
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) **Eastbourne Church of England Academy – Request for Release of Capital Funding**

Cabinet agreed to £747,477 of additional capital funding to be released to support the new build project for the Eastbourne Church of England Academy. This funding had been allocated by the Department for Children, Schools and Families and will enable the new Academy building project to be completed for opening in September 2009.

(b) **Safeguarding Children Update**

Members received a verbal update on work being undertaken by the Council in relation to safeguarding children. It was agreed that a briefing session be arranged for all Elected Members on this issue, and that a further report be submitted to future meetings of Cabinet and Council.

(c) **Elective Home Education Policy**

Cabinet approved an Elective Home Education Policy to ensure that children are safe and that education is suitable, especially with the number of home educated children in the Borough and justifiable concerns around safeguarding.

2. Developments in Children's Services

(a) Children Looked After

Darlington Borough Council has 129 children and young people 'looked after' (as at 18/12/08), a slight decrease on the last reported figure of 135 in October 2008.

The majority of children and young people are placed with foster carers in Darlington. There is a constant need to increase the 'pool' of carers to ensure a child's needs are appropriately matched to carers' skills and experience.

During 2009, the service will focus on foster care recruitment to increase and improve the placement service.

(b) Child Protection

On 18th December 2008, 63 children in Darlington had a child protection plan – an increase of 13 on October's reported figure. The plans continue to focus on two main categories:

	<u>December 2008</u>	<u>October 2008</u>
Physical Abuse	28	27
Neglect	35	23

Since the Haringey report, the child protection / safeguarding unit has been in sharp focus.

There has been a significant increase in child protection referrals since late November from statutory agencies and family members – this increase is reflected in the use of child protection plans.

The Local Safeguarding Children Board is meeting in January 2009 to analyse this increase and any actions required as a result.

- (c) Darlington's second Transition Action day was organised by Rob Thompson and held at Carmel RC College. It was very well attended by representatives from schools and stakeholders.
- (d) Darlington's Virtual Leadership College was launched on December 5th in partnership with Teesside University and the National College for School Leadership. Co-ordinated by Bernie Bowes it will cater for the professional development needs of all Darlington school staff.
- (e) The Primary Turnaround School opened on January 5th 2009. Based at Red Hall the school is designed to help primary school aged children who have behavioural problems.
- (f) Following a monitoring visit by Ofsted in early December, The Phoenix Centre is no longer in special measures and has moved to the category of notice to improve.
- (g) We successfully bid for £1.2m from the government's Playbuilder scheme to be spent over the next 2 years. A Steering Group will be formed to look at suitable sites and individual communities will be asked for their views on how each play site should be developed by forming a local design team.
- (h) Forty young people attended the annual Presentation of Awards evening on 17th December, kindly hosted by the Mayor. This recognised the achievement of young people undertaking the Award through the Open Awards Centre and included 8 gold award recipients.
- (i) Through the Youth Service and Democratic Services, Darlington hosted for the first time, the regional forum session (North East) of the European Youth Parliament. Teams of young people from throughout the region participated in a day of debate and discussion and the Council (and Council staff) were commended for the welcome extended to all teams and the work put in to stage the day.
- (j) Young people and Youth Workers were nominated for, and subsequently won, the award for Corporate Social Responsibility at the annual Taste of Africa Awards. The award recognised work with ethnic communities within Darlington and across the Tees Valley and made specific reference to work undertaken by a group of Bengali young women who have organised two high profile events and the work of the RAID group and their collaboration with young people in Lesotho.

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

(a) Friday 21st November

I was pleased to chair the interview panel for the new post of Children's Trust Manager, a key partnership post working across children's services in the Borough to improve outcomes for children and young people. The panel appointed Melanie

Brown who takes up this post in January.

(b) Wednesday 26th November

I attended the annual Children's Services conference held at Darlington Football Stadium. The theme for this year's event was "Narrowing the Gap - One Darlington" and we were delighted to be joined by key speakers and workshop facilitators from national organisations working to help reduce inequalities for children and young people.

(c) Thursday 27th November

I chaired a meeting of the Children's Trust Board.

(d) Friday 5th December

I was joined today by two students from the Queen Elizabeth 6th Form College studying A Level Politics.

We visited Whinfield Primary School to meet with the school Council to hear their views on their school and services for children in the Borough.

(e) Friday 12th December

I was again joined by another two A Level Politics students today.

We attended a special school assembly at Mowden Infant School, and later met the school Council to talk to the youngsters.

We then visited North Road Primary School to meet the school Council, other pupils and staff.

We later travelled to Holy Family School to meet the Headteacher, and again meet members of their school Council.

(f) Thursday 18th December

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

(g) Friday 19th December

I met with a representative of Darlington and District Youth and Community Association to discuss services for young people.

(h) Thursday 8th January – Friday 9th January

I attended the North of England Education Conference 2009 held in Chester. The theme of this year's event was "Growing People – Growing Minds".

Councillor Chris McEwan
Member with Portfolio for Children and Young People