
OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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) **Family Partnership Programme – First Year Pilot Sites in England** – We received a report from the Director of Children’s Services on the findings of the national first year evaluation of an intensive parenting programme (Family Nurse Partnership) working with vulnerable first time young mothers. Jan Finn, Programme Manager of the Family Nurse Partnership, gave an interesting presentation on early findings from the pilot programme that began in April, 2007 in Darlington. The presentation focused on the positive results achieved when delivering a client-led service to help improve the health, well-being and self sufficiency of young first time parents and their children.

The Family Nurse Partnership has been developed over 25 years in the USA by Professor David Olds, University of Colorado and produced impressive short and long term results. Services in Darlington and Durham are being delivered through a partnership of the Darlington PCT; County Durham PCT’ CYPS, Durham and our Children’s Services Department.

- (b) **School Exclusions 2007/08** – We received an update on the fixed and permanent exclusions within Darlington for the academic year of September 2007 to July 2007 and the progress being made in reducing exclusions and how this is being achieved. We were pleased to note that both fixed and permanent exclusions had dropped significantly during the last academic year and that schools had made major improvements through the introduction of Inclusion Units, and improved behaviour support, implementing managed moves, individual student support and teacher coaching from the behavioural support team.

- (c) **School Absence Figures 2007/08** – We continue to monitor the levels of school absence and received information on the persistent absentee agenda and were very pleased to learn that there has been a further decrease in absence rates both at secondary and primary level.

The Persistent Absentee Agenda is being rolled out across all schools in Darlington with support from the Education Welfare Service and last year this authority was the third most improved authority in the Country for the reduction in the percentage of persistent absentee in the secondary phase.

- (d) **School Developments in Darlington** – We also continue to receive regular updates on developments in Schools in Darlington and are pleased to note the appointment of Kier (Northern) as the building contractor for the replacement of North Road School. It is

anticipated that work will commence on site towards the end of November.

I can also now advise that the Schools Adjudicator has given approval for the amalgamation of Dodmire Infant and Nursery School and Dodmire Junior School. It is anticipated that the new Primary School will open on 1st January, 2009.

The Pheonix Centre is now open and pupils are benefitting from updated facilities and the school is being offered into community. It is presently used by Healthy Schools initiative, the Adult learning function of the Library Service, regular meetings by the Polish Community and Neighbourhood Watch Association. The building is once again in use as a Polling Station.

- (e) **Neet Strategy** – We received a report on pupils not engaged in education, employment or training (NEET) and the role of Darlington’s NEET Reduction Partnership to look strategically at the characteristics and barriers that prevent young people from engaging in learning and its responsibility to make recommendations regarding areas for development. It is important that all parties work together to increase the rate of converting offers of places to school leavers into actual starts in training and that the work of the 14-19 Trust is key to this.
 - (f) **Children’s Homes Overview** – Consideration was given to information on the provision of children’s residential services in this authority’s Children’s Homes.
 - (g) **Childrens’s Services Compliments, Comments and Complaints Annual Report 2007/08** – We received the Annual Report on the operation and effectiveness of the policy and procedure for Compliments, Comments and Complaints from 1st April,2007 to 31st March, 2008.
 - (h) **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.
 - (i) **Policy Review** – We received the findings and recommendations of the Joint Review by Members of the Health and Well Being Scrutiny and the Children and Young People Scrutiny who have visited three Primary Schools in the Borough to taste school meals and to consider issues in relation to the provision of school meals. Members agreed that they would like to do some further work on this..
2. A Special Meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee was held on Monday, 13th October, 2008 as part of Darlington Borough Council's commitment to Local Democracy Week (13th-19th October 2008). Two school children from each of the Primary Schools in the Borough were invited to attend the meeting, and 41 children attended in total.

The children enjoyed a healthy Buffet Reception prior to the meeting, where they were able to meet the Mayor (Councillor Ian Haszeldine), the Chief Executive (Ms. Ada Burns), Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee, and other Senior Members and Officers of the Council.

At the meeting, I opened with an overview of the work of the Committee and the meeting

protocols, before I announced the winner of a competition to co-Chair the meeting with me. The competition was won by David Spratt from Alderman Leach Primary School. The children then received presentations from Officers on Health and Safety in Schools, Healthy Eating and Internet Safety. All of those attending were given the opportunity to speak in the Chamber and were actively encouraged to engage and participated in discussions on these issues

Councillor Cyndi Hughes
Chair of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

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

- Meet with Assistant Director of Children's Services to discuss agenda of Scrutiny Committee.
- Met with Manager of Democratic Services to discuss changes to support for Scrutiny Committee.
- Attended the launch of the NEET Strategy.
- Language Learning Task and Finish Group.
- Met with the Director of Children's Services for a briefing.
- Monitoring and Co-ordination.
- Attend a youth Politix event in Newcastle designed to motivate hard to reach young people.
- Attended International Day held at the Forum on Borough Road.
- Spoke at Dodmire Infants School at their Comenius Celebration.
- Attended the Corporate Parenting Panel.