
OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PORTFOLIO

1. Since the last meeting of Council and under the Children and Young People Portfolio, Cabinet has received the following:
 - (a) **14-19 Commissioning Strategy**

Cabinet approved a submission to be made to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) on proposals for the Council to work in collaboration with the other Tees Valley Authorities to secure future education, training and schools development for 14-19 year olds. This will enable discussions about how best to secure the most effective provision when responsibility transfers to Local Authorities in 2010.
 - (b) **North Road Primary School – Procurement for Building Contractor**

Following a tender process which identified the most suitable contractor in accordance with the adopted selection criteria, Cabinet approved Kier Northern to be awarded the contract to build the replacement North Road Primary School.
2. Developments in Children’s Services
 - (a) The termly briefing for Chairs of Governors hosted by the portfolio holder, was again well attended.
 - (b) Darlington’s fifth Annual Data Day organised by Nigel Pell-Ilderton was attended by around 60 delegates from across the North East who listened to Sue Hackman from DCSF give an update on data issues.
 - (c) Permanent exclusions in Darlington schools were halved in the 2007/8 school year from 47 to 23. Fixed Term exclusions also fell considerably.
 - (d) The NEET Strategy launch was attended by around 60 delegates.
 - (e) I was pleased to participate in, and win, the ‘I’m a Councillor, Get me out of Here’ two week, on-line event held recently. The event encouraged children and young people to interact with local Councillors, via a website (www.bigvote.org.uk), ask questions and vote for the Councillor they wanted to win the event. The event was undertaken as part of this Council's commitment to Local Democracy Week, and aimed to raise awareness of local democracy within young people, break down barriers between Councillors and young people, provide the opportunity for Councillors to find out how young people feel about local issues, and increase the links between Councils and schools. The event proved to be very successful, with Darlington achieving the highest number of young people registered, the highest number of votes by young people, the highest number of page views and more said in live chat than any other council that

participated.

- (f) Incidents of anti-social behaviour by young people fell by 20% for the first quarter of this year, compared to the first quarter of last year.
- (g) Darlington has received £25,000 funding to be used on activities on Friday and Saturday evenings to help prevent young people falling into criminal behaviour, and we will be inviting the third sector to be involved in the development of these positive activities.
- (h) Darlington was visited by assessors following our bid for Beacon Award status in the category 'Reducing Child Poverty', following the work of the Darlington Partnership and its partners over the last five years to bring prosperity and employment to the Borough and to improve the quality of provision in our schools.
- (i) Ruskin Mill Education Trust in partnership with Darlington Children's Services, has been successful in securing finance from the DCSF 'Back on Track' initiative. The finance will be used to develop a complementary education provision for 14-16 year old young people who have additional needs or have a history of non-attendance. The capital funding will develop the Ruskin Mill town centre site – and an organic farm and fishery at Croft. The development will be monitored by a joint Council/Ruskin Mill Project Board
- (j) Children Looked After
On 31st October 2008, Darlington Borough Council had 135 children and young people 'looked after'. During October nine young people ceased to be looked after - eight returning to their family. However, nine young people became looked after during this period – three babies (under 1 year); two children (under 5 years); and 4 young people aged between 11 and 15 years. This illustrates the issue that behind the stable figure (in overall numbers), the 'looked after' group is a constantly changing population. This group of young people are, however, still continuing to achieve in education. There are three young people who started University in September, and another young person who starts in January.
- (k) Child Protection
There are currently 50 children subject to a Child Protection plan. This is a decrease on the figure in August of 61. The figure is divided between two categories:
Neglect - 23; Physical Abuse - 27.
- (l) Children's Centre staff and social care practitioners are holding a practice workshop on issues of neglect, to develop joint working and earlier identification of issues.
- (m) Darlington launched a Play Strategy 12 months ago. This identified some key areas for development, some of which are being funded for three years from Big Lottery Funding of £257K. These projects are on track for delivery. We have appointed two Play Rangers and are looking at improving opportunities for play in the Denes.
- (n) In addition, we have been consulting with young people to develop a mobile youth facility (WWW - whatever, whenever, wherever) officially launched in the town centre on 15th November 2008. The facility features an equipped minibus (TV, games consoles, work bench, seating, DVD player) and equipment trailer (sports and arts

equipment and additional seating). Over the forthcoming months the bus will tour schools and colleges, key estates and be present at large scale events for young people with a view to being fully operational from the Spring. This will entail locating at key sites for a 12-18 week period, engaging with young people at source, and providing an access point and range of relevant opportunities and activities. Work will be ongoing to add to the equipment available to young people.

- (o) Attendance in Darlington continues to improve. We are the most improved authority in the country for reducing secondary persistent absentees and the third most improved authority for secondary absence.

3. Visits and Meetings by the Portfolio Holder since last Council

(a) Friday 19th September

I sat on the Children's Services Infrastructure Group.

I sat on the Corporate Parenting Panel.

I chaired the Local Authority Governors Appointment Panel.

I later attended the afternoon session of Darlington Data Day conference held at the Kings Centre, Whessoe Road.

(b) Friday 3rd October

I visited the Key Stage 4 Engagement Centre at McMullen House, Yarm Road, to meet with students and their tutors.

I had a meeting with Steve Eames, Chief Executive of Co Durham Foundation NHS Trust to discuss children's health issues.

(c) Monday 6th October

I attended the Darlington Partnership Executive Group Meeting in my role as Chair of the Children's Trust.

(d) Wednesday 8th October

I attended a development day focusing on a strategy for Young People's Services in the Borough.

(e) Thursday 9th October

I attended a Children's Trust development day.

(f) Monday 13th October

I was pleased to attend a special meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held as part of Local Democracy Week where Year 6 pupils from Darlington's schools were invited to put questions to the Committee.

(g) Thursday 14th October

I attended a Question Time session held at Hummersknott School, and later attended the Citizenship Ceremony hosted by the school.

(h) Friday 17th October

Today I was accompanied by two students from Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College studying A Level Politics.

I joined a meeting of the Play Strategy Group held at the Groundworks offices.

I visited Corporation Road Primary School to meet the Headteacher, staff and listen

to a powerpoint presentation from the School Council on their likes and dislikes at school.

I later visited the Behaviour Support team to receive an update on their work, particularly the development of the Turnaround School.

Finally, I was pleased to join other Elected Members invited to a tea party hosted by our Youth MP, Emily Christer, to hear an update on her manifesto developments.

(i) Monday 20th October

I attended the launch of the NEET Strategy – aimed at reducing the numbers of ‘NEET’ young people (Not in Education, Employment or Training).

I later met Martin Barclay, Chief Executive of Tees, Esk and Wear Valley NHS Trust, at West Park Hospital, to discuss issues around children and young people experiencing mental health problems.

(j) Wednesday 22nd October

I attended a special screening of a film which involved our looked after children, which took place at the Arts Centre.

(k) Monday 3rd November

I attended a meeting of the Darlington Partnership Executive Group, in my capacity as Chair of the Children’s Trust.

(l) Friday 7th November

I visited Harrowgate Hill Primary School to meet the co-Headteachers, staff and pupils, and to listen to a powerpoint presentation from the School Council on their likes and dislikes at school.

I later attended a presentation by young people, led by our Youth MP Emily Christer, called ‘Take Over Day’.

I joined an event organised by Darlington PCT entitled ‘Preventing Obesity and Promoting Physical/Active Strategy for Children and Young People in Darlington’.

(m) Monday 10th November

I chaired the Autumn term meeting of Local Authority School Governors.

(n) Wednesday 12th November

I attended the Darlington Partnership Board meeting.

I later went to the GCSE certificates evening at Hurworth School, Maths and Computing College.

(o) Friday 14th November

Today I was once again accompanied by two students from Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College studying A Level Politics.

I sat on the panel shortlisting for the post of Children’s Trust manager.

I attended a meeting of the Children’s Services Infrastructure Group.

I later visited Reid Street Primary School to listen to the School Council members give me a powerpoint presentation on their likes and dislikes at school.

I attended Eastbourne Church of England Academy where I met its Principal, and met with the E-Learning Team based there.

Councillor Chris McEwan
Member with Portfolio for Children and Young People