
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) **Government White Paper – The Importance of Teaching** – We received a report to outline the Government’s policy for schools and education and the main clauses in the White Paper and the likely effects in Darlington. The White Paper is divided into sections covering Teaching and Leadership; Behaviour; Curriculum, Assessment and Qualifications; New Schools System; Accountability; School Improvement and School Funding. We were particularly interested in the removal of the requirement on schools to complete the Self Evaluation Form; teachers having powers to physically restrain pupils and be able to search and confiscate; the emphasis on schools’ responsibilities for excluded pupils; the possibility of Pupil Referral Units being granted Academy status; the introduction of the English Baccalaureate and Performance tables aimed at encouraging schools to drive the take up of individual science subjects, humanities and especially foreign languages, both modern and ancient; and the removal of the contextual value added (CVA) measure.

A copy of the White Paper can be obtained from the DfE website:
<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/schoolswhitepaper/b0068570/the-importance-of-teaching/>
 - (b) **Performance Report 2nd Quarter 2010/11** - The overall aggregated target for the four service plans is being achieved, although the Children and Families plan is showing below target performance and the reasons for this was explained to Members which related in the main to looked after children. Data was available for 84 out of 141 indicators at quarter 2 with 18 performing above target, 44 on target and 22 below target. Using the latest date there were 141 indicators in the four service plans, 28 (20%) were performing above target, 79 (56%) on target and 30 (21%) are showing below target performance. Data was unavailable for four indicators. It was proposed that a review of children’s residential services including looked after children be established.
 - (c) **Young Carers** – We received a report on the future of services for young carers, defined in the Darlington Young Carers Action Plan 2008-2011 as a young person under the age of 18 who provide care to a parent, grandparent, brother or sister or other relative who needs support because of a health problem or disability.

The Young Carers service is currently commissioned by the Children’s Trust with resources from Darlington Borough Council and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) to deliver a service to currently 98 Young Carers, provided by the Tees Valley YMCA.

There are currently pending applications for funding for young carers via the Big Lottery bid and Department of Health, Carers Innovation Fund and we look forward to hearing the outcome in due course.

- (d) **Teenage Pregnancy, Conception Rates and Health Education in Schools** – Members received an update on the progress with teenage pregnancy, conception rates and health education related in schools and other settings following our recommendations submitted to the Special Health and Well Being Scrutiny Meeting on 6th July, 2010 and subsequently submitted to the Director of Public Health in response to the Annual Report 2008/09 ‘Healthier Lives for Children and Young People in County Durham and Darlington’.

We are pleased to note and support the good work currently being undertaken within schools to ensure quality sex and relationship education programmes are provided and support the work with young people, parents and carers and practitioners to ensure awareness and knowledge of the sexual relationship issues.

- (e) **Admissions to Schools: September, 2010** – We received a report regarding the placement of pupils in Reception Classes and Secondary Schools for the 2010-11 school year and were very pleased to note that the number of parents receiving a place at one of their named preferences is higher than the national and local averages. 92% of families received a place at one of the secondary schools of their choice and at primary this was 94%. The actual number of children now in a school of their parents’ preference will have now increased as a result of subsequent successful appeals.
- (f) **School Closures During Inclement Weather** – Following a request by a Member, we received a report on the school closures which took place during the recent period of bad weather. Due to unusually severe weather conditions recently many of Darlington schools were closed for a day or more during the week commencing 30th November, 2010 and the report highlighted the considerations head teachers were obliged to make before calling an emergency closure. We discussed the advantages and disadvantages of the school closures and the overall impact of closures on families and the possible options for providing ‘learning portals’ for those pupils who wish to continue their studies at home.
- (g) **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 further topics/subjects that we may wish to review/scrutinise during the Municipal Year 2010/2011.

Councillor Eleanor Lister
Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee