
OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PORTFOLIO

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. Since the last meeting of Council and under the Children and Young People Portfolio, Cabinet has received the following:
 - (a) A report was submitted informing members of the outcome of the Annual Assessment of Children's Services. The contents of the report were noted.

Developments in Children's Services

2. Within the Council restructure there is no longer a separate Children's Services department. The statutory functions of a Lead Member for Children and a Director of Children's Services remain. The newly established Director of Services for People also holds the statutory function in relation to children's services.
3. Consultation on the new structure for children's services delivery is nearing completion. Some further discussions will take place with schools because of the element of the service delivery which is funded directly by schools through the dedicated schools grant. Some further work was also required to examine the details of the Early Intervention grant and the former grant streams it replaced. The grant has been reduced by 12%.
4. **The Importance of Teaching -The Schools White Paper 2010**, was published on November, 24th, 2010 with its aim to enact whole-system reform of education in England.
5. The key aims of the government's plans are to:
 - (a) improve teachers' professional status and authority.
 - (b) raise the standards set by our curriculum and qualifications to match the best in the world.
 - (c) hold schools effectively to account for the results they achieve.
 - (d) ensure that school funding is fair, with more money for the most disadvantaged.
 - (e) support teachers to learn from one another and from proven best practice.
6. To achieve the plans described in the White Paper there are key areas which will deliver the changes proposed by the government:

- (a) Teaching and leadership
 - (b) Behaviour
 - (c) Curriculum, assessment and qualifications
 - (d) The new school system
 - (e) Accountability
 - (f) School improvement
 - (g) School funding
7. A report concerning the White Paper and its implications for local authorities has been received by the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee in January 2011.
8. The full white paper document is available using the following link:<http://publications.education.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/CM-7980.pdf>

The Foundation Years: preventing poor children becoming poor adults

9. The Independent Review of Poverty and Life Chances was commissioned by the Prime Minister in June 2010 to produce a report outlining a series of recommendations to tackle child poverty and its wider effects. The review was chaired by Labour MP Frank Field.

Findings:

10. The report outlines a number of key findings:
- (a) The UK needs to review its strategy to address child poverty to make an impact;
 - (b) The **first five years** of a child's life, and their development during this time, has a large impact upon the life chances;
 - (c) Factors such as: family background; good parenting; parental education; a healthy pregnancy; good maternal mental health; secure bonding between the child and the parent; love and responsiveness from parents, and the opportunities for a child's cognitive, language, and social and emotional development have a much greater impact upon a child and their life chances than income;
 - (d) Good services also play a part; such as: health services; children's centres, and high quality childcare;
 - (e) Interventions at a later stage are still effective, but less so than interventions in the 'Foundation Years';
 - (f) Some Early Years provision may be **fragmented and can often be inaccessible** to those most in need of these services;
 - (g) Early Years services have improved, however **service quality is varied and lacks and evidence based approach**;
 - (h) The current economic conditions mean that utilising 'income transfers' through schemes such as tax credits is unsustainable, needing huge investment to meet the

target of eradicating child poverty by 2020, and

(i) **The focus of child poverty strategies needs to be shifted to ‘Foundation Years’.**

11. Services in Darlington are already making significant contributions to improving the life chances for those families on lower incomes. Between 2006/07 and 2007/08 (latest available data) child poverty in Darlington fell from 21.7% to 21.2%.
12. Between 2008 and 2010 the gap in educational performance between pupils on free school meals and those not on free school meals improved at Key Stage 4 in terms 5+ A* - C GCSEs (inc. Maths & English) as follows:
13.

	2008	2009	2010
NI 102ii: Free School Meal Gap	-40.0%	-31.5%	-24.0%
14. The report outlines a series of recommendations for the Government to consider before they publish their Child Poverty Strategy in Spring 2011.
15. There are **two overarching recommendations** that run through the wider recommendations:
 - (a) The Government should **establish a set of ‘life chances indicators’** to measure how successful interventions are at making outcomes equal, and
 - (b) The Government should **establish the ‘Foundation Years’** (from the womb to the age of 5) to form part of a ‘tri-partite’ education system, with Foundation Years leading to school years, and school years leading to further, higher and continued education.
16. There are already a number of areas of best practice operating within Darlington, such as the Family Nurse Partnership, Evidence-Based Parenting programmes and work to reduce teenage pregnancy rates.

Schools

17. **Severe Weather** - Due to unusually severe weather, many of Darlington’s schools were closed for a day or more during the week commencing 30th November 2010. A report, with full details of the closures and the process head-teachers have to follow before declaring an emergency closure, was discussed at Children & Young People’s Scrutiny Committee on 10 January 2011. I am grateful to staff who did manage to keep education services running, especially for children in Y10 and Y11 who are close to their examinations. I am also grateful to the parents for their understanding and flexibility during a period of service disruption.
18. **Ofsted** - Two monitoring visits were carried out by Ofsted in the autumn term. At Northwood School progress was found to be satisfactory whilst at Mount Pleasant it is pleasing to note that progress since the last visit was judged to be good. A recent full inspection carried out at Abbey Junior School judged the school’s overall effectiveness to be satisfactory with some good and outstanding features. An inspection of Corporation Road School earlier in the term reported good quality of provision and good outcomes for

pupils.

19. Schools due to be inspected by Ofsted continue to receive support from the Local Authority and support is also provided for post-Ofsted action plans. From April 2011, the funding to support school improvement is largely removed from local authorities and included in the dedicated schools grant. This will place a greater emphasis on schools supporting each other to improve standards (see paragraph 5, above). The Local Authority will increasingly commission school improvement support from schools with proven expertise in areas of need for other schools or across the authority as a whole.

Children Looked After

20. On 30 November 2010 Darlington Borough Council had a total of 180 children looked after. In November six children became looked after and no children ceased to be looked after.
21. These figures show the continued high numbers (1 November 2010 – 170) with the largest increase in the month of November, being young people aged 10-14 years.
22. The Corporate Parenting Panel met on November 5th, and received information on the educational achievement of looked after children (currently 4 young people at university); the Darlo Care Crew pledge and a report on permanence planning for children in care.
23. The role of ‘Virtual Head Teacher’ for looked after children, previously held by Keith Cotgrave, will now be a ‘job share’ arrangement by Peter King and Nick Blackburn – both current Headteachers in Darlington. This role ensures educational monitoring and achievement continue to be robustly addressed.
24. The ‘virtual Headteachers will report to the Head of Children and Family Services and will provide reports for the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Child Protection

25. There are currently 85 children in Darlington with child protection plans (compared to 1 November 2010 – 84). Neglect continues to be the highest category and the Darlington Local Safeguarding Board (LSCB) is prioritising this as an area of focus and action across all agencies for 2011.
26. The Safeguarding and Looked After services are preparing for the Announced Inspection process. The services are given 10 working days notice of an inspection, which will examine a broad range of activities similar to the Joint Area Review process.
27. Preparation includes raising staff awareness across services and agencies and ‘fact-sheets’ to ensure current information is available.

Darlington Children’s Trust Update

28. The Children’s Trust Annual Conference took place on November 24th. The theme of this year’s conference was Child Poverty. Key note speakers included 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). Since the conference a Child Poverty workshop has been held in December to discuss next steps and it is planned that from January 2011 further sessions will be held to consider the Child Poverty Needs Assessment.

29. The November Child Poverty Conference endorsed the regional Child Poverty Declaration and sought support from the wider community to sign it. The declaration is as follows:
30. **I believe:**
 - (a) All children in the North East should have equal opportunities to be happy and healthy, achieve their potential and contribute to society
 - (b) Children in poverty is everyone's business
 - (c) We can make a difference to children's lives
31. **I welcome:**
 - (a) The Child Poverty Act
 - (b) Plans and actions by partnerships to reduce poverty
32. **I commit to:**
 - (a) Find out more about child poverty
 - (b) Change our policies and the way we work to support families
 - (c) Record actions I have taken in support of this Declaration
 - (d) Support local action to reduce child poverty
33. The declaration can be accessed at the following address and I would encourage Members who have not yet done so to sign the declaration:
<http://www.org.uk/northeastpvertydeclaration>
34. Darlington's Children's Trust has been highlighted as an example of best practice in an Ofsted survey. The survey, which reviewed the performance, strategic direction and delivery of frontline services of six Children's Trusts across the country, aimed to highlight the impact of Children's Trusts in improving the lives of children and young people, in particular those whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable. The report found that the Children's Trusts surveyed demonstrated a commitment to early intervention and prevention and a focus on designing services around the needs of those most vulnerable. Plans were found to be clear and targeted and good relationships existed between the Children's Trusts and schools, social care services, the police, health services and the voluntary sector enabling the organisations to work together to meet the needs of those at risk. The full report can be found on Ofsted's website at www.ofsted.gov.uk

Meetings

35. Since the last meeting of Council, I have:
 - (a) Addressed an assembly at Mowden Infants School;

- (b) Attended numerous briefings with the Director and Assistant Directors of Children's Services;
- (c) Met with Youth MP and youth representatives to discuss proposed Local Authority spending cuts;
- (d) Attended a youth choir performance of Christmas music at Darlington Shopping Arcade;
- (e) Chaired the Local Authority School Governor Appointment Panel;
- (f) Met with Jenny Chapman MP to discuss possible Children's Services Spending Cuts;
- (g) Attended Carmel RC College Christmas Liturgy and Concert;
- (h) Attended the Darlington Retail Awards Ceremony;
- (i) Attended the Darlington Partnership Executive Board Meeting;
- (j) Attended a charity performance by young people at the Forum;
- (k) Attended a meeting with young people to discuss a town centre skate/BMX facility;
- (l) Chaired the Darlington Children's Trust meeting;
- (m) Attended the Darlington Partnership Board Meeting at Maidendale House;
- (n) Attended a "Talking Together" Event with young people;
- (o) Attended the Vibe Awards

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Member with Portfolio for Children and Young People

Councillor Hughes