
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) **European Day of Languages** –Members of our Scrutiny visited Carmel College on Friday, 26th September, 2009 to observe Language Learning in progress. This visit coincided with the European Day of Languages organised by the Council of Europe to celebrate linguistic diversity and the benefits of being able to converse in a different language. During the visit we observed several lessons and took part in a language quiz and food tasting workshop.
- (b) **Local Democracy Week** – On Monday, 12th October, 2009 we held a special meeting of our Committee as part of this authority’s celebration of Local Democracy Week. Two school children from each of the Primary Schools in the Borough were invited to attend the meeting, and 33 children attended in total.

The children enjoyed a health buffet reception prior to the meeting, and met the Mayor, Members of this Scrutiny and other senior Members and Officers.

I opened the meeting with an overview of the Committee and meeting protocols and then the children received presentations on Pupil Transition, Road Safety and Pedestrian Training and the Play Strategy and actively engaged and participated in these issues. The children then received certificates from the Mayor to mark their attendance. Overall it was a very successful and enjoyable meeting.

- (c) **E-Safety** – Following the tragic events in the news recently which involved a young Darlington woman and a social networking website, I requested that Members receive a presentation from John Steel, the Lead Improvement Officer, Learning Technologies Team to advise us on what is being done in our schools and colleges to keep our children and young people safe. It was a very interesting and sobering presentation on the benefits of the internet but contrasted by the risks that children and young people face when interacting with others on the internet. We were particularly concerned to learn that no specific advice is contained within the national curriculum and that the Council relies on advice from other resources.

Resources currently relied upon included: The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) have produced a CD to advise children and young people on internet safety and this has been circulated to all Year 7 households in the borough. The CEOP also publish a very useful web page, catering to all ages www.thinkuknow.co.uk. There is also advice and support for children via Childline on Tel. 0800 1111 or visiting the NSPCC’s website www.there4me.com.

A Task and Finish Review Group was held on 16th November in order to make recommendations to Cabinet regarding the provision of internet safety advice to all children, young people, parents and carers in Darlington.

- (d) **The Darlington Compact** – We scrutinised the draft Darlington Compact in advance of its consideration by Cabinet.
- (e) **School Absence Figures 2008/09** – We continue to monitor the levels of school absence and what actions are being taken by this authority to improve attendance. Integral to this work is the work being done with schools through the Secondary and Primary Behaviour and Attendance Networks to share good practice and advise of new initiatives. Although absence rates have stalled in the period September to Easter, with performance dipping slightly overall, it is encouraging to note that the number of persistence absentees continues to decrease in both secondary and primary phase.
- (f) **School Exclusions 2008/09** – We continue to be kept updated with regard to fixed term and permanent exclusions within Darlington. During the last academic year, 2008/09 we noted there has been a rise in permanent exclusions in the last year, although the overall trend is down and none of these permanent exclusions have been in primary schools. However, one explanation offered is that this can be attributed to the schools persisting longer with students and ensuring a wide range of strategies were exhausted before finally resorting to permanent exclusion. It is pleasing to note that the number of fixed term exclusions in secondary schools has reduced to 356 from 408 in the previous year, and the number of days lost through fixed term exclusion in secondary schools has fallen from 2,285 to 1,940.
- (g) **Compliments, Comments and Complaints – Annual Report** – We received the second annual report on comments, compliments and complaints received and managed by Children’s Services. The Council is required by law to have management arrangements in place for considering children’s social care representations, including complaints, under the Children Act 1989. The effectiveness of the procedure for managing complaints is essential in continuous improvement of service delivery to children, young people and their families.
- (h) **Extended Schools Activities** – Committee Members received an update on the work taking place in schools around Extended Services and the work both nationally and across Darlington to promote and support the delivery of and signposting to extended services. 33 schools (84%) in Darlington are providing full access to the core offer of extended services through a mix of services provided on school site and signposting families to services across the town. We are very pleased to learn that all schools are working towards developing their extended services provision to achieve full core offer status by September, 2010.
- (i) **Preferences for Secondary School Places 2009** – At the Members request, we received a further report on the pattern of parental preferences for secondary places for the 2009/10 school year showing the number of first, second and third preferences and also giving an indication of the number of places offered at schools where no parental preference was recorded.
- (j) **Appointment of Co-opted Member** – We have appointed Siobhan Lund as a non-voting Co-optee on this Scrutiny. Siobhan Lund has knowledge of important issues affecting

children with special needs and their families. We are confident that Mrs. Lund will bring valuable insight and experience to this Scrutiny Committee.

- (k) **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.
- (l) **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.