

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – ANNUAL REPORT  
2008/09**

1. The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee are pleased to present their Annual Report to Council.
2. The Chair of the Committee would like to thank all Elected Members and Co-opted Members of the Committee for their enthusiastic input into its work over the past year. A special thanks goes out to those who have devoted time to the various extra meetings and investigations outlined in this report.
3. The Committee would also like to thank the Lead Officer, George McQueen, Assistant Director, Planning and Resources, Children's Services Department, Allison Carling and Karen Graves from Democratic Services, and the many officers of the Council who have assisted us with our work during the year.
4. This has been a year in which children and young people in the Borough began to reap some of the benefits brought about by important changes implemented by the Children's Services Department working closely with schools, families and young people themselves in regard to attendance, attainment and exclusions. The Committee has been pleased to support these improvements and continues to press for further advances.

**School Developments**

5. The Committee have continued to follow the progress of various school developments over the year and these have included :-
  - Amalgamation of Dodmire Infant School and Nursery School, with Dodmire Junior School;
  - Firthmoor Primary School Temporary Closure – The thanks of this Committee has been extended to each of the schools that acted as host schools and accommodated pupils of Firthmoor Primary School during the school's closure in the Summer of 2008;
  - The National School Challenge – This had a significant impact on Longfield School Sports College and Houghton Comprehensive School but both schools have a detailed action plan in place to improve;
  - North Road Primary School – Following a selection process, Kier (Northern) was the successful company and work commenced on the re-build in November, 2008;
  - Phoenix Centre – The Centre is now open and pupils are benefiting from the updated facilities. Work continues to develop community use of the Centre.

## **School Budgets Outturns and Properly Assigned Projects**

6. In June 2008, this Scrutiny Committee examined the outturns in relation to Darlington school budgets for 2007/08, and the Committee were pleased to note the reduction in overall school balances from the previous year, as declared by school governing bodies. This Committee remains committed to monitoring school budget outturns in future years, in order to ensure that schools are utilising resources fully to provide the maximum benefit to children and young people in the Borough.

## **Children and Young People's Plan 2008-2011**

7. Members were consulted on and gave views on the Draft Children and Young People's Plan and the role of the Plan in the delivery of the Sustainable Community Strategy vision: One Darlington: Perfectly Placed, and the new Local Area Agreement. Members continue to monitor the plan.

## **PLAY and Free Time Strategy – Update**

8. Following the launch of the Darlington Play and Free Time Strategy in Autumn 2007, we received a progress report on the outcomes that have been achieved by the Strategy, including a successful application to the Big Lottery fund. As a result of this successful application, the following three projects had been developed:
  - **Fun and Games in the Park** (£91K), which included the appointment of part-time Play Rangers;
  - **Fun on Wheels** (£54K);
  - **Better play in the Denes** (£87K).

## **Language and Learning for Minority Communities**

9. Members received a report on the work of the Language for Learning Service and the impact of the arrival of additional families from Eastern European countries on service delivery. Members discussed the wide range of nationalities and cultures represented in Darlington's schools, the support provided by parental and family structures in language learning and how this is facilitated.

## **Childhood Obesity**

10. We have continually monitored and received updates on action undertaken and action required in relation to childhood obesity in Darlington.

## **Health and Safety in Schools**

11. We received a report to update Members on health and safety management in schools and outlining the progress and future actions associated with the implementation of the Council's plans for health and safety management. We also received information as to areas of risk in schools and ways in which staff and students were working together to reduce those risks.

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

12. Members received the Service Plans that this Scrutiny Committee has responsibility for scrutinising, and continued to receive 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.

### **Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1,2,3 GCSE and A LEVEL Results in 2008**

13. Members received a report on the cumulative performance of Darlington schools in national tests in 2008 which showed the provisional results at Foundation Stage and Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 showing some significant improvements and consolidated existing good performance. We were also pleased to note the improvement attendance and exclusion figures.

### **Development of 14-19 Curriculum Offer and New Diplomas**

14. Members received a report on the work of the Darlington 14-19 Trust, the development of the 14-19 Strategy, the work of the various sub-groups that support the Trust and the development of a new range of qualifications for the 14-19 phase designed to bridge the gap between vocational and academic education. From September 2009 Darlington has been delivering four Diplomas (IT, Creative and Media, Engineering and Hospitality and Catering) with one further Diploma (Construction and the Building Environment) to be offered from September, 2010.

### **Safeguarding Children and Young People**

15. We felt that it has been a key role of this Scrutiny Committee to receive regular updates on the roles and responsibilities of the Darlington Safeguarding Children Board (DSCB) and to highlight the key statutory mechanisms for agreeing and monitoring how relevant organisations in Darlington co-operative to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, and that the Board ensure that this is done effectively.

### **Specialism in Schools**

16. We received a report to inform Members on how a school may become a 'specialist school' and to update Members as to the position with regard to current specialist status in Darlington's schools.

### **Family Partnership Programme – First Year Pilot Sites in England**

17. Members received a report to outline the findings of the national first year evaluation of the intensive parenting programme working with vulnerable first time young mothers as part of a three year Family Nurse Partnership. The Family Nurse Partnership has been developed over the past 25 years in the USA by Professor David Olds, University of Colorado and has produced impressive short and long term results. Jan Finn, Programme Manager also gave Members a presentation on the successful pilot which began in April, 2007 and has been delivered in Darlington and

Durham through a partnership involving the Darlington PCT; County Durham PCT; CYPS, Durham and Children's Services.

### **School Exclusions 2007/08**

18. A report was received to update Members of this Scrutiny Committee on the fixed term and permanent exclusions within Darlington for the academic year of September 2007 to July 2007 and to highlight progress being made in reducing exclusions and to identify how this is being achieved. Members were particularly pleased to learn that permanent exclusions have dropped and schools have made significant improvements by the use of inclusion units, internal exclusion and isolation, implementing managed moves, individual student support and teacher coaching from the behaviour support team. Members of this Scrutiny also congratulate all staff concerned in making this authority the most improved local authority. Members of this committee visited the special inclusion unit at Hummersknott Language College and spoke at length with staff working there.

### **School Absence Figures 2007/08**

19. A report was received to update Members on the levels of school absence, and to also advise Members of the expansion of the persistent absentee agenda. Members were very pleased to note a further decrease in absence rates in both secondary and primary level.

### **NEET Strategy**

20. We gave our consideration to Darlington's NEET (Not Engaged in Education, Employment or Training) Strategy. The NEET Reduction Partnership developed in Darlington aims to look strategically at the characteristics and barriers that prevent young people from engaging in learning and to make recommendations regarding areas for development. If this local authority's NEET target for 2020 is reached there will be a significant amount of government funding realised under the Local Area Agreement.

### **Children's Homes Overview**

21. Members of this Scrutiny Committee requested information on the provision of children's residential services in this authority's Children's Homes. A report received thereon outlined the extent and remit of the Children's homes in Darlington that provide a service for Looked After Children as well as information on the Short Break Centre for Disabled Children.

### **Children's Services Compliments, Comments and Complaints**

22. We received the Annual Report operation and effectiveness of the policy and procedure for 1st April, 2007 to 31st March, 2008.

### **Review and Task and Finish Review Groups**

23. We have undertaken various Task and Finish Reviews over the last Municipal Year and these have included :-

**Joint Visits to Taste School Meals** – In conjunction with Members of the Health and Well Being Scrutiny Members undertook visits to various schools to scrutinise the provision and quality of school meals.

**Multi Use Games Areas (MUGA's)** – Members investigated the use of Multi Use Games areas within the borough, and after initial findings have agreed to undertake a full Review into MUGA's which is currently ongoing.

**Language Learning**- Members have initiated a two strand task & finish—language learning in the Community (adult education) and language learning in schools. This work continues and will be reported back in due course.

### **Local Democracy Week**

24. A Special Meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee was held on Monday, 13th October, 2008 as part of Local Democracy Week. 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 41 children attended in total.

The children enjoyed a healthy buffet reception prior to the meeting, where they were able to meet the Mayor (Councillor Ian Haszeldine), the Chief Executive (Ms. Ada Burns), Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee, and other Senior Members and Officers of the Council.

At the meeting the children then received presentations from Officers on Health and Safety in Schools, Healthy Eating and Internet Safety. Each and every child spoke in the Council chamber and many actively engaged and participated in discussions on these issues.

### **Strategy for Young People's Services**

25. We were consulted on the Strategy for the Development of Young People's Services in Darlington which aims to provide services and improve the outcomes for young people aged 11-19 years. The Strategy builds on existing good practice and will deliver integrated services to improve early intervention, prevention and targeted support. It has been very encouraging to see a positive contribution from young people in the 'I'm a Councillor, Get Me Out of Here' competition run as part of Local Democracy Week and the positive turnout at the Youth Member of Parliament Elections. Two members of our scrutiny committee took part in the "I'm a Councillor" fortnight event.

Darlington's Member of the Youth Parliament, Emily Christer, and Gary Arnold, Youth Officer within the Community Services Department, also attended the meeting to discuss with Members their views on the Strategy and the ways they feel we can reach young people.

### **Primary Capital Programme**

26. Members received an update on the progress of the Local Authority's bid for additional capital funding and the schools which will benefit from the capital resources if received.

### **Local Admission Forum**

27. Members received a report detailing the work and responsibilities of the Local Admissions Forum and its annual report.

### **Joint Area Review of Services for Children and Young People in Darlington**

28. Members of this scrutiny committee were presented with a report to outline the Joint Area Review of Services for Children and Young People and to be consulted on the draft action plan which had been prepared in response to each of the Joint Area Review recommendations. The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) published its Joint Area Review of Services for Children and Young People on 18th November, 2008 and we were given 70 working days to respond in the form of an action plan. Members of this scrutiny committee made particular reference to improving outcomes for children and young people with learning disabilities and/or disabilities and the provisions for 16-19 year olds.

### **Secondary Schools Building Schools for the Future**

29. An Expression of Interest has been sent to the Department for Children, Schools and Families and Partnerships for Schools seeking to have Darlington included in the next wave of funding available under the Building Schools for the Future Programme. Darlington is not programmed to be included until 2013-14, however this Expression of Interest aims to accelerate the release of funding to work can commence on refurbishing three secondary schools in the Borough and improve the use of ICT in all secondary schools.

### **Youth Offending Service**

30. We received a presentation from Rita Taylor, Head of Service, Darlington Youth Offending on the Darlington Youth Offending Service with particular emphasis on the services provided to reduce offending and re-offending by young persons. The presentation included the background information on the Youth Offending Service, the Youth Justice Plan and the Criminal Justice Act 1998. This included examination of the partners with whom the Youth Offending Service work in the provision of service at Pre-Court, Post-Court and Performance and Quality levels. Members were particularly interested to learn more about influence of alcohol and under-age drinking on first time offending, the work with the Drug Action Team and general issues around the prevention of offending and re-offending. Following a very informative and discussion provoking presentation and discussion, Members of this Scrutiny have agreed that there are certain areas that Members wished to pursue further. To this end, the Committee have agreed to undertake a full Committee Task

and Finish Review in order to examine the following: the Parenting Strategy, the Safer Schools Partnership, the contribution of the Clarevaux Trust and Police liaison in order to learn more about the Council and our partners work together to try to minimise youth offending. These specific areas are those which this Scrutiny Committee has performance indicator monitoring responsibility. It is therefore the intention of the scrutiny committee to bring together representatives from the policy areas listed and partner organisations mentioned to inform committee's discussion and facilitate an exchange of views which may lead to recommendations

### **Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee**