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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) **European Day of Languages Celebration Visit to Darlington Secondary School** – Members of the Scrutiny Committee were delighted to visit Hummersknott Language College on 26th September, 2005 to see language training in progress and to learn more about the innovative collaborative work underway with primary schools in the Town. This visit was timed to coincide with The European Day of Languages, organised by the Council of Europe to celebrate linguistic diversity and the benefits of being able to speak another language. Globalisation and patterns of business ownership mean that people increasingly need foreign language skills to work effectively within their own communities and it was very pleasing to note the good work being carried out at the School.
  - b) **Local Democracy Week** – To coincide with Local Democracy Week, which was held from 17th – 23rd October, 2005, a Special Meeting of the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee was held on 18th October, 2005. An invitation was sent to all Primary Head Teachers in the Borough asking them to send two pupils and a member of staff to participate in this meeting on the theme of ‘Ideas into Action’. Nine Primary schools attended the event and the pupils participated in debate on the Darlington Youth Service’s – Every Child Matters Project and the Extended Schools Initiative. Prior to the meeting, a reception was held, hosted by the Mayor, Councillor Stella Robson, Ada Burns, Chief Executive and Members of the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee.
  - c) **Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee – Newsletter** - A Lifelong Learning Newsletter has been distributed to all Schools in the Borough to inform schools, parents and governors of its remit, membership, dates of meetings, future work programme and the subject of task and finish reviews currently being undertaken by its Members. It is hoped to keep the School Community updated on the future work of the Scrutiny Committee through ‘The Link’ – the newsletter for Children’s Services produced by the Council’s Communications Department.
  - d) **Learning Representatives** – Peter Owen, Education and Lifelong Learning Officer, UNISON, talked to the Scrutiny Committee about his role as an accredited Learning Representative in Darlington and the work that this being undertaken in this area. The Committee has pledged its support to the project and looks forward to future updates.
  - e) **Street Scene**– Consideration was given to progress made with the Street Scene Review, which is being undertaken as part of the ‘Leading Edge’ agenda, the next stage of this Council’s organisational development. The main focus of the review is to identify and improve the process and processes within each service that contributes towards the management of the external environment. The key outcomes forming the

scope of the Street Scene Review being a clean and well-maintained external environment; and a well-designed and safe external environment.

- f) **Results of Audit of Support Services for ‘Looked After’ Children** – The Committee was pleased to note the progress made with the implementation of the Children Services Department Strategy intended to improve the educational opportunities of children in public care. These support mechanisms include the development of improved Personal Education Plans for each looked after child; the establishment of the Looked After Children Strategy Group and Sub Group to closely monitor the children’s progress; the provision of regular information to schools about look after children on their rolls; and proposals to develop further initiatives included in a comprehensive audit tool, which was rolled out nationally, to support services for looked after children.
- g) **Access to Employment for Looked After Children** – Following on from a Task and Finish Review undertaken by Members of the Committee on the Educational Attainment of Looked After Children during the 2003/04 Municipal Year, consideration was given to further progress made to actively promote the employment of care leavers through the Council’s equal opportunities policies. It is pleasing to note the progress made with this initiative which involves the development of a programme of assistance/opportunities including work placements/tasters, job search skills, access to the Council’s job advertisements, promotion of the work based learning programme and a possible mentoring programme. Several individual success stories of children who had benefited from the support services were reported to the Committee.
- h) **14-19 Agenda** – Consideration was given to the progress made with the implementation of the 14-19 Agenda since the formation of the 14-19 Trust in September, 2004. Initiatives included the introduction of transitional mentoring in all 3 post-16 institutions in the Borough; the development of a two year Junior Apprenticeship Programme which commenced in September, 2004; the establishment of a work-based learning providers Forum to raise the profile of work-based learning as an alternative route to post-16 qualifications; a common College day for pupils from all secondary schools in Darlington to attend the Darlington College of Technology on the same day; a common afternoon timetable block to enable students from one school to access a Key Stage 4 (GCSE) course in another school in the Borough if the students’ home school does not offer that course; the introduction of common transfer forms to enable post-16 institutions to obtain better information about students transferring from schools; and the establishment of a Data Group with representative from Connexions, Learning and Skills Council, the Local Authority and post-16 institutions. The challenges for the further development of the 14-19 agenda, especially in relation to the development of vocational education in line with the Government White Paper on the 14-19 Agenda were also reported to the Committee.
- i) **Co-opted Members – Community Representative** – Following a recruitment exercise to fill a vacancy for a Community Representative on the Scrutiny Committee, a panel of three Members has been established to make an appointment to this vacancy.
- j) **School Attendance Task and Finish Review Group – Final Report** - A Task and Finish Review Group, established by the Scrutiny Committee, reported its findings and recommendations following its consideration of statistical information on

attendance at schools in the Borough, including comparative data with other local authorities and projections for the future. The Task and Finish acknowledged all the work being carried out by the Council, primarily through the Education Welfare Service, and in the Borough's Schools to improve attendance. The Task and Finish Review Group made several recommendations which were endorsed by the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee and will, therefore, be submitted to Cabinet for consideration in due course.

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