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**OVERVIEW OF LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work that have been undertaken under the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee:-
  - (a) **Heathfield Primary School – OFSTED Inspection Report and Post Inspection Action Plan** – Mr. D. Hayllar Head Teacher of Heathfield Primary School attended the Scrutiny Committee’s meeting held on 5th September, 2005 to discuss the outcome of the OFSTED report on the School and its post Inspection Action Plan. The Committee requested that a letter be sent to the Staff and Pupils at Heathfield Primary School congratulating them on the good outcome of its OFSTED Inspection. As part of its scrutiny role, that the Committee intends to also invite other Head Teachers of Schools in the Borough to future meetings to discuss their schools’ OFSTED reports.
  - (b) **Commons Select Committee Report on Public Libraries** – Consideration was given to the content of the House of Commons Culture Media and Sport Committee into public libraries. The comments and issues raised in the report were generally supported, particularly in relation to its conclusion that responsibility for delivering public library services should remain with the local authority and also proposals in relation to the enforcement of clear and consistent Library Standards. It was pleasing to note the Darlington Library Service performance, particularly in relation to the percentage of the total budget spent on books and the work that has been carried out to ensure that library services are relevant and accessible to all. These initiatives include the provision of a lift into the Crown Street Building, the provision of technology for disabled users of ICT; reading groups for visually-impaired users; a new CCTV system for visually impaired users; the wide range of material available in alternative formats; and the installation of automatic doors and exit ramp at Cockerton Library.
  - (c) **Behaviour Support Team** – The Committee was pleased to note the progress made with the development of the Behaviour Support Team since it work was considered in October 2004. The progress included the Team’s expansion, proposals for it future expansion; the amount of support given to schools by the Team which was based on individual need; developing partnership working with professionals from a range of services, and an on-going comprehensive analysis of pupils in Darlington who have been identified with social emotional and behavioural needs. The Committee decided to establish a Task and Finish Review Group to consider trends in pupils with behavioural problems both locally and nationally.

- (d) **Inspections of Adult and Community Learning and Work-Based Learning** – The Scrutiny Committee were pleased to note the good improvements made in the results of the Adult Learning Inspectorate’s re-inspections of adult and community learning and work-based learning compared with the previous inspections during 2003/04. It was gratifying to note that the Inspectors found that the services had improved in all the areas subject to re-inspection.
- (e) **School Funding** – A report was considered on the financial health of schools in Darlington at the end of the financial year, which indicated that schools in the Borough, are in general, reporting healthy reserves as at 31st March 2005. This was partly due to funding secured under the Excellence in Clusters initiative during the latter part of 2004/05. Details were also given on the measures in place in Darlington to challenge and support school funding; and the possible implications of the results of a consultation on the Government’s review of schools funding for 2006/07.
- (f) **School Performance 2005** – Initial data on the performance of pupils in Darlington Schools in tests/examinations in all Key Stages in 2005 were considered by the Committee. It was particularly pleasing to note the reduction in the difference in boys attainment compared to girls; the significant improvement in the percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more grades at A\*-C; and the improvement in percentage of pupils gaining A Levels at A – E at Carmel RC Technology College, which allied to the excellent performance at Queen Elizabeth VI Form College, may well make Darlington the best performing local authority in England at A level this year. It is proposed to consider a detailed analysis of results at all key stages, including information on value added, subject attainment and school level data at the January 2006 meeting of the Committee.
- (g) **School Attendance Task and Finish Review Group** – This Group is currently considering the current position of attendance in Darlington schools by considering statistics relating to absences and investigating the impact of the Authority’s strategies to improve attendance. The Group hopes to report its findings to the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee to be held on 31st October, 2005.

I also attended the following meetings as Chair of Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee:

School Governors Appointments Panel,  
Briefing with the Director of Children’s Services and Cabinet Member for Children’s Services and  
Pre-agenda meeting with Children’s Services Policy Adviser.

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