
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) **Local Democracy Week** – On Monday, 11th October, 2010 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. Prior to the meeting the children enjoyed a healthy buffet reception and had the opportunity to meet the Mayor, Members of this Scrutiny and other Senior Members and Officers. The Mayor then gave each school the opportunity for a photograph.

The meeting was opened with an overview of the Committee and meeting protocols and then the children received reports and presentations on Carbon Management and Progress on the Darlington Key stage 2 to 3 Transition Programme. During the presentation on carbon management the children split into groups to discuss their thoughts on ways to save energy within their schools and these were later shared and discussed with the Members. During the presentation on pupil transition the children undertook an exercise to gauge their worries in relation to the transition from Key Stage 2 to 3 and the things that they were looking forward to. The views of the pupils will be taken on board to be fed into the transition strategy.

The children then received certificates from the Chair to mark their attendance. Overall it was a very successful meeting and from the feedback received, enjoyed by all who attended and took part.

- (b) **Mid Year Savings and Impacts for Schools** – Members received information on mid-year budget cuts as a result of in-year grant reductions and the Council having to reconsider its medium term financial plan amounting to a reduction in spending of £539,000 related to Children’s Services. The report highlighted the information sent out to schools about service reductions and the impact of the in-year reductions for the Children’s Services Department. Reductions of £730k have been made through the reduction of the Schools Commissioning Budget; a reduction in the amount provided to schools to facilitate extended services; the restructure of the Pupil Referral Unit; a vacant post in the delivery of 14-19 services will remain vacant; the deletion of a middle management post in Children and Families Services; two posts to be removed from the ContactPoint; a reduction in services and two Lead Officer posts to be removed from the structure in School Improvement and Development; following two members of staff leaving at the end of the academic year a restructure of the Ethnic Minority and Traveller Service will be undertaken; signalised pedestrian crossings have been provided outside

some schools in the last year removing the need for school crossing patrol officers; the reduction of road safety campaigns in schools; reduction of funding for the Youth Capital Fund; and the reduction of the Harnessing Technologies Grant.

We will continue to receive reports on changes brought about by the need to re-design services to meet with new financial models and will be closely monitoring the potential impact on service provision.

- (c) **Academies and Free Schools** – We received an update on the legislation introduced by the Academies Act 2010 providing for Community and Aided schools to take Academy status, provided certain criteria is met. Academies are publicly funded independent schools, free from local authority and national government control and have greater freedom on how they use their budgets. We also discussed The Academies Act 2010 which makes provision for setting up ‘Free Schools’ which are all-ability, state funded schools, set up in response to parental demand. These schools will be Academies which are funded independent schools and free from local authority control. A Free School could be set up by any suitable proposer, where there is evidence of parental demand such as a petition or declaration from interested parents and requires approval from the Secretary of State, who will consider each proposal on its merits. The Local Authority is not a statutory consultee in the process of setting up a free school.
- (d) **Overview of the Support and Challenge Provided to Darlington’s Community Schools by the Schools Improvement and Development Services** - Members were advised on the development of the role of school improvement partners (SIPS) nationally, gave consideration to their functions and those of Lead Officers in the Schools and Improvement and Development Service (SID) and how they support and challenge Darlington’s community schools and Pupil Referral Unit. We also looked at what the SID have been working on this term and the possible future impact on the service as a result of the Education White Paper and the decision from the Department for Education on the future of the role of the SIPs and other aspects of school improvement work. We will continue to monitor the impact on the service closely.
- (e) **Work Programme 2010/11** – We continue to give consideration to the Work Programme for the Municipal Year 2010/11, and examine Cabinet’s Forward Plan, in order to identify areas of particular interest or concern and have included various reports for future meetings. We also gave consideration to topics/subjects that we may wish to review/scrutinise during the Municipal Year 2010/2011.

Councillor Eleanor Lister
Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee