
OVERVIEW OF LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1. Since the last ordinary meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work that have been undertaken by the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee:-
 - (a) **Transformation of Secondary Education in Darlington – Academy Update** – The Committee continued to receive its regular update from the Director of Children’s Services as to the ongoing progress of the proposed Academy School for Darlington. The Committee were informed of the progress of the key features within the feasibility stage, the site appraisal, the procurement process and staffing implications. The Committee engaged in discussion regarding the amended pupil intake figures, the terms of employment for teaching staff, and the ethos and vision of the proposed Academy.
 - (b) **Educational Opportunities at the South Park** – Members of the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee received an overview from Deborah Hall, Park Ranger at the South Park, on the ‘Outside In’ programme. ‘Outside In’ is an educational initiative that allows pupils to learn about the park and such subjects as nature, food webs and habitats and is based at the Education Centre near to the Clock Tower Lodge in South Park. The programme is provided in an informal manner and commences at Key Stage 1. It was reported that the programme is adaptable to the National Curriculum and has been incorporated into such subjects as Mathematics and English. The programme is aimed at Primary School children, however has also been accessed by some Secondary Schools. The Committee were pleased to note that the programme is fully booked until August 2007.
 - (c) **Children and Young People’s Plan Review Update** – The Committee received a report outlining the arrangements for conducting the statutory review of the Children and Young People’s Plan. The Committee noted the ongoing work in relation to this review, and welcomed the consultation with children, young people, families, schools and other stakeholders.
 - (d) **School Exclusions** – Following a recommendation made by the Behaviour Support Task and Finish Review Group, the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee received a half yearly update on the school exclusion figures. It was gratifying to learn that the number of permanent exclusions had reduced overall compared to the figures for the same period during the previous academic year, with this reduction being particularly noticeable in the Key Stage 4 Year Group. The Committee raised concerns at the continuing high level of permanent exclusions in the Key Stage 3 Year Group, however were pleased to learn of the introduction of initiatives to target this. The Committee remain committed to monitoring the exclusion figures and will receive a further report at the end of the academic year to scrutinise the annual overall figures.

- (e) **Visit to Darlington College** – Members of the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee visited the Darlington College on Wednesday, 21st March 2007, and received a tour of the facilities with specific focus on the Skills + programme. The variety of courses available and the facilities provided, particularly in relation to vocational qualifications, were extremely impressive. The Principal of the College, Ms. Sarah Robinson facilitated the tour and provided answers to Members’ many questions.
- (f) **Pupil Referral Unit Task and Finish Review** – The Pupil Referral Unit Task and Finish Review Group submitted its final report to the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee, at the Committee meeting held on the 26th March 2007. The report was well received by the Committee, and although the Pupil Referral Unit remains in special measures, it was reassuring to learn that the Unit had received a positive report following a recent monitoring visit from HMI. The inspectors particularly commented on the availability of Local Authority staff and acknowledged that there had been improvements in other areas. The inspection team will be visiting the Pupil Referral Unit again in May 2007 to examine further progress, and the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee have resolved to revisit the work conducted by this Task and Finish Review Group in the forthcoming Municipal Year.
- (g) **Health and Safety Task and Finish Review Group** – The Committee received a report from the Health and Safety in Schools Task and Finish Review Group, updating Members of the Committee on progress made to date. A further meeting of the Health and Safety in Schools Task and Finish Review Group will be taking place in May 2007.
- (h) **Work Programme 2006/2007 and 2007/08** – The Committee considered the Work Programme for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2006/2007, and also for the forthcoming Municipal Year, and examined Cabinet’s Forward Plan, in order to identify areas of particular interest or concern. The Committee highlighted a number of items to be included on the Work Programme. The Chair extended an open invitation for the inclusion of additional items on the Committee’s Work Programme.

Councillor Cyndi Hughes
Chair of Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee

Since the last Ordinary meeting of Council, I have attended the following meetings:-

- SACRE (The Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education);
- Attended a production of Bugsey Malone at Hummersknott Language College;
- Spoke to Polam Hall students at their Languages for Business Day on the importance of learning modern foreign languages;
- Visited Cummins Engines on International Women’s Day (8th March 2007) to discuss educational and career opportunities with visiting Secondary School pupils;
- Attended the Darlington Music Festival at Eastbourne Comprehensive School;

- Visited the Neighbourhood Nursery at the Coleridge Centre;
- Attended two meetings of the Monitoring and Coordination Committee;
- Had a briefing session with Murray Rose, Director of Children’s Services in regard to admissions for 2007-2008;
- Attended a briefing with Mr. Harry O’Neill, Director of Education for the Catholic Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle.