
OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES PORTFOLIO

1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the areas for work under my Children's Services Portfolio :-

a) Sure Start

The Darlington Sure Start Plan for 2004/06 and End of Year Review for 2004/05 were presented to Cabinet in June. Progress has been made towards achieving the targets contained in the 2004/06 Plan, and there is ongoing work to implement Round 1 of the Children's Centres in Darlington by March 2006. The key requirements of 'Choice for parents, the best start for children: a ten year strategy for childcare' and its implications for this Authority were also discussed. It was agreed that the Children's Centres planning should be progressed, to evaluate proposed developments required by the ten year strategy for childcare to proceed.

b) Eastbourne School / Hurworth School proposal

Early exploratory discussions have been held with the Governing Bodies of Eastbourne and Hurworth secondary schools about a proposal to use our single school guarantee funding for those Authorities not in waves 1, 2 or 3 of Building for Schools initiative. The proposal is to use this funding for a new school on the site of Alderman Tommy Crooks park, which in effect would be a statutory transfer, with significant enlargement of Hurworth school, and closure of Eastbourne school.

A meeting has also been held with Hurworth parents and Eastbourne parents.

It is important to note that these are very early exploratory discussions and not consultation processes at this stage.

c) Text Vibe pilot launched

The TextVibe pilot was successfully launched in the Youth Service on 1 June 2005 followed by an Arts pilot launch two weeks later. The service was developed by Leisure and Arts in conjunction with corporate I.T. and Internet provider, Waterstons. The service allows access to anyone who is interested in receiving up-to-the minute information on performances and events within Leisure and Arts, as well as providing a forum for consultation, particularly with the young people of the town.

There is no cost to the person receiving the text and their normal service charge applies should they send a reply. Registering is made easy by logging onto www.darlington.gov.uk and simply following the links on the website.

d) Detached Youth Work

Detached Youth Workers, who have been working in the North Road area for several months building relationships with young people, have initiated a partnership with Dolphin Centre staff to deliver a six week sporting activity programme at Longfield School.

The Detached Youth Workers have been successful in gaining places for young people on a residential training programme for youth forums.

Two young people from Darlington Youth Assembly, and an accompanying youth worker, represented Darlington on a visit to Germany to see how transport is managed. This information will form part of the Town on the Move consultation and planning.

The youth service has been chairing a multi agency group to produce a leaflet giving information on activities in Darlington over the summer holidays. The group is also looking to produce an annual directory of local agencies that provide activities for children and young people.

e) Youth Service Website – E-Vibe

The youth service has recently commenced development of the new DBC young people's website – E-Vibe. The site is being developed in consultation with the young people of Darlington, to that end a young person, Paul Hepper, has been employed by DBC to take this forward.

Paul has recently completed the consultation with the young people of Darlington as to what they want from their site. Parental views are also being sought as to what parents do or do not want their children to be able to access via E-Vibe. A full launch of the service is planned later this summer once the pilot has been evaluated.

2. I have conducted the following meetings and briefings in my role as Cabinet Member as part of my ongoing familiarisation of the portfolio role:

May 2005

- a) I attended a joint briefing with the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Life Long Learning Scrutiny Committee and the Social Affairs and Health Scrutiny Committee, together with the Director of Children's Services, to discuss cross-over work issues.
- b) I attended the Adult Learners Award Ceremony held in the Council Chamber, where successful members of the public were presented with awards to recognise their outstanding achievement in adult learning.
- c) I attended a meeting of the Council's Corporate Parenting Panel.
- d) I met with officers and the Head Teacher of Abbey Junior School, together with Councillor Nutt, to discuss town twinning and the development of early language learning in schools.

- e) I met with Mr Terry Dabbs, Chair of Tees Valley's Learning Skills Council, together with the Director of Children's Services.
- f) I visited Haughton Community School where I met with the recently appointed Head Teacher, Mr David Bradley. This visit gave me the opportunity to meet with other teachers, staff and pupils, to tour the school and view the facilities.

June 2005

- a) I met with officers in the performance section of Children's Services to increase my knowledge of this important service area provided to staff and schools.
- b) I visited Eastbourne School and the Acting Head Teacher Mr Eamonn Farrar gave me a tour of the school, to meet with teachers, staff and pupils.
- c) I visited Bishopton / Redmarshall School and met with the Acting Head Teacher, Mrs Helen Morgan who has recently led the school in improving its performance and standards which has been recognised by a recent successful Ofsted inspection.
- d) I met with officers from the School Effectiveness Service, to increase my knowledge of this service area.
- e) Darlington Assembly met on 22nd June, with the morning's programme dedicated to Children's Services. I was privileged to give a joint presentation with the Director of Children's Services and to take questions from the floor. This was a very informative and useful Assembly meeting with discussions, workshops and raising awareness generally of children's issues in Darlington.
- f) The Children's Services Conference took place on 30th June and 1st July, which I was pleased to officially open and speak to. Representatives from the Borough's schools, officers from the Local Authority and relevant stakeholders were invited to attend, to discuss the challenges which lie ahead in Children's Services in Darlington. I was also very pleased to present at the awards evening, which recognised the dedication and commitment shown by staff in the department and schools.

July 2005

- g) I visited the Connexions office in Darlington to meet with managers and staff.
- h) I attended a joint briefing with Councillor Vasey, and officers from the Community Services Department to discuss the Youth Service and developments within that section.
- i) I visited Firthmoor Primary School to meet with the Head Teacher, other teachers, staff, and pupils.
- j) I continue to meet with the Director and relevant Assistant Directors in Children's Services on a weekly basis, and will soon be conducting regular joint briefings with the Chief Executive and Chair of Darlington Primary Care Trust.

Councillor Chris McEwan
Cabinet Member with Children's Services Portfolio