
OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PORTFOLIO

1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work undertaken under the Children and Young People Portfolio.

Funded Childcare Places for Two Year Olds

2. The Department for Education (DfE) and the Schools Forum have agreed the release of capital funds, relating to the expansion of childcare places for two year old children, consisting of £212,638 designated capital funding and £500,000 converted from two year old revenue funding.
3. Particular reference was made at the meeting to the criteria in respect of two year olds with a current statement of Special Educational Needs and how those needs would be identified prior to those children attending school.
4. The projects will be identified to ensure provision is available across the Borough, thus making it accessible to all families.

Children, Families and Learning Capital Programme 2014/15

5. We have formally approved the release of £769.679 for 2014/15 to support a range of projects and initiatives across schools and community centres in the borough and to allow investment in the areas identified with the greatest need in terms of asset management priorities.
6. We have also agreed the proposed 'universal free school meals' capital investment programme for Children's Services and that the Director of People be given delegated authority to manage the authorisation of this funding.

School Term Dates 2015-16

7. We have considered and approved the school term date arrangements for Darlington Maintained schools for the academic years 2015/16 and agreed publication by the end of June 2014.
8. The model approved is the model preferred by most schools, governing bodies and other interested parties in Darlington following the consultation exercise which ended on 23 May 2014.

Children and Young People's Plan 2014-2017

9. We have approved the draft Children and Young People's Plan.

10. Although it is no longer a statutory requirement to produce a Plan it is considered good practice to produce a strategic document across partners and regulatory bodies, such as Ofsted, routinely comment on the existence or otherwise of a strategic plan.
11. The development of the Children and Young People's Plan has taken place alongside the development of the Sustainable Community Strategy.
12. The draft Plan has been extensively consulted on through regular meetings of the Collective, through engagement activity with children and young people and by incorporating the priorities voted on by over 4,000 young people through the Youth Member of Parliament election.

A Strategy for School Improvement

13. Approval has been given for the revision of a set of arrangements in order for the Local Authority to fulfil its statutory obligation to monitor the performance of schools and to challenge underperformance.
14. The new arrangements will replace the current protocols previously agreed in 2008 and will take account of significant changes in education arrangements since that date, particularly the changing relationship between schools and local authorities and the reduction in centrally retained education staff.

Participation Data

15. Data just released show figures and emerging trends for Darlington that are encouraging:
 - (a) The proportion of 16-17 year olds recorded in education and training has risen by 3.5 per cent in the 12 months since March 2013 (86.1 per cent to 89.6 per cent) bringing Darlington broadly in line with the North East average (90.0 per cent) and England average (90.3 per cent). Our 'not knowns' have fallen by 1.3 per cent to 2.3 per cent. This sits below the North East average (2.7 per cent) and England average (3.6 per cent).
 - (b) Of particular note is that 100 per cent of 16-17 year olds in Darlington with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (LDD) are recorded as participating (North East average 84.4 per cent, England average 85.8 per cent). We believe that this figure reflects a successful approach by the local authority in supporting families and young people through transition, placing young people appropriately and working proactively with post 16 providers to shape their provision to meet the needs of the young people.

Children Looked After

16. At 31 May 2014, there were 184 children Looked After by Darlington Borough Council. This represents a decrease of eight children since 31 March 2014. The

decrease is due to older young people reaching 'leaving care' age and also to children being rehabilitated home to their parents' care.

17. The draft proposals for the Corporate Parenting Work Programme were considered at the meeting in March 2014. The Panel Members have agreed that representatives from the Children in Care Council (Darlo Care Crew) should attend all future meetings of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Child Protection

18. At the end of March 2013, 62 children were subject to a Child Protection Plan, however, by the end of March 2014, 141 children were subject to a Child Protection Plan. Numbers began to significantly increase from December 2013. This coincided with a number of internal changes, including the implementation of the MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub) with Health, Police and Social Care, and the redesign of the Duty and Area Social Work teams. From January 2014, there has been a significant increase in the number of ICPC's (Initial Child Protection Conference) held and Chairs have noted the large sibling groups involved. The sustained increase in children being made subject to a plan also coincides with a marked reduction in the number of children being removed from a plan. From 2012-2013, 157 children were removed from a plan. This has significantly reduced to 99 in 2013-2014. A case audit is being undertaken to understand the factors involved in this rise in Child Protection numbers.
19. At the end of March 2014, 60 per cent of children on a plan were as a result of Neglect. This is a reduction when compared to the end of the previous year which was 77 per cent. 6 per cent were as a result of physical abuse, as compared to 10 per cent last year. 8 per cent were as a result of sexual abuse - this is an increase when compared to 2013 at 2 per cent. 26 per cent were as a result of emotional harm as compared to 13 per cent from 2013. This is in line with the significant increase in January 2014 of cases coming to conference where the risks were related to domestic abuse. Numbers relating to sexual abuse have remained static.

Troubled Families

20. The 'Troubled Family' initiative is a national programme aimed at identifying families with a cluster of issues and by intensively working with those families 'turn around' their situation. The finance for the scheme is mainly via a payment by results scheme. In Darlington, the Government has set a target of 275 families within the scope of the programme.
21. In relation to progress in May 2014, Darlington has been identified as making excellent progress. 265 of the 275 families have been identified and a package of support provided. 131 families have been 'turned around' representing 48 per cent of the families Darlington were committed to supporting (the national average is 39 per cent).
22. The strategic and partnership commitment to and investment in family intervention has led to better services and improved outcomes for troubled families

in Darlington. The service is confident it can achieve the target set of 275 families receiving services to improve their outcomes and life chances.

School Leaver Stay Safe Operation

23. On 23 May, year 11's left school for their GCSE exams. The Council's Anti-Social Behaviour Team and Durham Police worked with schools and other agencies prior to this date in order to ensure the night in question ran as smoothly as possible and keeping school leavers safe. 'Operation School Leaver Stay Safe' is a multi-agency operation which brings together several agencies and school staff to ensure any young person who has consumed too much alcohol and deemed vulnerable is taken to a place of safety where parents are contacted by the Anti-Social Behaviour Officer. 'Hotspot' areas are patrolled to ensure young people are not putting themselves at risk by having too much to drink. The operation that took place on 23 May was hailed a success for a second year in a row with very few calls to Police with regards to anti-social behaviour and only one person brought to the designated place of safety. We firmly believe the key to the success of the Operation was the forward planning which involved a multi-agency meeting including attendance from the majority of the secondary schools in Darlington.

Home to Nursery Transition Project

24. Darlington Children's Centres are working with local schools to deliver a home to nursery transition program. The program was piloted at summer term 2013 as a targeted six week program for children prior to commencing nursery. The program was very well received by the parents and schools involved. Ofsted Inspectors observed the program during a children's centre inspection and said within the report 'The centre has rightly targeted these schools and therefore children in the most deprived area benefit from good support from the centre for their transition to school'. The program had run again for 6 weeks commencing June 2014. The centres are working in partnership with local schools within Darlington children's centre catchment areas, where the majority of families reside within 30 per cent areas of deprivation. Schools involved in the project are Corporation Road Community Primary, Red Hall Primary, Mount Pleasant Primary, Skerne Park Academy, Rydal Academy, Gurney Pease Academy and Springfield Academy. A number of the schools involved provide staff to support some of the sessions in partnership with the children's centres.
25. 174 children who are due to start nursery in September along with their parents have been invited to participate in the program. Children centre staff deliver a focused program over 6 weeks designed to improve children's outcomes in communication and language, independence, personal, social and emotional development and promote children's independence and confidence.
26. The program increases parents awareness of play and child development. Issues such as potty training, use of dummies, routines and behaviour are covered during the program. School readiness is actively promoted with a particular focus on target children. It provides early identification of target children with whom the centre staff can continue to support. Longer term, the program is designed to

improve the percentage of children from target groups who achieve good levels within the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile.

27. During a recent children's centre advisory board meeting, a deputy head from one of the schools involved fed back 'Parents are very positive and the academy had noticed a huge difference in how quickly children settled'. School staff and children's centre early years practitioners have also had valuable professional discussions about tracking baseline and progression of children.
28. Children's centre staff carry out an extensive evaluation at the end of the program which includes service users' feedback, observations and tracking of children's progress and feedback from the schools involved.

School Forum

29. The School Forum is a statutory body made up of representatives from schools (maintained and academies) and with some representation from other non-school organisations such as nurseries and 14-19 providers. The Forum must be consulted on some issues (eg changes to local funding formula; arrangements for funding pupils with special educational needs) and is a decision making body on others (eg proposed carry forward; how much funding is centrally retained).
30. Since 2013 the meeting is open to the public to attend as observers and the minutes, terms of reference and membership are available on the Council's website.
31. The Education Funding Agency (EFA) has observer status at meetings.
32. The Schools Forum has successfully overseen the transfer of some key services from the local authority to the direct management of individual schools, where the school acts as a lead body to provide a service for all schools. However, national statute determines whether or not services can be funded by such decisions of the Forum and recently a Forum vote to fund the Music Service by a top slice of the dedicated schools grant (DSG), the ring fenced school funding pot, was rejected by EFA regulations which state this cannot happen, despite an underspend within DSG and the desire of the schools. Schools will, instead, fund the service from their individual budgets.
33. School funding and complexities of the regulations restrict decisions the School Forum can make. Therefore, a Contract Monitoring Officer post has been created specifically by the Forum to support joint school contracts and improve collective commissioning arrangements, thus improving value for money from the DSG.

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Children and Young People Portfolio