

## **ATTENDANCE AT KEY STAGE 1 AND RECEPTION REVIEW GROUP**

**17<sup>TH</sup> October, 2011**

**PRESENT** – Councillors C. Taylor, Curry, Lister, T. Richmond, J. Vasey; and D. Moyes.

**OFFICERS** – George McQueen, Head of Education Services; Jenni Cooke, Assistant Director Children, Families and Learning; Chris Archer, Lead Officer Early Years; and Allison Hill, Democratic Officer.

**PURPOSE OF MEETING** – This was the first meeting of the Review Group and the purpose of the meeting was to receive and overview of the current situation with attendance at Key Stage 1 and Reception within the borough's schools and also to approve the terms of reference for the Review.

### **DISCUSSION:**

- Members received a presentation from the Head of Education Service to provide some background on the current legislation relating to school attendance; the importance of attendance; and how Darlington is doing on attendance generally compared to regional neighbours and the national average.
- At primary and secondary level, Darlington is comparable with regional neighbours and national average, however at Key Stage 1 is lower than regional neighbours, lower than statistical neighbours and lower than the national average. However, attendance is improving rather than declining but it is still too low.
- Chris Archer spoke to Members on the Early Years Foundation Stage which covers the period of a child's life from birth to the end of Reception and give details of the various settings a child may be in including maintained nursery places and Private, Voluntary and Independent nursery places i.e. daycare, playgroups, pre-school, childminders and independent schools. Members also examined the models of access to nursery Flexible Free Entitlement (FFE) which differs upon the type of setting and also examined the differences in session attendance.
- It was noted that children can be encouraged to attend school at 4 but this cannot be enforced until the child is 5 years old and there are a number of parents who elected not to send their children until they are 5 years old.
- Members undertook a simple mapping exercise to determine what effect different factors had on school attendance, whether they always, sometimes or never effected attendance. Factors included Family Intervention Teams; closer work with Children's Services; Home School Liaison; Education Welfare Officer Intervention; Incentives to Parents; Withholding benefits; Fast track prosecutions; and Incentives to Schools.
- Analysis of the exercise carried out amongst the Members showed that generally opinion was equal as to the importance of family intervention teams, work with children's services and home liaison on attendance. Factors that Members though sometimes may help attendance were Education Welfare Visits to homes, incentives for schools and

parents and factors that would never help would be fact tracking prosecutions and withholding benefits.

- During the exercise Members made further suggestions for increasing attendance to include wider family liaison and school to home liaison; school policies to contact families if a child is not in school without an explanation by 10 am.; flexibility with 'Rising 5's' admission policy to Reception Class; and raising the age for school starters.
- Members considered the draft Terms of Reference for the Review and agreed to forward to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Meeting on 31<sup>st</sup> October, 2011 for approval.
- Members also discussed the impact of traveller families upon attendance levels and other ethnic minorities and also the proportion of domiciled travellers not attending.

#### **FUTURE ACTIONS:**

- Invite the Traveller Education Service to attend the next meeting.
- Examine good practise in neighbouring authorities.
- Speak with the Schools Forum for incentives.
- Case studies on non-attendance and literature reviews.
- Examine policies for attendance within the 4 star authorities.
- Examine consistency of approach across the schools within the Borough. Liaise with Head Teachers.