
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) A report to approve the School Term dates for the academic years 2011/12 and 2012/13. In line with previous practice, all North East authorities met with a view to coordinate school term dates. It was again thought possible to co-ordinate term dates with authorities in the Yorkshire region using the previously agreed Guiding Principles. Proposals to set term dates for the next two years were presented for Cabinet's approval. This will assist schools, parents and the authority in planning processes.
- (b) A report to disburse capital funding from the Diploma Development Fund to enable essential capital works to be undertaken for Branksome, Hurworth and Longfield Schools. Approval was sought for the distribution of £1,500,000 Diploma Development funding to address the most urgent condition, health and safety and Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) works required at each of the three Secondary Schools identified. A further £5,453,974 to be held in reserve for further planned investment in the three schools once the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review is known in detail.

2. **Developments in Children's Services**

- (a) LA Officers are meeting with partners, schools, parents and carers through regular and bespoke meetings to discuss the impacts of the budget proposals.
- (b) Several Darlington schools have been accredited with the national School Travel Plan 'STAR' Accreditation which helps pupils choose a sustainable travel option for their journey to and from school. As a result of this work the number of pupils in Darlington travelling to school by car has dropped. The latest figures from 2009/10 indicate a reduction of 9.2% and only 20.5% of pupils now travel by car. During the same period, levels of cycling to school have risen to 6.7%, over 700 pupils every day.
- (c) The results of the national School Lunch Take up survey 2009-2010 shows Darlington schools continue to improve the take up of school meals. Primary schools have seen an increase of 8.6% from 41.5% in 2008-09 to 50.1% in 2009-10. Although lower than the regional take-up of 55.9%; this is higher than the national figure. Darlington's Secondary schools have one of the highest take up rates in the country; seeing an increase of 4.7% from 57.3% in 2008-09 to 62% in 2009-10. This is considerably higher than the regional take-up of 43.4%.

3. **Schools**

(a) **Behaviour and Attendance:**

Following the review of the first two conferences on Behaviour and Attendance and the establishment of the Partnership the review continues to look intensively at the support provided to our most vulnerable young people. A revised model is being developed as part of

Business Transformation which will be finalised by the end of November for further consultation with schools and partners.

- (b) **Schools Improvement and Development** has concentrated its activities on the capacity to support schools as funding streams end, we have chosen to focus our activities this term on:
- sharpening how we plan, monitor and evaluate the impact and outcomes of the support we provide to schools
 - improving the focus and the usefulness of the reports we write when we have visited schools
 - working more closely with other LA specialist teams such as those for children and young people with special educational needs; the educational psychology service and locality teams to ensure we capture and can report back accurately on the impact of their engagement with schools within our reporting mechanism
 - working out how best to challenge and support schools to improve their planning processes and evaluate their effectiveness rigorously given that the completion of a standardised self-evaluation form is no longer a requirement once the current academic year ends
 - succession planning: that is, considering how we can best future proof schools and enable them to work together in partnership to support and challenge each other and deliver their own school improvement services should changes in funding and statutory requirements result in the demise of School Improvement Partners, Lead Officers and Schools Improvement and Development.
 - maintaining focused support on schools currently in an Ofsted category for improvement or where academic results in 2010 were lower than expected.
- (c) Several Darlington Schools have received the national School Travel Plan Accreditation award - Hummersknott School & Language College, Carmel RC College, St Aidan's Church of England Academy, along with the Harrowgate Hill, High Coniscliffe, Cockerton, St Bede's, Dodmire, Whinfield, Harrowgate Hill, St George's, Holy Family, and St John's primary schools and Borough Road Nursery School.
- (d) **Branksome Science College** - Members will be aware that the Headteacher at Branksome Science College has resigned for personal reasons and that the Chair of Governors allowed this to take place with immediate effect. We are grateful to the Governors at Longfield School who have released Calvin Kipling to take over as interim Headteacher at Branksome. We expect Branksome and Longfield schools to work together now to secure improvements for all of their pupils. The Local Authority continues to provide support and assistance to the school at this time.

4. **Children Looked After**

- (a) There are currently (01/11/10) 175 children and young people looked after by Darlington Local Authority. This continues the upward trend – 26 % increase in the past 12 months. This increase has resulted in an increase in external placements and includes 3 secure placements. These continue to put pressure on budgets.
- (b) We have had an unprecedented rise in the number of children looked after which reflects the national picture and is well documented in, for example, Bursting at the Seams (Impact on Fostering Services of the rise of children going into care 2009-10) Helen Clarke 2010. This impacted on our capacity of internal placement of children and it has been necessary to commission external provision to meet this challenge.

- (c) Contributory factors to this national trend include:
- i. The death of baby Peter
 - ii. Southwark Judgement 2010 ruled that councils should ensure all 16-18 year olds, who find themselves homeless, have a full assessment of their needs and support for employment, health, education and finance as well as accommodation.
 - iii. The category of ‘children looked after by family and friends’ changed following recent case law so that they also become looked after children and carers are remunerated at the foster care rates.
- (d) As part of the Transformation Agenda a Resource Panel has been established to consider requests for placements and other resources on an individual basis and ensure robust thresholds are adhered to whilst ensuring that children at risk are safely placed. Statutory Guidance (HMSO 2010) on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children and work is being undertaken in Darlington to ensure our compliance with this.
- (e) Darlington’s Corporate Parenting Panel meets on a regular basis and receives reports on current developments and trends.

5. Child Protection

- (a) There are currently 84 (01/11/10) children and young people in Darlington with a child protection plan. This is a 68 % increase over the last 12 months. The main categories which result in the need for a plan continue to be neglect and physical abuse.

| | As at 01/11/10 | As at 31/10/09 |
|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Neglect | 50 | 34 |
| Physical abuse | 26 | 13 |
| Emotional abuse | 6 | 2 |
| Sexual abuse | 2 | 1 |
| Total | 84 | 50 |

- (b) We have had a significant increase in the number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan. Again, this is reflected in the national picture (The Safeguarding Pressure Research Response 2010). Neglect remains the highest category listed in Darlington and nationally.
- (c) An Independent Chair – Colin Morris- has now been appointed to the Safeguarding Children Board (August 2010). We are in the process of appointing two Lay members, which will ensure we are compliant with the Guidance on the Constitution of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB).

6. Darlington Children’s Trust Update

- (a) The Children’s Trust Annual Conference will take place on November 24th. The theme of this year’s conference is Child Poverty. Key note speakers include Sally Thatcher (Child Poverty Unit), Professor Jonathon Bradshaw (Associate Director Social Policy Research Unit) and Catherine Fitt (Centre for Excellence in Outcomes (C4EO) Chair of Child Poverty Theme Advisory Group)
- (b) A Darlington-wide Volunteering Strategy has been developed by eVOLution and consultation is underway with organisations across the borough. It aims to create a ‘*borough-wide approach to the support, development and resourcing of volunteering...and to make*

Darlington a better place to live and work.'. A target of 500 registered volunteers was set for the year ending March 2011, which would include at least 120 young volunteers aged 14-25 years of age. The figures to the end of September 2010 show that 487 volunteers were already registered of which 86 are aged 15-18 years and 133 aged 19 to 25 exceeding the target for young volunteers in 2010-2011.

- (c) An updated Adult Learning and Skills Strategy is the final stages of development as part of joint work undertaken through the Aspiring and Prosperous task and finish groups of the Sustainable Community Strategy.

7. Libraries and Community Learning

- (a) Darlington's Crown Street Library celebrated its 125th Anniversary on October 23rd. Various events have been held to commemorate this landmark. Library staff dressed in Victorian costume and visitors were invited to place their memories of the Library in years gone by on the Memory Wall. Events were held throughout the day including talks on a day in the life of a Victorian housemaid, the life of a Victorian lead miner, an illustrated talk by staff from Killhope Lead Mining Centre, Victorian life, a talk by staff from Beamish Museum, and a talk about Darlington Library by Chris Lloyd, deputy editor of the Northern Echo. Children and young people have been involved in discovering the toys and books of the Victorian era.

8. Meetings

- (a) Since the last meeting of Council, I have:

- Visited outdoor play areas in the borough with Groundwork Trust representative;
- Addressed students from Skerne Park Primary School during their "Treasure Hunt" visit to the Town Hall;
- Attended, on National Poetry Day, a poetry reading by Carol Ann Duffy (Poet Laureate) at Crown Street Library;
- Addressed the Carers of Disabled Children in Darlington (CDCD) conference at the Arts Centre;
- Attended the Darlington Borough Council 4 Star Awards evening at the Dolphin Centre;
- Attended a meeting with the Governing Body of the Coleridge Centre;
- Chaired the Children's Trust Executive and Board Meetings;
- Attended a special meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee in the Council Chamber during Local Democracy Week;
- Chaired the "Darlo Debate" at the Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College during Local Democracy Week;
- Attended a regional event in Darlington for the European Year Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion.
- Attended a baby rhyme-time Bookstart event;
- Attended Darlington Local Strategic Partnership Executive and Board Meetings;
- Met with Darlington Borough Council's Disability Manager and Aiming High Officer at Harewood House to discuss provision for disabled children and their families;
- Met with the Director of Children's Services and Assistant Directors for weekly briefings;
- Attended a young persons drama event at Hurworth Grange, Hurworth;
- Chaired a meeting with the National Communication Champion, Jean Gross, at the Education Village;
- Attended the Corporate Parenting Panel;
- Attended the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee;
- Attended Talking Together Events (8th and 16th November);
- Attended a young persons anti-bullying conference at the Arts Centre during Anti-Bullying

- Week;
- Attended the Darlington College Awards Ceremony;
- Adjudicated at a regional debating competition held at Polam Hall School;
- Attended and spoke at the annual Children's Trust Conference at Darlington Football Stadium;
- Addressed an assembly of children at Mowden Infants School on "Thanksgiving".

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Member with Portfolio for Children and Young People