
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) **School Standards in Darlington** – Following receipt of a report to provide us with the cumulative standards of attainment and achievement recorded by schools in Darlington in 2009 in national tests, we are extremely pleased to note that Darlington is the most improved local authority school at Key Stage 1 over a three year trend; at Key Stage 2 we are above the national average and ranked as the most improved authority; and at Key Stage 4, 51.1% of pupils achieved five or more A* to C grades including English and Maths. Overall the improvements are as a result of all the hard work undertaken by the Officers and the schools to make continuous improvements in our schools and the commitment to a programme of collaboration between the local authority, schools and other stakeholders.

We are also going to undertake a Task and Finish Review Group to look further into other factors affecting school standards i.e. gender and socio economic differences and to look at initiatives in place to ease that first transition into the education system.

(b) **Progress on the Darlington Key Stage 2 to 3 Schools Transition Programme** – We welcomed a report on the existing provision and planned developments for school pupil transition from Key Stage 2 to 3 and on the work of the 11 Transition Action Groups initiated during the Summer of 2008 and the “One Book For Darlington” project. The report also discussed the Transition Conference held in November, 2008; the “Assessing Pupil Progress” pilot; early transfer and the role of parents and curriculum continuity.

(c) **Admission to Schools – Annual Report to Schools Adjudicator** – We received the Annual Report 2008/09 agreed by the Local Admissions Forum and submitted to the Schools Adjudicator. The format of the report and the information contained within it is prescribed by the Adjudicator’s office. The Committee were particularly encouraged to note that 84.2% of first preferences were met by the authority, which slightly exceeds the national average of 83.2% and overall we achieved the national average of 94% for families gaining a place at one of their three stated preferences. The Committee were also pleased to learn of all the work of the Admissions Team and the Choice Advisors in targeting the harder to reach families who did not make a preference and work with the travelling families within the Borough.

- (d) **School Finance** – We received an overview of the Scheme for Financing Schools and the formula for providing each school with its budget share and the role of the Schools Forum within this process.
- (e) **Integrated Working** – A report of the developments of integrated teams to improve early intervention and prevention services in Darlington was received by Members of this Scrutiny Committee.
- (f) **Primary Capital Programme** – We received a progress report on work being undertaken in our schools as part of the Primary Capital Programme. There are substantial refurbishments and re-modelling works either being undertaken or planned at 16 schools in Darlington including the rebuilding of North Road Primary School. The recent summer holiday period provided a convenient time to carry out building works as contractors had access to school buildings without disruption to pupil learning and it was reported that work progressed well during that time.
- (g) **Connexions Service in Darlington** – At the request of Members of this Scrutiny Committee, we received a report on the structure, operation and performance of the Connexions Service in Darlington which was established in 2000 to provide more holistic information, advice and guidance to young people aged 13-19 (or up to 24 for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities) to assist them with learning opportunities when leaving Year 11, or aged 17 who are not in education, employment or training (NEET).
- (h) **Sex and Relationship Education Policy** – Members were advised of the recommendations that are included in the Darlington Children’s Trust Sex and Relationship Education Policy and how sex and relationship education is being delivered across the borough. We learned how it is hoped that this policy will impact positively on our targets to reduce teenage pregnancy, to reduce domestic violence and to improve the health and well being of children and young people.
- (i) **The Comprehensive Annual Assessment – Annual Rating of Council Children’s Services** – We received a report to advise us of the new arrangements for grading children’s services functions in the local authority area and how children’s services will be conducted under the new Comprehensive Area Assessment.
- (j) **Work Programme 2009/10** - The Committee considered the Work Programme for the Municipal Year 2009/2010, and examined Cabinet’s Forward Plan, in order to identify areas of particular interest or concern or potential areas for Review.

(k) **Review Groups** – Work is still on going with the Multi Use Games Areas and the Language Learning Review Groups.

Councillor Cyndi Hughes
Chair of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

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

- Monitoring and Co-ordination Meeting.
- Briefings with officers.
- Addressed students at Polam Hall on representative democracy.
- Met young Peruvian footballers and Year 7 pupils at Carmel College.
- Attended the Corporate Parenting Panel.
- Attended the Children's Trust.
- Met with visiting African educationalists visiting Hummersknott Language College.
- Attended the LA Governor's Appointments Panel.