
OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1. Since the last meeting of the Council, the following are the main areas of work the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee has undertaken:-

Work Programme

2. We continue to give consideration to the Work Programme for this Committee and taking into account the ambitious programme of change across the Council and the key role of Scrutiny in ensuring that the programme is able to deliver the service improvements and the budget savings necessary.

SEN Update

3. We received a presentation on the work and progress of the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Pathfinder project.
4. The Pathfinder seeks to improve the current 'Educational Statement' process by including care and health needs. Full involvement of the family and early identification are at the core of the work.
5. The vision includes putting in place support at an early stage; ensuring staff have the knowledge, understanding and skills to provide the right support for children and young people with SEN needs; parents know what they can reasonably expect local schools, colleges or local authorities to provide; aspirations of children and young people are raised through an increases focus on life outcomes, including employment; an integrated assessment and a single Education, Health and Care Plan are in place from birth to 25 years for young people with more complex needs; and there is greater control for parents and young people over the services they and their family use.
6. Information regarding the changes to SEN/High Needs funding for schools was also provided, highlighting impact on Darlington schools.

Academies/Free Schools

7. We have received an update on the current status with regard to Academies and Free Schools within the Borough and were advised that we currently have 28 Academies, nine maintained schools, one special free school and one pupil referral unit. There are also two applications to be submitted to the Department for Education for two further free schools. Information was provided regarding applications for Free Schools within Darlington – one definite application and another possible – currently being discussed. Applications are made in January.

8. Members were encouraged to learn that all schools are members of Schools@OneDarlington and meet regularly as a forum to share future plans.
9. We also discussed the availability of school places and expressed our concerns at the potential for a lack of school places in the next five years and we will, therefore, be monitoring the situation closely.
10. We will receive a further update in the new year to monitor the situation with the academies and free schools.

Child Poverty Review Group

11. Members met on 15 October 2013 and discussed the 'living wage' and what the living wage is and how wage levels compare nationally to locally.
12. The living wage is classed as a minimum wage level needed to meet basic needs and is set by the Centre for Research in Social Policy at Loughborough University. It is set at £7.45 per hour (London is set at £8.55 per hour to reflected the added costs of living and is set by the Greater London Authority).
13. In 2011 the average weekly expenditure for the North East was £384.20 which is lower than the figure for the UK of £470.70 (18 per cent less than the UK).
14. Members also considered the Darlington Partnership's report 'The Scope of Poverty in Darlington' which examined the issue of poverty within Darlington by way of enquiry groups.
15. Members discussed the percentage and number of children living in poverty in Darlington by Ward in 2011, approximately 13 per cent of all households in Darlington.
16. Members were particularly concerned to learn that there are a number of children in Darlington who are not claiming free school meals, when entitled to and therefore missing out on free school meals. Schools are also missing out on the pupil premium which is worth £900 per pupil eligible. We intend to investigate this further throughout the duration of our review.
17. To assist with a consultation exercise with various organisations being undertaken by officers, the Review Group requested Members to forward any experiences they have had in dealing with child poverty within their wards.
18. We will be continuing our Review of Child Poverty and report back.

Co-opted Members Task and Finish Review

19. Members met on 6 November 2013 to review the position with statutory and non-statutory co-optees on this Scrutiny Committee.

20. Under the Education Act 1996 and the School Standard Framework Act 1998 local authorities are required to include parent governor and church school representatives on overview and scrutiny committees when considering education matters.
21. We currently have a Church of England Diocese Representative and one Roman Catholic Diocese Representative, however the three parent governor places remain vacant.
22. With the changes to Scrutiny from the previous Education Committee and the past role of co-optees on the Council's School Organisation Committee, which no longer exists, the current role of statutory co-optees was discussed.
23. However, as there currently is no change to the requirement to have statutory co-optees on Scrutiny when dealing with education matters we will be looking again to successfully fill the current vacancies for three Parent Governor Representatives.
24. Members also examined the current list of non-statutory representatives on Scrutiny and the attendance of those representatives at Scrutiny and to look to fill some of the existing vacancies for school representatives.

Councillor Eleanor Lister
Chair of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee