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**THE DARLINGTON SURE START PLAN, 2004-06 – END OF YEAR REVIEW 2004-05**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member(s) - Councillor Chris McEwan, Children's Services Portfolio**

**Responsible Director(s) - Margaret Asquith, Director of Children's Services**

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**Purpose of Report**

1. This report is brought to Members to inform them of: -
  - (a) the progress that has been made towards achieving the targets in the Darlington SureStart Plan 2004-06.
  - (b) ongoing work to implement Round 1 of Children's Centres in Darlington by March 2006
  - (c) the key requirements of "Choice for parents, the best start for children: a ten year strategy for childcare" (December 2004) and its implications for the Authority.

**Information and Analysis**

2. To reflect the importance of collaborative working in developing services for young children, and the shared targets across organisations, the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP) was reconstituted in April 2004 to become the Darlington SureStart Partnership (DSSP). Sub-groups were reconfigured to lead on specific target areas and a new group, the Children's Centre Strategic Steering Group was established. The representation of SureStart Local Programmes (SSLP) within DSSP and its sub-groups was strengthened in recognition of the importance of sharing the learning and to support the focus on 'mainstreaming' SSLPs in Darlington.
3. Progress Towards Targets 2004-05
  - (a) Darlington continues to offer a free, high quality, part-time early education place for all eligible three and four year olds whose parents request a place in the maintained, private voluntary and independent sectors.
  - (b) The 2004-06 plan set a new place creation target of 503 within a mixture of full daycare provision, out of school clubs, holiday clubs and childminders' places. Between 1st April 2004 and 31st March 2005, 468 new places have been created as follows: -

Out of School Clubs	70 places
Private Day Nurseries	120 places

Holiday Clubs	50 places
Childminders	<u>228</u> places
TOTAL	<u>468</u>

Work to develop an additional 50 group based full day care places for 3 and 4 year olds as outlined within the Round 1 Children's Centres Implementation Plans is continuing and is on target to deliver by March 2006. The Government's commitment to eradicate child poverty through increased parental employment will require the Authority to manage effectively the childcare market and ensure a sufficient supply of accessible, affordable, flexible, good quality care for children and families.

- (c) Particular attention continues to be paid to supporting provision within the 20% most disadvantaged wards in Darlington. By April 2004, 145 neighbourhood nursery places had been created. Two of these settings (McNay Street and Maidendale House) are in permanent new buildings. A third, at Skerne Park, is in temporary accommodation awaiting the completion of the new, integrated facility in Spring 2006 which will include Skerne Park Primary school, the SureStart Local Programme and Adult Learning Provision. These three settings, together with the SureStart Local Programme co-located with Mount Pleasant School, will be designated as full Children's Centres by March 2006. These centres will offer child and family health services, antenatal advice and care, family support services, parental outreach, adult learning and links to the local Children's Information Service and Job Centre Plus. In addition, services are being developed and delivered on Red Hall estate and within the Bank Top and Lascelles areas. Recent guidance from DfES indicates that future planning e.g. Children's Centres in Round 2 (2006-08) will be more responsive to pockets of deprivation by focussing on the 30% most disadvantaged super output areas, which are a new, standard unit for presenting local statistical information. These are consistent in size, unlike electoral wards, which may vary greatly.
- (d) Both new and existing providers continue to receive support from staff including help with business and financial planning and sustainability. Throughout 2004-05 a number of settings were supported through a business "health check" and offered appropriate guidance. Providers continue to have access to continuous professional development, including training, qualified teacher support, Darlington's Investors in Children Quality Assurance scheme and financial support in training staff to NVQ Level 2 and 3. In Darlington:
- (i) 96.4% settings rated as satisfactory or better by Ofsted
  - (ii) 374 practitioners accessed an average of 4.3 days training
  - (iii) 27 settings are involved in the Quality Assurance Kitemark
  - (iv) 16 childminders are working towards Quality Schemes
  - (v) 1:10 ratio of qualified teacher support to non maintained settings
  - (vi) All qualified teachers delivering Foundation Stage Education have had access to appropriate Early Education training.
  - (vii) Establishing Foundation Stage baseline to properly measure them reduce the gap by 25% between SureStart Local Programme areas and Borough wide achievement events in Communication, Language and Literacy and Personal, Social and Emotional development areas of learning in the Foundation Stage.
  - (viii) Exceeded target of 45 more staff qualified to NVQ Levels 2 and 3.

There are specific proposals to promote training to NVQ level 4 and degree level within the 10-year childcare strategy to promote and sustain the quality of the childcare workforce.

- (e) On 1st April 2004 Darlington Children's Information Service (CIS) went live, providing a free phone telephone 'helpline' service and drop in facilities at the easily accessible office in Church Row. The service has an up to date database of childcare providers, training opportunities, tax credit information and links to Job Centre Plus and Lone Parent Advisers. The Recruitment and Information Officer has produced a range of advice and information leaflets and is actively engaged in seeking to increase the percentage of under represented groups in the childcare workforce e.g. men, minority ethnic communities, older people. "Good news" stories have been published in the Town Crier, Northern Echo and Early Years Gazette. The CIS evaluates both its childcare and recruitment services. Of the evaluation forms returned during 2004-05:
- 91% rated the childcare service good or excellent.*  
*92% rated the recruitment service good or excellent.*

The 10-year strategy for childcare stresses increasing support for families to access information which promotes work-life balance.

The CIS is working with a range of partners, including Children's Centres planning groups to develop models which fully integrate accessible information within local communities.

4. SureStart Local Programmes at McNay Street, Mount Pleasant and Skerne Park will be designated as Children's Centres by March 2006 along with Maidendale House at Firth Moor. Each will deliver the full offer of Children's Centres services as outlined in paragraph 3c. These facilities will be available to all children under 5 and their families resident in the catchment areas. Recently received guidance for the 2nd round of Children's Centres (to be developed between 2006-08) proposes a further 2 Children's Centres in Darlington, based on ensuring that all under 5's in the 30% most disadvantaged super output areas have access to a local centre. It is a requirement that centres with full day care (Round 1) must include an appropriately qualified Early Years teacher and plans are in place to meet this requirement. Authorities are also recommended to review their Round 1 plans in the light of the revised Round 2 guidance. This flexibility affords an opportunity to realign catchment areas and include additional settings and communities. The SureStart Local Programmes are working with the Social Affairs and Health Scrutiny Committee to promote Darlington as a Baby Friendly Town and support an increase in breastfeeding rates. Additionally, Darlington Primary Care Trust has reshaped its Health Visiting service to a more geographic model of provision, based on the local programme model of multi-disciplinary team work and is targeting resources in the more disadvantaged areas. Discussions are ongoing with the Head of Midwifery Services to explore opportunities for reshaping in line with Children's Centres delivery. Parental involvement in the governance of local programmes has brought a real sense of community ownership to their development and must be sustained within Children's Centres management groups.
5. The 10-year strategy for childcare aims to make early years and childcare provision a permanent, mainstream part of the welfare state. The strategy will be implemented through the framework provided by Every Child Matters and is closely correlated to the 5 outcomes

for children. It has been identified as a priority area for Directors of Children's Services. Local authorities have a central role in commissioning and co-ordinating the delivery of integrated early years and childcare services. These roles are:

- (a) Joining up services for families by commissioning the delivery of an integrated childcare offer, including provision of local information and support to parents, to meet local needs and priorities.
- (b) Addressing affordability and sustainability, working with local partners to understand and where necessary intervene in the local childcare market.
- (c) Raising quality and ensuring inclusion, working with partners to deliver appropriate training and support for the expanding workforce.
- (d) Brokerage and partnership working with local partners, including schools, the Health Service, Social Care, to establish a shared strategy and broker private/voluntary sector partnership arrangements.

The strategy addresses the need for childcare for all families with children aged up to 14 and describes extended school requirements for primary and secondary schools to deliver out of school care and extended services. A programme to deliver briefings to Key Stakeholders is being implemented and during Autumn 2005 it is proposed to commission a comprehensive market analysis and consultation with families throughout the Borough.

- 6. The Darlington Sure Start Plan Children's Centres plans and 10 year childcare strategy proposals are all designed to provide high quality, flexible, easily accessible services which are all designed to cater for a family's changing needs and deliver the best outcome for children. Whilst they pose challenges they also provide significant opportunities to create a solid framework for early learning and childcare across Darlington for the next decade.

### **Legal Implications**

- 7. This report has been considered by the Borough Solicitor for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Borough Solicitor considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

### **Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998**

- 8. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is not considered that the contents of this report have any such effect.

## **Council Policy Framework**

9. The issues contained within this report do not represent change to Council policy or the Council's policy framework.

## **Decision Deadline**

10. For the purpose of the 'call-in' procedure this does not represent an urgent matter

## **Recommendations**

11. It is recommended that Cabinet:-
  - (a) Note the progress that has been made towards achieving the targets in the Darlington SureStart Plan 2004-06.
  - (b) Note the requirements for the Authority within the 10-year strategy for childcare and the proposal to commission a comprehensive market analysis and consultation process.

## **Reasons**

12. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons: -
  - (a) To progress Children's Centres Planning.
  - (b) To evaluate proposed developments required by the 10 year strategy for childcare to proceed.

**Margaret Asquith,  
Director of Children's Services**

## **Background Papers**

Darlington SureStart Plan 2004-06

Choice for parents, the best start for children; a ten-year strategy for childcare (December 2004)

PM/GJ: Extension 2847