003 were consolidated and built upon at Key Stage 3, but performance dipped at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4.

On the 19th October, 2005, a Special Meeting of the Committee was held to celebrate “Local Democracy Week”, the theme of which was “Making your Mark” and was aimed at helping young people become more involved with decision making and planning at local level. In the spirit of this week a special meeting of Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee was convened and pupil representatives and one member of staff from all Primary Schools in the Borough were invited to participate in the meeting. Representatives from eleven schools in the Borough attended his event and there was a lively debate involving both Members of the Committee and the pupils present.

Two Members of the Committee are currently involved in a Joint Task and Finish Review Group with the Social Affairs and Health Scrutiny Committee considering the problem of obesity in children.

**Councillor Cyndi Hughes,  
Chair of Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee**