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**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – ANNUAL REPORT 2007/08**

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1. I am pleased to present the Annual Report of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee to Council, on behalf of the Members of that Committee.
2. There have been a number of changes to the membership of the Committee during the last Municipal Year and I would like to thank all the Elected Members and Co-opted Members who have served on the Committee for their input into its work over the past year, especially those who have devoted time to our Task and Finish Review. I would particularly like to take this opportunity to extend my gratitude to Mr. Ray Bennett who, until his resignation in September 2007, had served as the representative of the Darlington Association of Governors on this Committee for a number of years.
3. The Committee also welcomed a new Lead Officer in October 2007, George McQueen, Assistant Director, Planning and Resources, from the Children's Services Department.
4. This has been an extremely important, and challenging, year in terms of educational development in Darlington. There have been a large number of positive changes in terms of service provision, delivery, and outcomes.

**Eastbourne Church of England Academy**

5. At the start of the Municipal Year the Committee continued to receive its regular update from the Director of Children's Services in relation to the progress of the proposed Academy for Darlington. The Committee were kept well informed at every stage of the project – from the submission of the finalised and revised version of the Outline Business Case, the submission, and subsequent approval, of the Funding Agreement by the Sponsors, the conditional grant of approval by the School Organisation Committee, the increased funding by the Partnership of Schools (PFS), the commencement of the Implementation Stage, to the development of the procurement process. Members of the Committee also received information in relation to the long term programme, staffing implications, and the governance arrangements.
6. The Committee were delighted that the Eastbourne Church of England Academy opened, on schedule, on 4<sup>th</sup> September 2007.

7. Since the opening of the Eastbourne Church of England Academy, the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee have received two further reports outlining the vision and ethos of the Academy. Members were informed of the three strands of the vision for the Academy, the development and aims of the Academy Development Plan, and the six key objectives contained within the Academy Development Plan. We note that the Academy continues to work closely with the Local Authority and engages enthusiastically with this Council's scrutiny process.

#### **School Performance in National Examinations 2007**

8. Members of the Committee received an early analysis of school performance in national examinations, based on provisional figures, at its Ordinary Meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> September 2007. Members were pleased to note the provisional improved performance in a number of Darlington's Secondary Schools. Members of the Committee received a more detailed analysis of the school performance figures during a training session held on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2007, including school performance in national examinations and annual figures in relation to contextual added value.

#### **Relocation of the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) and Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) Service to the Former Rise Carr Primary School Site**

9. The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee continued to monitor the progress of the project to relocate the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) and the Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) Service to the Former Rise Carr Primary School Site. Through regular update reports the Committee were informed of the approval of the revised plans, the granting of planning permission and listed building consent by the Planning Applications Committee, the appointment of a contractor, and the appointment of a new Head Teacher.
10. Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee also visited the site of the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) and Education Other Than At School Service (EOTAS) on Monday, 29<sup>th</sup> October 2007 to monitor the progress of the development first hand. It was reassuring during the visit to be informed of the input that the new Head Teacher, Maxine Hepple, had internal adaptations to the Unit.
11. We noted that the new Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) and the Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) Service, opened at the Former Rise Carr Primary School Site, just a few weeks behind schedule, in April 2008.

#### **Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee visit the site of the Pupil Referral Unit on Monday, 29th October 2007.**

#### **School Attendance and Exclusions in Darlington**

12. The Committee received two reports during the Municipal Year outlining both the ongoing, and final, school attendance and exclusion figures for the Academic Year 2006/07. Members were reassured to note some improvements in the individual attendance figures, however expressed concern at the continuing level of exclusions, despite the implementation of a number of positive strategies by the Pupil Support Service. Members learned about the partnerships formed by schools to provide support on issues of behaviour and persistent absenteeism, and to share good practice. Members of the Committee hope that this partnership working will lead to a reduction in the number of exclusions, and are resolved to continually monitoring the ongoing progress.

### **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)**

13. Following a recommendation by the Behaviour Support Task and Finish Group, Members of the Committee received a presentation from representatives of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). Members were informed of the key priorities in relation to the engagement of young people, learning and development, the EDUC / CAMHS initiative and the CAMHS Early Intervention Strategy.

### **Youth Opportunity Fund (DOSH)**

14. Members of the Committee received an overview from the Assistant Director, Community Services, on the Youth Opportunity Fund, marketed in Darlington under the name 'DOSH'. The Assistant Director outlined the nature of the scheme, and Members were delighted to have an opportunity to speak to some of the young people that sit on the Youth Committee, who are responsible for making decisions in relation to the allocation of funding.

### **PLAY and Free Time Strategy**

15. The Committee held a joint meeting with the Environment Scrutiny Committee (now Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee) on Thursday, 12<sup>th</sup> July 2007, to receive information on the PLAY and Free Time Strategy, and participate in the formal consultation process. Members of both Committees agreed to endorse and support the Strategy, and Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee now look forward to receiving an update report in the forthcoming Municipal Year.

### **Enquiry Group 2**

16. Members requested an overview from David Heaton, Chair of Enquiry Group 2, outlining the question posed by the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) in relation to future educational needs and provision in Darlington. Mr. Heaton highlighted the work and research that he had, to that point, conducted. Members enthusiastically entered into discussion on various aspects of the education remit,

identifying areas for improvement and challenge, and highlighting the progressive work already being carried out. The Committee were extremely grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the valuable work of Enquiry Group 2.

### **Darlington Media Group – Youth Involvement**

17. Representatives from the Darlington Media Group attended a meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee on Monday, 5<sup>th</sup> November 2007, to inform Members of the services and facilities offered to young people by the Group, in relation to photography, media and artwork, and highlighted some of the projects that young people had undertaken. Members were also given the opportunity to view a DVD, which demonstrated some of the project work that had been successfully completed.

### **Placement of Youth Offending Service Preventions Officer at Hummersknott and Skerne Park Schools**

18. Further to the recommendation of the Behaviour Support Task and Finish Group, Members of the Committee received a report on the placement of a Youth Offending Service (YOS) Preventions Officer at Hummersknott and Skerne Park schools, and to provide information on changes in relation to the cluster arrangements – namely rolling this programme out to Carmel, Heighington High Coniscliffe, Mowden Infants and Juniors, Abbey Federation, St Augustine's and George Dent. Members also received a presentation from the Preventions Officer on the 'podcasting' initiative developed for children attending Skerne Park Primary School, in relation to transition to Hummersknott School and Language College.
19. The Committee received a further update report at its meeting on Monday, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2008, on this initiative. Members were extremely pleased to learn that full funding for the initiative had been secured from cluster arrangements until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2009.

### **Libraries and Community Learning Service**

20. The Head of Libraries and Community Learning Service submitted a report to the meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee on Monday, 14<sup>th</sup> January 2008, at the Education Village in Darlington, to update Members on the activities available within the Libraries and Community Learning Service. This report was complemented by a further report presented to the Committee on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2008, which outlined the recent Ofsted inspection (to which I provided evidence to inspectors), in which the overall effectiveness of the service was rated as 'good'. Members were pleased to learn that the inspectors commented on the positive learner experience, and had identified seven key strengths. Two areas for improvement were identified, and the Committee were satisfied to discover that

an Action Plan was being developed to address these areas for improvement, and to build on the areas of strength.

**Members of the Committee discuss the report on the Libraries and Community Learning Service at its meeting on the 14<sup>th</sup> January 2008, at the Education Village, Darlington.**

**Darlington's Parenting Strategy**

21. A report was submitted to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee informing Members of the development of a Comprehensive Parenting Strategy for Darlington. Members of the Committee held a discussion on various aspects of the Strategy, including the provision of Children's Centres, the parental support available for families with children with Special Educational Needs, and signposting and the promotion of other appropriate services. Members were happy to endorse the draft Parenting Strategy for future development.

**Development of Positive Activities ('Youth Offer') in Darlington**

22. Members received a report that provided the key elements of the new statutory duties placed on the Council to secure access for young people to a sufficient local offer of positive activities and to outline the plans and proposals in place to meet this duty, including design, branding, and integration of providers across all sectors. Members were interested in the cost of the provision of activities and opportunities, and the role of the T3 Group, Darlington's youth forum for 11-19 year olds.

**Annual Performance Assessment of Services for Children and Young People in Darlington Borough Council**

23. The Committee were informed of the Annual Performance Assessment (APA) of the Children's Services Department. Every year the Office of Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) carry out an Annual Performance Assessment of each Council, commenting on its effectiveness in meeting the needs of children. The report received by the Committee outlined the nature of the assessment, the grading system on which the assessment was based, and the areas identified for improvement. The Committee resolved to continue to monitor those areas for improvement highlighted by Ofsted.

**Lifewise Learning Project**

24. Members were informed of the Lifewise Learning Project led by the Trade Unions, which is an initiative that aims to help employees of the Council who would like to return to learning, however find themselves in the 'hard to reach' category due to the nature of their employment. Members were supportive of the

Charter signed by the Council and the TUC to promote learning representatives and workplace learning initiatives.

### **Draft Sustainable Community Strategy**

25. The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held a Special Meeting on Monday, 28<sup>th</sup> January 2008, to consider the Draft Sustainable Community Strategy. Following the meeting a written submission was made, as part of the consultation exercise, outlining the discussion that had taken place during the meeting.

### **Director of Children's Services' Transition Commission**

26. Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee received a report that provided an update as to the results of the Director of Children's Services' Transition Commission, which involved Primary and Secondary schools in the Borough. The report outlined the aims of the Transition Commission, analysed the current approach adopted in relation to transition, identified the challenges to the current approach, and highlighted the improvements required. The report also provided feedback on the first Darlington Transition Conference, which took place on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2007, and the development of the Transition Action Plan.

### **Special Educational Needs: The Educational Provision in Darlington Schools**

27. Members received an extremely detailed report that provided an update on how the special educational needs (SEN) of children and young people in Darlington are met. The report outlined the numbers of children and young people who have special educational needs, the provision available and the support and guidance provided to schools. In particular, the report highlighted the Council's increased responsibility to promote inclusion, the consultation that has been conducted on the further delegation of SEN resources to schools without recourse to a statement of special educational need, and the development of transition guidance for schools, settings, parents / carers and children.

### **Referral Trends / Origin of Referrals to Children's Social Care**

28. Members received a report to inform the Committee of the referral trends to Children's Social Care, their origins and the processes in place to respond. The report provided Members with statistical data in relation to the Child Protection Referrals in Darlington compared to the national performance rate. It was pleasing to note that the rate of referrals that led to initial assessment has increased from an already high rate to 99.6%, compared to the national performance rate of 56%.

### **The School Forum**

29. Members were informed of the work and responsibilities of the School's Forum, and received a copy of the minutes of the School Forum's meeting held on Tuesday, 12<sup>th</sup> February 2008. The Committee have requested representation on this Forum.

### **The Local Admission Forum**

30. Members also received a report detailing the work and responsibilities of the Local Admissions Forum, and provided Members with the opportunity to view the minutes of the meeting of the Local Admissions Forum held on Tuesday, 12<sup>th</sup> February 2008.

### **Climate Change**

31. Further to the decision made by the Monitoring and Co-ordination Group on Monday, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2007, that all Scrutiny Committees should conduct a piece of work within their remit in relation to Climate Change, and report back their findings in February 2008, the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee resolved that one of the topics of discussion during the Special Meeting held on Monday, 15<sup>th</sup> October 2007, be Climate Change.
32. The Committee also held a Special Meeting on Thursday, 28<sup>th</sup> February 2008, at Longfield Comprehensive School in Darlington, where the sole focus of the meeting was Climate Change, and the work and projects that are being conducted in Darlington's schools to raise awareness of Climate Change amongst school children. An invitation was extended to every school in the Borough, and several schools were represented at the meeting by either teachers, pupils or both. Dr. Krista McKinzey, Climate Change Schools Project Officer from the Science Learning Centre North East, attended the meeting and gave a presentation to those in attendance. The meeting then split into two workshop sessions which allowed greater discussion on the work being conducted within Darlington's schools. It is hoped that this meeting will have allowed the sharing of good practice and will provide the catalyst for the production of a document mapping the work being conducted in relation to Climate Change in every school in the Borough.

### **Service Planning and Service Plan Performance Monitoring**

33. Members received the Service Plans that this Scrutiny Committee has responsibility for scrutinising, and continued to receive quarterly updates of performance against the Service Plans. The reports highlighted those Performance Indicators (PIs) where targets are not being achieved, and where targets are being

exceeded. It was resolved that these service plans be made available for viewing by Members of the Committee before each ordinary meeting.

### **Health and Safety in Schools Task and Finish Review Group**

34. The Health and Safety in Schools Task and Finish Review Group continued to meet and to clarify the process of holding schools to account for the adherence to Health and Safety guidance and compliance with required legislation, examine the evidence required to demonstrate that schools are adhering to Health and Safety guidance and complying with required legislation, and consider the action that can be taken to encourage schools to adhere to Health and Safety guidance and comply with required legislation.
35. Whilst Members of the Task and Finish Group remained frustrated that the Council are unable to impose any restriction on where a school must take its health and safety maintenance and training provision from, the group were extremely pleased with the progress made by the Health and Safety Unit in relation to the School Health Check. Members are looking forward to receiving an update at the start of the forthcoming Municipal Year, and also recommended the implementation of a Children's Services Health and Safety in Schools Award.
36. I presented the final report of the Health and Safety in Schools Task and Finish Group to Cabinet on Tuesday, 15<sup>th</sup> January 2008. This was the first time that a Scrutiny Chair had been given the opportunity to present a Task and Finish report to Cabinet directly, highlighting the recommendations of the Committee.

### **Local Democracy Week**

37. A Special Meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee was held on Monday, 15th October 2007 as part of Darlington Borough Council's commitment to Local Democracy Week (15th–21st October 2007). An invitation was issued to all Primary Head Teachers in the Borough inviting them to send two pupils and an escort to participate in the meeting, and 26 children attended in total. The children enjoyed a healthy buffet reception prior to the meeting, where they were able to meet the Mayor, the Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive, Members of the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee and other senior Members and Officers of the Council. At the meeting the children received an overview of the Committee structure and meeting protocols, before receiving overviews from Officers on School Transport Plans and Climate Change. The children and Members of the Committee then participated in discussions and workshops on these issues, including voting on actions that can be taken to improve school transport and the impact on Climate Change. It was heartening to see the enthusiasm of all involved.

**Councillor Cyndi Hughes,**



**Chair of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee**