

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12th January, 2009

PRESENT – Councillor Hughes (in the Chair); Councillors Armstrong, Davies, Galletley, Lawton, Lister, Long and Richmond. (8)

APOLOGIES – Councillors Burton and Francis; (2) and Mr. D. Moyes, Mr. M. Frank, Mr. K. Cotgrove.

ABSENT – Councillor Thistlethwaite. (1)

STATUTORY CO-OPTTEES – Canon S. Bamber. (1)

NON-STATUTORY CO-OPTTEES – Mr. R. Egan, Mr. N. Rees, Mr. C. J. Taylor and Mr. T.R. Fisher (4)

ABSENT – Councillor Thistlethwaite, Mrs. V. Mitchell and Ms. S. Robinson.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Murray Rose, Director of Children’s Services, George McQueen, Assistant Director (Planning and Resources), Melanie Stainthorpe, Admissions Manager within the Children’s Services Department; and Gary Arnold, Youth Officer within Community Services Department.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Emily Christer, Youth Member of Parliament; and Catherine Thompson, Head Teacher, Longfield School.

CYP40. MINUTES – Submitted - The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 3rd November, 2008.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes be approved as a correct record.

CY41. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS – There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

CY42. STRATEGY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE’S SERVICES – The Director of Children’s Services submitted a report (previously circulated) to consult Members of this Scrutiny on the Strategy for the Development of Young People’s Services in Darlington.

The submitted report outlined the Strategy (also previously circulated) which aims to provide services and improve the outcomes for young people aged 11-19 years in Darlington. The Strategy builds on existing good practice and will deliver integrated services to improve early intervention, prevention and targeted support. The key theme of the Strategy being to empower young people and place them at the centre of our services, policies and governance. The Strategy also recommends how this Council will work in partnership with others agencies and how services from third sector providers will be commissioned.

Particular reference was made to the successful participation of young people in the ‘I’m a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here’ competition run as part of Local Democracy Week in October,

2008; and the positive turnout at the Youth Member of Parliament Elections. It was also reported that a recent Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership meeting had identified a 13 per cent reduction in anti-social behaviour in relation to young people which it was agreed by Members was as a result of the hard work by the Youth Service and its partners in targeted young people and early intervention.

Members questions were in relation to NEET (Not Engaged in Education, Employment or Training) levels in Darlington; work with Connexions in getting young people into work; how these levels will be monitored by this Scrutiny Committee; alcohol abuse levels and the work being undertaken to reduce these levels; and statistics on the take up of the various events that have been organised by the Youth Service for young people;

The Youth Member of Parliament Emily Christer, accompanied by Gary Arnold, Youth Officer within the Community Services Department also attended the meeting and gave their opinions on the Strategy and how they reach young people. The Youth MP expressed her view that there was a lot available for young people but more may need to be done on promotion, she also emphasised that there was a lot of information available on the Youth Service website 'Click'.

RESOLVED – That the report and Action Plan be approved.

CY43. PRIMARY CAPITAL PROGRAMME – The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (previously circulated) to advise Members on the progress of the Local Authority's bid for additional capital funding and gave an indication of the schools which will benefit from the capital resources received.

It was highlighted that this Council had already been identified as a pathfinder for capital schemes, and had been selected as one of only 41 Authorities to have its Primary Strategy for Change approved for the next two years.

As the six of the primary schools in Darlington are less than five years old, the funds received will ensure that over half of the buildings in the Borough will have been brought up to standard by the close of 2010-11.

A list of the projects to be undertaken in the Borough's Schools over the next two years were also outlined in the submitted report.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

CY44. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE LOCAL ADMISSIONS FORUM – The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (previously circulated) to advise Members of this Scrutiny on the work of the Local Admission Forum and to receive its annual report for information (also previously circulated).

The submitted report gave the background to the Local Admission Forum, which is a mandatory body comprising of Headteachers and Governors from community, trust, voluntary aided schools and Academies, and constituted to make sure that all publicly funded schools co-operate and subscribe to the co-ordinated admissions scheme, administered by the local authority.

It was highlighted that 87 per cent of secondary applications received their first preference, which compares favourably with the national average of 82 per cent of families getting first preference.

Members questions on the annual report of the Local Admission Forum were in relation to budgets; the problems that are created by parents who will only express a first preference; the impact on neighbouring authorities and how this Council communicate to neighbouring authorities on admissions; a request by a Member on more details to be provided on the actual appeals, not necessary the success rates in relation to secondary and primary schools; the Key Stage 1 Legislation impact on primary appeals statistics; and the follow up processes when parents are unsuccessful in receiving a first preference.

There was also some discussion on school places for Forces Families moving into the area and any potential problems that this may cause and Catherine Thompson, Head Teacher at Alderman Leach School gave her experiences in this area. The Assistant Director Planning and Resources advised the Members that the Service Children's Liaison Group at Catterick Garrison have been invited to attend the Local Admission Forum.

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be received.

(b) That the Annual Report of the Local Admissions Forum be made available on the Council's web-site.

CY45. JOINT AREA REVIEW OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN DARLINGTON – The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (previously circulated) to present to Members of this Scrutiny the Joint Area Review of Services for Children and Young People and to consult on the draft action plan prepared in response to each of the Joint Area Review recommendations (also previously circulated).

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) published its Joint Area Review of Services for Children and Young People on 18th November, 2008 and this Authority and its partners must respond in the form of an action plan within 70 working days.

The Director of Children's Services agreed that the Review was a fair summary of all Children's Services and outlined the areas that the Joint Area Review had recommended required more attention and also highlighted actions in the Action Plan for immediate action, action over the next six months and action for longer term. It was also emphasised that some of the actions, that had to be addressed as a matter of urgency, had now been completed.

Members comments were in relation to improving outcomes for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the provisions for 16-19 year olds; and the Director of Children's Services advised Members of on-going work with Ruskin Mill Education Trust, a national charity who will be working with Darlington as a partner organisation in the future.

The Chair made reference to the report in relation to the comment made on the work of this Scrutiny Committee which had played a productive role in the performance management and gave her congratulations to the Scrutiny Members.

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be received.

(b) That the action plan prepared in response to the Joint Area Review be approved.

CY46. SECONDARY SCHOOLS BUILDING SCHOOLS FOR THE FUTURE – The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (previously circulated) to advise Members of

the Expression of Interest sent to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and Partnerships for Schools, seeking to have Darlington included in the next wave of funding available under the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) Programme.

It was reported that Darlington is not programmed to be included in the BSF Programme until 2013-14, however, the Expression of Interest that had been submitted to accelerate the release of funding which in turn would mean that work could commence on refurbishing three secondary schools in the Borough that have not been modernised, and improving the use of ICT as a learning medium in all secondary schools. It was also reported that there will be an announcement in February 2009 as to the schemes which will be brought forward to April 2009.

General discussion ensued on the number of surplus places currently in schools and projected surplus of places and the reasons for the fluctuations, taking into account birth rates and migration from outside. It was also proposed that the school census data, which is carried out every three years, be made available on the Council's website.

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be received.

(b) That Members of this Scrutiny receive further update reports on the outcome of presenting the Expression of Interest.

CY47. DARLINGTON SAFEGUARDING – POSITION STATEMENT – The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide Members with additional information regarding the child protection process within Darlington.

The submitted report outlined the policy, procedure and practice of the child protection system and also identified the monitoring and quality assurance processes, including the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

The Chair advised Members of this Scrutiny that there will be a future Training Session on Safeguarding Arrangements in Darlington and further information will be forwarded in due course.

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be noted.

(b) That Members of this Scrutiny Committee receive regular updates and briefing sessions.

CY48. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – WORK PROGRAMME 2008/09 – The Director of Corporate Services submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that further consideration be given to this Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme and Review topics for the Municipal Year 2008/09.

With regard to an item that had been programmed for this meeting, in respect of School Standards Performance (including performance in National Examinations 2007/08), the Chair advised the Members of this Scrutiny that she had received a letter from the Assistant Director, Planning and Resources to outline the reasons for the delay in receiving the revised National Key Stage 2 results, resulting in the lack of information to provide to this Scrutiny Committee at this time. The Chair expressed her concerns at this delay and proposed that a letter be sent, on behalf of this Scrutiny Committee to Cabinet expressing their disappointment at these delays and causing the interruption to their Scrutiny work on KS2 results.

The Chair advised that following approval of the Monitoring and Co-ordination Group at their meeting on 12th January, 2009 approval has been given to turn the Task and Finish Reviews on Language Learning and Use of Multi Use Games Areas into full Reviews, to allow for more thorough investigation.

It was also reported that it was the intention to hold a Special Meeting of this Scrutiny to examine the Juvenile Justice Systems in Darlington and the Youth Offending Service Plan and to invite to that meeting representatives from the various partners involved.

RESOLVED - (a) That the report be noted.

(b) That, on behalf of this Scrutiny Committee, a letter be submitted to Cabinet expressing this Scrutiny's disappointment at the delay in receiving the revised National Key Stage 2 results.

(b) That the Language Learning and Use of Multi Use Games Areas Task and Finish Review Groups be undertaken as full Reviews with the approval of the Monitoring and Co-ordination Group.

(c) That a Special Meeting be arranged for the reports on the Juvenile Justice System in Darlington and the Youth Offending Service Plan.

(d) That a Special Meeting be arranged to scrutinise the budget for Children's Services to be held before 14th February, 2009.

CYP49. POLICY REVIEW - (1) Review of Progress on Policy Review Items –
There were no reports to consider.

(2) Review Items Final Report Back – There were no reports to consider.

(3) Responses of the Executive to Reports of this Scrutiny Committee – There were no responses to consider.

CYP50. EXECUTIVE CALL-IN - (1) Call-In Items Relating to Key Decisions of the Executive - There were no call-in items.

(2) Other Call-In Items - There were no call-in items.