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**OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE**

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1. Since the last ordinary meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work that have been undertaken by the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee:-

- (a) **Developments in Darlington's Schools** – The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee received a report which provided the position in relation to the proposed amalgamation of Dodmire Infant School and Nursery School, with Dodmire Junior School, the temporary closure of Firthmoor Primary School, and the impact that the recently announced National School Challenge will have on Darlington's Secondary Schools.

Members were heartened to learn that the disruption at Firthmoor Primary School was close to being resolved, and that the contingency arrangements implemented for the continued education of the pupils had worked well.

- (b) **School Budget Outturns and Properly Assigned Projects** – Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee received a report to inform Members of outturns on Darlington school budgets for the financial year 2007/08. The report drew to Members' attention the recent revisions to the Scheme for Financing Schools, in relation to the control of surplus school balances. The Committee noted that a number of schools exceeded the allowable surplus threshold of budget share, however were pleased to learn that in all cases the monies had been allocated to properly assigned projects in the forthcoming year, ensuring that monies would be spent appropriately for the benefit of children and young people.

Only one school demonstrated a deficit balance and, again, Members were pleased to note that a recovery plan had been successfully produced to recover this small deficit.

- (c) **Children and Young People's Plan 2008-2011** – A report was submitted to the Committee to consult on the draft Children and Young People's Plan 2008-2011, which appears elsewhere on the Agenda of this meeting. Members were pleased to note the sizeable amount of consultation that had been undertaken, particularly the involvement of children and young people through the Council of School Councils. Members entered into discussion on the work required to engage with harder to reach young people, and the focus on the emotional well-being of young people, through the Plan.

Following discussion, the Committee were pleased to endorse the draft Children and Young People's Plan 2008-2011.

- (d) **Play and Free Time Strategy – Update** – Members received a report aimed at providing information on the progress in the Darlington Play and Free Time Strategy, which was launched in Autumn 2007. Members were pleased to receive information on the development of three new projects over the period 2008 – 2011, and were especially interested to learn about the Play Rangers, and the future development of further play provision in the Denes area.
- (e) **Language and Learning for Minority Communities** – The Committee received a report to provide Members with information on the work of the Language for Learning Service. Members were pleased to learn of the support being offered to children and young people in schools, in relation to language learning, however were disappointed that the report did not contain information on the provision of language learning for adults. Whilst Members agreed it was important that children continue to receive such support, and acknowledged the work outlined in the report to involve parents, the Committee felt that it was vital that non-English speaking parents were encouraged to receive support. A task and finish group was set-up to look at provision of language and learning for minority communities of all ages within the borough.
- (f) **Childhood Obesity - Update** – Members received a report to provide an update on the work conducted to tackle childhood obesity in Darlington, and the Committee was pleased to welcome Sue Hoare-Leather, Health Improvement Strategy Lead on Obesity from the County Durham and Darlington Primary Care Trust, who introduced the report. The report highlighted that children in Year 6 in Darlington had significantly high levels of obesity (school year 2005/06), compared to regional and national figures. Whilst appreciating that Darlington's position may appear misleading when compared to other authorities, due to the larger than average take up of Darlington's children in the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP), the Committee expressed concern and resolved to monitor the ongoing actions, in terms of prevention and intervention.
- (g) **Update Report on Health and Safety in Schools** – A report was submitted to the recent Ordinary Meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee to provide an update on the work being undertaken in relation to Health and Safety in Schools, following the work conducted by a Task and Finish Group established by this Scrutiny Committee last year. The Committee was reassured to discover that the work in this area has continued to progress well. Members noted that there had been an increase in reportable accidents, however accepted the conclusion of Officers, that this increase was a result of an increase in reporting awareness in staff and human error, rather than a systemic or premises fault. As ever, it is heartening to note that the work of Scrutiny has contributed to improved service performance.
- (h) **Service Plan Performance Year End 2007/2008** – The Committee received a report from the Assistant Chief Executive which summarised the performance of services against Service Plans and Performance Indicators for the period 1st

April 2007 – 31st March 2008. Members were pleased to learn that there were no issues that gave rise to concern, and felt that it was appropriate to continue to receive update reports at timely intervals as a tool to inform the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee Work Programme.

- (i) **Service Planning 2008/2012** - The Assistant Chief Executive submitted a report to inform Members of the Service Plans that the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee has responsibility for monitoring. The Service Plans provide a useful summary of what a service is aiming to achieve and how it links into the Community Strategy and the Corporate Plan.
- (j) **Work Programme 2008/2009** – The Committee considered the Work Programme for the Municipal Year 2008/2009, and examined Cabinet's Forward Plan, in order to identify areas of particular interest or concern.

Members agreed to the formation of two Task and Finish Groups, the first to look at the provision of language learning for people of all ages in Darlington, and the second to examine the use of Multi Use Games Areas (MUGA's) in the borough, with particular attention being given to whether these are sufficiently accessible to fulfil the recreational needs of children and young people. The Chair extended an open invitation for the inclusion of additional items on the Committee's Work Programme.

**Councillor Cyndi Hughes**  
**Chair of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee**

Since the last meeting of Council, I have attended the following:-

- Met with the Assistant Director - Planning and Resources, Children's Services, to discuss a number of issues, including the secondary strategy for change and the sustainable schools initiative
- Attended the Local Authority Governor Appointments Committee
- Attended Town Sports Day (small primary schools) Competition at Eastbourne Sports Complex
- Addressed third-tier managers in Children's Services on what it's like to be a borough councillor
- Attended a drama production at Mowden Infant's School
- Attended a drama production at St. Augustine's Primary School
- Chaired a pre-agenda briefing with Council officers
- Attended the Transforming Schools, Transforming Lives conference at the Darlington Football Arena
- Attended the Monitoring and Co-ordination Committee