
LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – ANNUAL REPORT 2005/06

1. I am pleased to present the Annual Report of the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee to Council on behalf of the Members of that Committee.
2. In the first instance I would like to thank all the Elected Members and Co-opted Members on the Committee for their input into its work over the past year, especially those who have devoted time to our Task and Finish Reviews this year. I would also like to thank the very able Officer support given to us over the last year and also Councillor McEwan, the Cabinet Member for Education for his contribution and attendance at our meetings.
3. On an extremely sad note, I would like to remember two of our Committee Members, Councillor Roderick Burt and Councillor Philip Stamford-Bewlay who both passed away in this Municipal Year. Their contribution to the work of our Committee and to the learning in our Town will not be forgotten.
4. The Committee has been involved in examining a wide variety of learning opportunities during the past Municipal Year. We have seen many major developments in education terms in Darlington including the opening of four splendid new educational establishments i.e. the Harrowgate Hill Primary School, St. George's Primary School, the Education Village and Skerne Park Primary School. A synopsis of the work of the Committee during the year is given below.
5. At the beginning of the year consideration was given to the results of the Annual Performance Assessment of the Authority's Children's Services, which highlighted areas where Children's Services would need to focus its efforts into improving performance in relation to educational attainment and rate of progress in Darlington. It was reassuring to note the steps to be take to improve performance, which included partnership working between Children's Services, Head Teachers and schools and other Agencies, and the establishment of a Darlington Educational Improvement Partnership to improve, challenge and support schools. The Committee looks forward to participating in the development and monitoring of improvement plans for all the schools in the Borough.
6. The Committee has scrutinised and monitored the development of the Extended Schools Initiative in the Borough. It has received reports on the Initiative, had discussions with the Extended Schools Co-ordinator and also carried out a Task and Finish Review Group to assist in its development.

The Members of Lifelong Learning Scrutiny look forward to further monitoring this Initiative as it develops.

7. Dame Della Smith, the Chief Executive, of the Education Village came to a Committee meeting and gave an interesting and informative presentation on the rationale behind the development of the Village, how it would work, the opportunities and benefits it would offer for the education of pupils (including those with special educational needs) and the challenges for its management. Following this presentation several members of the Committee made a visit to the Village, which was still under construction. It is proposed that the Members of the Committee re-visit the Village next Municipal Year to view the completed development. We also hope to hold one of our Scrutiny Committees there in the new year.
8. The Committee has been heavily involved in monitoring and developing proposals for Transforming Secondary Education in the Borough - including the proposed submission of An Expression for Interest for an Academy School in Darlington. In November the Committee held a Special Meeting, at Cabinet's request, to investigate fully whether the Council should submit an Expression of Interest to the Department of Education and Skills for up to £25M of funding to develop an Academy School in Darlington. The meeting was held over a two-day period. The first day was devoted to hearing the views of interested parties. The second day was spent preparing the recommendations to Cabinet. The Committee supported the submission of an Expression of Interest for a City Academy in Darlington but recommended to Cabinet several issues that should be addressed in the Expression of Interest prior to its submission for approval. It is proposed that the Committee will regularly monitor the proposals for Transforming Secondary Education in the Borough as it develops. A Task and Finish Group has been established to collate information on Academies where the Church of England is the sponsor. The Committee were delighted to welcome Sheila Bamber, Director of Education, The Church of England Diocese of Durham Board of Education to its March meeting to talk about the Church's involvement in Academy Schools and in particular as the potential sponsor for the proposed Academy School in Darlington.
9. The Committee was pleased to welcome Mr. D. Hayllar, Head Teacher of Heathfield Primary School to its meeting in September, who addressed the meeting on the school's future development plans/aspirations, following its OFSTED Inspection. The Committee congratulated the staff and pupils at the School on the good outcome of its OFSTED Inspection. During the year the Committee also considered the judgements made about the quality of education offered by the two nursery and four primary schools and one secondary schools in Darlington that were subject OFSTED inspections during the period 1st September 2004 and 31st July 2005. The results indicated that the Local Authority could be pleased with the overall performance and subsequent progress of the schools inspected.
10. Consideration was given to the content and recommendations of the Commons Select Committee Report on Public Libraries published in March, 2005. It was pleasing to note that consideration was being given to innovative ways of overcoming the possible implications of the fact that Darlington only has two Libraries, on the proposed Corporate Performance Assessment Model on the Council's Excellent CPA rating after 2008. These included investigating the opening up of Library access in other places in the Borough as well as the new trolley library services operating in the Town Hall for staff.

11. The progress made with the development of the Behaviour Support Team during the last twelve months has continued to be monitored. During the year the Team received additional funding which would enable its further expansion and also there was opportunities to develop holistic solutions to behavioural problems under the auspices of the relatively new Children's Services Department. The Committee established a Task and Finish Review Group to highlight any trends in behaviour problems in pupils. The work of this Review Group is on-going.
12. It was pleasing to note the results of the Adult Learning Inspectorate's inspections of adult and community learning and work-based learning, which showed substantial improvements in the services provided, with the work-based learning Services being judged as one of the best in the country.
13. The Committee has continued to monitor the financial health of schools in the Darlington. Consideration was given to the contents of an Audit Commission document, which widely criticised financial management of schools nationally, however it was reported that the comments did not apply to Darlington as the Authority has in place robust mechanisms to challenge and support school funding. Proposals are also in place to review budget management methods in an attempt to improve accuracy of financial reporting, both to governing bodies and the Authority.
14. Consideration was given to an analysis of Schools' performance in test/examinations at all key stages in 2005 which indicated where improvements have been made and also priority areas for future improvement. It is worthy of note that the extremely good results at Key Stage 5 at Carmel Technology College had led to Darlington Local Authority being judged the best at 'A' Level nationally. To enable the Committee to consider and challenge future results a training session was held in for Committee Members on 'value added' issues in relation to examination results.
15. A Trade Union Learning Representative from UNISON, attended the meeting in October, 2005 to talk about his role as an Accredited Learning Representative. He referred to the legal rights and money given to Trade Unions to promote the Learning Representative Initiative which is intended to increase employees' basic skills. He also referred to the opportunities and challenges for its future development in Darlington.
16. The progress made with the implementation of the Children's Services Department's Strategy to support the education of children in public care was considered and in particular the mechanisms in the Strategy, to support looked after children during their education. Also regular monitoring has continued of the initiatives taken to actively promote the employment of care leavers through the Council's equal opportunities policies. It was particularly gratifying and encouraging to hear about individual success stories of children who had benefited from these support services.
17. It was interesting to hear of the progress made with the implementation of the 14-19 Agenda since the formation of the 14-19 Trust in September 2004. The Committee particularly highlighted the need to tackle prejudices to vocational qualifications as an alternative to academic qualifications and the problem of young people going straight into low paid work straight from school. It was acknowledged there are good facilities in the Borough to put it in an excellent position to enable the delivery of the 14-19 Agenda.
18. A six monthly progress report was received detailing the good progress made with the implementation of the Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy actions that came within the remit of the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee.

19. School Attendance in Darlington has continued to be monitored by the Committee. It also established a Task and Finish Review Group to consider school attendance. The Group congratulated the Pupil Support Services and in particular the Education Welfare Officers for the work they have done to increase attendance in Darlington's Schools and made several recommendations intended to further improve attendance in schools.
20. It was pleasing to note the outcome of the Annual performance Assessment of the Council's Education and Children's Social Care Services for 2005 which revealed that the final judgements for children's services and overall 2 star rating for social services performance had contributed to the Authority maintaining its 'Excellent' status for Comprehensive Performance Assessment.
21. In March this year the new Skerne Park Primary School, Children's Centre services, Community Learning and Neighbourhood Nursery commenced operation from its new building, and the Committee gave consideration to its proposed governance arrangements. It is proposed that the Committee will make a visit to the site in the near future.
22. Consideration was given to the findings of a National Evaluation of Sure Start Local Programmes entitled "Early Findings on the Impact of Sure Start Local Programmes on Child Development and Family Functioning" which was a cross-sectional study of 9 and 36 month old children and their families. Details were also given of Sure Start Local Programmes in Darlington, although these had not been subject to the National Evaluation. It was particularly interesting to hear of the work carried out in Darlington by the Sure Start Local Programmes with hard to reach groups in the community, the success of the Bump and Baby Clinic, and the acknowledgement nationally of the provision of seamless services with health colleagues.
23. To coincide with Local Democracy Week, which was held on 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'. Eight Primary Schools attended the event and pupils participated in debate on the Darlington Youth Services – Every Child Matters Project and the Extended Schools Initiative. Prior to the meeting, a reception for the teachers and pupils was held which was hosted by the Mayor, Councillor Stella Robson, Ada Burns Chief Executive and the Members of the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee.
24. To coincide with The European Day of Languages 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. The Members of the Committee participated in a German language lesson and it was very pleasing to note the good work being carried out at the school.

25. In October 2005 a Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee Newsletter was distributed to all schools in the Borough to inform schools parents and governors of the work being carried out by the Committee. In future it is proposed to keep the School Community up to date on the work of the Scrutiny Committee through 'The Link' – the newsletter for Children's Services produced by the Communications Department of the Council. The Spring 2006 edition contained an article on the work of the Committee in relation to the pupil's test and examination results in the Borough for 2005, and a picture of a pupil at St. George's School, Middleton-St. George receiving a book token from myself for winning the Word Search competition on the October Newsletter.

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