
OVERVIEW OF LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work that have been undertaken by the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee:-

(a) Progress on Skerne Park School and Governance Arrangements – It was pleasing to hear that the new building at Skerne Park that will house the Skerne Park Primary School, Libraries and Community Learning, a Neighbourhood Nursery and a Children’s Centre was handed over to the Council on 15th February, 2006 and was operation from the 6th March, 2006. The Committee considered and commented upon the proposed integrated management and governance arrangements for the services to be delivered from the building. It is hoped that a visit can be arranged for the Committee to the new building to view the facilities available.

(b) National Evaluation of Sure Start Local Programmes – Consideration was given to the findings of the National Evaluation of Sure Start entitled “Early Findings on the Impact of Sure Start Local Programmes on Child Development and Family Functioning” published in November 2005, which was a cross-sectional study of 9 and 36 month old children and their families. The overall conclusion of the findings was that relatively less disadvantaged children and families benefited from Sure Start Local Programmes but not the most disadvantaged. Consideration was also given to Sure Start Local Programmes in Darlington, which had not been subject to the National Evaluation and it was particularly reassuring to hear of the work carried out in Darlington with hard to reach groups in the community.

(c) Transformation of Secondary Education in Darlington – Academy Update – The Committee welcomed Reverend Sheila Bamber, the Director of Education, The Church of England, Diocese of Durham, Board of Education to its last meeting to talk about the Church’s involvement in both primary and secondary education, its ethos of offering high inclusive education and its involvement in the Academy proposals in Darlington with particular reference to the development of an Expression of Interest for an Academy School. The Director of Children’s Services also reported on public information sessions that had been held on the Academy proposals.

(d) Training Session – The Committee, at its request, recently enjoyed a very informative and useful training session on school performance target setting. The information provided at this session should prove very useful when scrutinising school performance in the Borough.

(e) Presentation of Book Token – Information about the work of the Scrutiny Committee has previously been made available to parents, teachers and school governors through a newsletter published in October 2005, which included a word search competition. It was a pleasure recently to present the winner of the competition, seven-year-old Natasha Sheen-Abbott, who attends St. George’s Primary School, with a book token.

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

the Monitoring and Co-ordination Committee;

a briefing meeting with the Director of Children's Services and Cabinet Member for Children's Services;

a pre-agenda meeting with the Head of Performance and Development, Children's Services Department and a Democratic Support Officer, Corporate Services Department;

visited the new education premises at South Park;

a special service at St. Augustine's Church to celebrate "Education Sunday"; and

addressed a group of young people from Polam School on the importance of learning modern foreign languages.

Councillor Cyndi Hughes
Chair of Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee