
OVERVIEW OF LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work that have been undertaken under the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee:-
 - a) **Proposal for an Academy in Darlington** – The Committee held a Special Meeting on 21st November, to consider a request from Cabinet to investigate fully whether the Council should submit an Expression of Interest to the Department of Education and Skills for up to £25M. of funding to develop an Academy, seeking views from interested parties and requesting that the Committee’s findings be reported back to the next ordinary meeting of Cabinet to be held on 29th November, 2005. The Scrutiny Committee, on the 21st November, 2005, heard the views of fourteen stakeholder groups and other interested parties and also considered written representations on the proposals. The Committee was then adjourned and reconvened on the 23rd November, 2005 to formulate and agree its recommendations to Cabinet. The Committee agreed to support the submission of an Expression of Interest for a City Academy in Darlington and highlighted several issues that it considered needed to be addressed in any submission.

In addition, the Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting held on 9th January, 2006, received an update report on the Academy Proposals. The report referred to the establishment of an “Academy Team” to work on the proposals; the support of the Church of England, Diocese of Durham as sponsor for the Academy; and plans to hold a series of information sessions in community venues across the Borough throughout January and February, 2006 to provide parents and the general public with the opportunity to find out more about the Academy proposals.

- b) **Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy** – Consideration was given to a six monthly progress report on the implementation of the Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy, covering the period from April 2005 to October 2005. The Strategy is intended to reverse the spiral of decline in Darlington’s eleven priority Wards and its Action Plan issues in relation to Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee are to increase attainment in Key Stage, 2 Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 (GCSEs); promote wider participation in learning at all ages; improve parenting skills; improve school attendance and provide comprehensive and high quality early years provision.
- c) **School Performance 2005: National Tests/Examinations** – It was pleasing to note that an analysis of Darlington pupil performance in the national tests and examinations in 2005 showed that significant improvements have been made a Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 4. The overall improvement at Key Stage 4 makes Darlington the sixth most improved Local Authority (LA) nationally at 5+ A* -C and the second most improved LA nationally at this measure, including English and mathematics. At Key Stage 1, the improvements made Darlington the fifth most improved LA nationally for writing, the ninth most improved for mathematics and the thirteenth most improved for reading. The improvements of 2004 at Key Stage 2 have been maintained in 2005. Performance also continued to improve at Key Stage 3 in 2005 but this was below the national rate of improvement. Value added is positive for Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 but not for Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4. When

examined through the value added, from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4 is much better than the value added from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3. This area remains a priority for improvement. The Scrutiny Committee agreed to hold a Special Meeting to consider the concept of value added in more detail.

- d) **School Performance in 2005: Schools Inspected by OFSTED between 1st September 2004 and 31st July 2005** - A report on the two nursery schools, four primary schools and one secondary schools in the Borough which inspected by OFSTED between 1st September 2005 and 31st July 2005 stated that the quality of education provided was judged to be at least satisfactory in six out of the seven schools and three of the seven was judged to be good. Where OFSTED identified serious concerns, these have been remedied in one of the two schools so identified. The other school is judged to be making satisfactory progress. It is pleasing to note the overall performance and subsequent progress of schools inspected during this period.
- e) **School Attendance in Darlington** - It was pleasing to note the ongoing work that is being carried out to improve school attendance within Darlington. Although the local authority did not meet the Department for Education and Skills stretch targets for 2004 – 2005, eighteen primary schools and five secondary schools reduced their absence levels. There is continued support from the media to publicise the current news and information concerning school attendance. Education prosecutions and their outcomes are reported in the local, press, as are truancy sweep facts and figures. The Education Welfare Service continues to develop practice around the delivery of parenting support and a recruitment drive will be carried out during January. A school authorised absence pass system and Plan for this scheme is to be implemented by September 2006.
- f) **Children’s Services Performance in 2005** – Consideration was given to the outcome of the Annual Performance Assessment for Darlington Borough Council’s Education and Children’s Social Care Services for 2005, which was conducted jointly by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED). The purpose of this assessment is to evaluate the outcomes for children in the area and the contribution of Council services to those outcomes. The final judgements secured for the APA for children’s services and the overall 2 star rating for social services performance contributed to the Authority maintaining its “Excellent” status for Comprehensive Performance Assessment.
- g) **Behaviour Support Task and Finish Review Group** – The Behaviour Support and Task and Finish Review Group reported the progress it had made with its remit to add value to the behavioural support services by increasing awareness of the support available and by encouraging its further development through the Children’s Services Department, so that all support services can work together to provide early intervention in an attempt to reduce permanent exclusions”. The Committee supported the approach being taken by the Group to the Review.
- h) **Extended Schools Task and Finish Review Group** – The Committee considered the Final Report to the Extended Schools Task and Finish Group and endorsed its suggestions that the Scrutiny Committee receive regular update reports as the Extended Schools Initiative develops and that the Initiative be given more publicity.
- i) **School Attendance Task and Finish Review Group** – The Committee was pleased to note that Cabinet had considered the final report of the School Attendance Task and Finish Review Group and had supported its recommendations and thanked Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee for its work.

I also attended the following meetings as Chair of Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee:

Addressed the children and staff at Mowden Infant's School about Thanksgiving;

Convened the Community Panel Appointments Board;

Met with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder, an Assistant Director of Children's Services and other officers for an update on activities by the Children's Services Department;

Presented the Healthy School Award to Mowden Infant's School;

Attended a Briefing on Secondary Education with Margaret Asquith; and

Attended a meeting of the Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education

Councillor Cyndi Hughes
Chair of Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee