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**OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES PORTFOLIO**

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

**(a) Children's Centres Strategic Proposal – Round 2**

Proposals to amend the boundaries for Darlington's Round 1 (2004-06) Children's Centres were agreed by Cabinet in November 2005. Cabinet also agreed to the preferred locations for a further 2 Children's Centres under Round 2 of the initiative in the Dodmire and Houghton areas of the borough.

**(b) Expression of Interest in a City Academy for Darlington**

Cabinet received the recommendations of the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee to support an Expression of Interest for a City Academy. We are now progressing the information sessions to a wider number of stakeholders prior to completing the Expression of Interest.

**(c) School Performance 2005: National Tests/Exams**

Cabinet received a report providing an analysis of school performance in the national tests and exams in 2005. The report highlighted improvements in performance at Key Stage 1 across all curriculum areas; at Key Stage 2 Level 4+ in Maths and English, although performance fell back at the higher Level 5; at Key Stage 3 Level 5+ in all curriculum areas with the exception of maths which remained static at the 2004 level; and Key Stage 4 which saw seven percentage point gain in 5 or more GCSEs A\*- C. At Key Stage 5 Carmel saw 96.6% of its pupils gaining 2 or A Levels at grades A – E. This a 9 percentage point improvement on 2004 and coupled with the excellent performance of Queen Elizabeth VI Form College may well make Darlington the best performing local authority area in England.

**(d) Children's Services Performance in 2005**

Cabinet received a report outlining the results of the Children's Services 2005 Annual Performance Assessment (APA) and star ratings for children's social care. Following national moderation of the APA the Council has been issued with a letter providing a series of judgements ranked from 1 to 4 (where 4 is a service that delivers well above the minimum requirements for children and young people). During its first year as the Children's Services Authority the Council secured grades of 3 in 3 judgement areas and secured a grade of 2 in the fourth judgement area pertaining to education services. The APA also contributes to the Council's Social Care Ratings and for this year the Council has maintained its 2 star rating (i.e. serving most children well), and that our capacity for further improvement has been rated as 'Excellent' (an improvement on the previous year).

## **2. Developments in Children's Services**

The Pupil Support Service have developed with Darlington College of Technology and Eastbourne School an exciting development for young people. 81 pupils have begun a programme of study at Darlington College of Technology. The programme is aimed at young people who would benefit from an alternative curriculum offer at KS4. These students were interviewed and offered an accredited programme of their choice - the offer includes catering, hairdressing, construction and sports, together with key skills in Maths, English and ICT. The courses will lead to NVQ Level 1 and Level 2 qualifications which is equivalent to 4 GCSE's plus accreditation for the key skills element. The groups of 15-19 pupils are being supported by staff from the Pupil Support Service to ensure any areas of concern are quickly addressed. The Education Welfare Team will also support the attendance of these pupils. At the 'special' open evening offered by the college last week over half of the parents and pupils were in attendance. The course began on Monday 9th January 2006 and all but 4 students attended. Progress of the '**Skills +**' programme will be monitored and reported to other schools through the 14-19 Trust and Head Teacher meetings.

## **3. Youth Service Issues**

### **Overview of Children's Services Portfolio – Youth Service information**

- a) 'Politics Rocks' event – 2 November – which officially launched the election process for UK Youth Parliament. 6 young people from across the town have been nominated to stand in the elections which this year will utilise schools and colleges to ensure many more young people are aware of and able to vote. The election is scheduled for February 2006.
- (b) Youth Service staff and young people led on the Youth Strategy Consultation day at the Dolphin Centre on 3 December. 99 young people attended and participated in a range of activities as well as a number of workshops sessions to identify young people's issues around the 5 outcomes of Every Child Matters. Material from the day is being collated and will inform the next Youth Strategy steering group meeting.
- (c) PS2K project – 20 young people have been trained and briefed for this project and held their inaugural meeting with the Head of Youth Service on 6 December. The purpose of the project is to enable young people who use Youth Service projects and activities direct access to the Head of Service so that feedback, ideas, comments and opinions can be given and used as part of the Youth Service planning processes.
- (d) The Volunteer Training programme has developed significantly over the last few months with training being offered to volunteers at the Westside Project and across the town generally. Discussions have taken place with Middleton St George, Heighington and Eastbourne Partnership with a view to running further training programmes in the New Year.
- (e) The Introduction to Youth Work course commenced at the beginning of November (and will finish in February 2006). 9 young people have enrolled. This is central to the Youth Service four-tier training programme and is the initial step

for young people becoming more involved in the service, ultimately in a paid capacity. It continues Darlington's principle of 'growing its own' staff.

- (f) Finally, adverts were placed in a range of local and national media to recruit to 11 new posts created as a result of the growth budget within the Youth Service. Interviews are on going at present and a fuller report on the outcomes of the process will be available in my next report.

#### **4. Visits and Meetings since last Council**

In addition to my regular briefing meetings with the Director of Children's Services and Assistant Directors, I have attended the following meetings:-

18th November – I visited Heathfield Primary School for a discussion with staff and teachers. I also met with the Principal of Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College.

28th November – I met with staff at the E-learning Centre, Sadberge, for an update on developments with this technical provision to schools in the Borough. I attended a meeting with staff and teachers at Beaumont Hill School and to tour the facilities. I visited St George's Primary School, Middleton-St-George and was pleased to meet the children and members of the school council.

5th December – I was pleased to attend the Hummersknott Prize Giving Presentation and had the opportunity to meet with teaching staff, pupils and parents.

9th December – I visited the Education Village for a tour of the facilities and was accompanied by Cllr Thompson, Lead Member for Childrens Services at Middlesbrough Council. The Interim Chief Executive of the Education Village was in attendance and provided us with an update on current progress. I also visited Red Hall Primary School and St Bede's RC Primary School to meet with the Head Teachers, other teachers, staff, and pupils.

13th December – I joined the Fostering Panel Meeting. Topics discussed included all areas of planning input in relation to Foster Carers, in conjunction with assessment and review reports; individual concerns arising, including suitability of carers for specific children; review of terms of approval of Foster Carers to meet specific needs.

16th December - I visited the Principal of Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College, to discuss 14-19 education issues.

4th January – I attended the North East Education Conference at the Sage in Gateshead. This is one of the UK's premier education events. The 2006 conference brought together some of the UK's leading politicians and education professionals under the theme; "Learn:Create". Workshops are based around the five outcomes of Every Child Matters.

**Councillor Chris McEwan**  
**Cabinet Member with Children's Services Portfolio**

