



meeting COUNTY COUNCIL

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REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES

Partners in excellence 2006

Nottinghamshire County Council had two projects shortlisted for the 2006 Partners in Excellence awards; Create2gether, an early years arts project, and 'Come and Count with us!' a counting and story book about Traveller families. The authority was amongst 48 finalists, from an overall total of over 300 applicants, and representatives, (including the mum of one of the Traveller families involved in the book), attended the awards ceremony in London at the beginning of December, where Cherie Booth made the presentations.

Create2gether, which was in the *Supporting Children's Learning* category, is a project that links visual artists with practitioners, children and families in childcare settings, for up to a full term. It was devised and facilitated by officers from the Early Years and Childcare team and the Arts Education Service, and the first 19 projects, which ran from late 2005 to Easter 2006, were funded from the General Sure Start grant.

Participants are encouraged to emphasise the process and the experience of their project rather than the end products. This message was reinforced by the provision of digital cameras which enabled participants, including the children, to document their projects and create their own visual records. Evaluations from the projects demonstrate the wide ranging benefits of early creative experience. As one practitioner commented 'the children learnt new words and ways of describing experiences, processes, thoughts and feelings, they are communicating with the staff more and are keen to initiate activities themselves'.

Resources from the project are now available for use by development teams and settings to support and stimulate planning and staff development, and planning for a further 15 projects is currently underway.

'Come and Count with us!' which was in the *Inclusion and Engagement* category, is a trailer shaped, touchy feely book illustrated with photographs of Traveller children in their home. Five Traveller children and their families were involved throughout the planning and production of the book which is illustrated with photographs of the children at home in their trailer, looking at colour and counting. The children invite us to count various everyday objects;

supporting early learning whilst introducing and celebrating Traveller culture in the wider community.

The book is a real source of pride for all the families involved. A mother of three of the children featured in the book said "It has been a wonderful experience for the children and us as parents to do the book. Our families are really excited about the book because it shows our way of life and it will be good for all children to understand about how we live".

The Traveller Education Service and Early Years and Childcare Services work in partnership to meet the needs of pre-school Traveller children and families.

'Star for a Night' fundraising event

Young people from across Nottinghamshire showed their support for Children in Need on Friday, 17 November at the Circle Arts Centre in Worksop. A number of young people aged between 12 and 20 performed a variety of acts including street dance, rapping, skateboarding/blading, poetry and Brazilian dancing. The event was organised by the Bassetlaw District Youth Work Team with support from the County Youth Arts Team. It was also supported by local businesses, who donated raffle prizes and refreshments. The occasion was a huge success, with approximately £1,300 being raised.

Xmas factor 2006 (Teenage Pregnancy Partnership)

The 'Xmas Factor 2006' Grand Final took place on 5 December in the Assembly Room at County Hall. The event was compered by Youth MP James Falconbridge and the finalists were presented with a CD of their professionally recorded songs by Hollyoaks star, Sarah Jayne Dunn. The overall winner, Madeleine Leather, aged 14, from Southwell wowed the judges with her fantastic performance of 'Show Me', written to the tune of well-known festive song 'Frosty the Snowman'. The song's lyrics follow the themes of young people delaying sex until they are sure they are ready and finding other ways to show they care without having sex. The competition involved young people from schools and youth centres from all over the County and the standards set were extremely high.

You can listen to 'Show Me' and the two runners-up entries by visiting www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/youthzone. This site also gives young people information and advice about relationships and sexual health.

Building schools for the future

The DfES announced on 18 December that Nottinghamshire would enter the programme as a wave 6 authority. We had indicated that we wished to enter the programme in wave 5 (autumn 2007) but like many authorities we have been given a start date that is only six months later.

We are waiting for feedback from the DfES about our 'Readiness to Deliver' submission and will address any issues raised by them.

The DfES have also indicated that there is considerable fluidity between the timing of waves 5 and 6 and so we could enter the programme near to the

time we originally intended. Work on the programme will therefore continue as planned with a Project Board hopefully being in place by Easter 2007.

Government Green Paper 'Care Matters': Transforming the lives of children and young people in care

Background

This Green Paper was presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills in October 2006. It builds on the good work already happening in many Local Authorities including Nottinghamshire, and it puts forward proposals to ensure that every child in care receives the help and support they need to reach their potential. In recent years there has been some improvement in outcomes for children in care, but there remains a significant and widening gap between children in care and all children. The Green Paper aims to address these inequalities and sets out a radical package of proposals for change which need absolute commitment from central and local government if they are to succeed.

The Green Paper is wide ranging and the proposals focus on seven key themes as follows:

- Intervening earlier and more effectively with children on the edge of care and their families
- Strengthening the role of the corporate parent
- Improving the quality and stability of placements
- Ensuring a first class education
- Improving life outside of school
- Easing the transition into adult life
- Making the system work – robust accountability

Elected Members have a key role to play in improving the lives of children in care in Nottinghamshire. As their corporate parent Elected Members can positively impact on the outcomes for these children and young people and ensure that our ambitions for them are no less than those we have for our own children.

How does Nottinghamshire measure up to the challenges in the Green Paper?

Nottinghamshire Children and Young Peoples Services have many of the building blocks in place as highlighted in the Green Paper including:

- An interagency Corporate Parenting Steering Group
- A well established recruitment programme for foster carers who receive regular training
- A Placements Officer who has oversight of placement capacity and quality
- A 'Virtual Head Teacher' who has responsibility for championing the education of each individual child and young person in our care.
- Training Officers, seconded from Connexions, working directly with care leavers.

- Dedicated Education Welfare Officers and a rapid response team of teachers and tutors.
- Dedicated Education Psychology service to ensure that a child with complex needs gets the required support.
- Dedicated Youth Service support and a Participation Post
- A dedicated Child and Adolescent Mental health worker.

Overall the proposals within this Green Paper are viewed positively and would build on our existing good practice. The benefits of other aspects are less obvious and some are open to challenge. The Nottinghamshire response to the consultation will be submitted by 30 January 2007 and will reflect a wide range of views.

Learner achievements in the Nottinghamshire Learning Centre

Pupils in the Nottinghamshire Learning Centre (NLC) achieved record numbers of accredited exam results in 2006 at 16 years of age. 16 young people achieved passes in at least one subject at GCSE. 5 achieved 4-5 GCSEs. 1 achieved A* in English. 14 achieved results in English and 11 in Maths. Results reflect the general level of attainment of learners who are in out of school provision, which is usually below national expectancy. However, some learners achieved in the range of A* - C in one or more subjects, which reflects individual strengths. For many young people, completing course requirements, sitting the exams and obtaining a result is a significant achievement and represents substantial progress. Many had not previously been expected to achieve at these levels.

Key Stage 3 SATs results showed that whilst many of the young people attained below national expectancy, they had in fact progressed from the previous Key Stage 2 SATs scores in accordance with expectations. This means that, although behind their peers in mainstream schools, they have maintained progress and in many cases improved whilst on roll with the NLC.

Nottinghamshire Learning Centre Adventurous Activities

In September the NLC and the Youth Service formed a partnership to provide adventure based learning for children and young people on the roll of the NLC. This has brought youth work staff, based at the Mill Adventure Centre in Sutton-in-Ashfield, together with staff from the NLC to plan and provide a range of adventure based learning. This is a good example of colleagues within the new children and young people's services coming together to improve the range and quality of opportunities available for vulnerable children and young people in Nottinghamshire. The development of shared working practices and skills is leading to more flexible and responsive provision, and a better understanding of the wider needs of children and young people.

During 2007 the NLC and the Youth Service have plans for further partnership working, including the development of community based projects to help young people make a positive contribution to their local communities.

Work with DfES priority schools

The DfES has a key target to reduce absence from school. During the last 15 months the DfES has worked closely with local authorities (LAs) to make

develop an appropriate strategy, part of which is to name individual schools that have high levels of absence. The DfES expectation is that LAs will work more closely with these schools and this work is monitored by the Assistant Regional Attendance Advisor (ARRA).

We currently have 16 identified priority schools in Nottinghamshire. We co-ordinate our support for these schools through a Senior Education Welfare Officer (Manager). Action plans are agreed with the schools to address both strategy issues and support at individual pupil level. Support is offered through several different agencies including the Education Welfare Service (EWS), Behaviour and Attendance Consultants, Connexions and the Police. The EWS has also established a focus group, consisting of three Education Welfare Officers. The purpose of this group is to help the priority schools with their attendance strategy. This is done through a thorough audit with the schools attendance leader and the group subsequently introduces relevant initiatives to the school.

The EWS organised attendance seminars for both primary and secondary schools during the autumn term 2006. These raised the profile of attendance for all schools but also offered additional support from three schools at each event, sharing best practice. In both the primary and secondary sectors new schemes are running where schools can visit each other to discuss practice. In the secondary sector, priority schools are particularly invited to participate in this scheme.

In January 2007 there will be a further seminar for Attendance Leaders in the priority schools. Speakers include the DfES, ARRA and Anthony May, Service Director for Inclusion and Engagement.

National truancy sweeps

The Education Welfare Service has participated in the autumn term national truancy sweeps organised by the DfES. These sweeps are an integral part of the Education Welfare Service's annual programme of action to combat non-attendance at school. During 13 November 2006 and 1 December 2006 Education Welfare Officers joined police liaison officers for twelve sweeps across the county. Eighty four pupils were stopped in this period. Nearly half of those stopped had no valid reason for not being in school. Most of these were secondary school pupils, 50% of whom were returned to school.

The Education Welfare Service and schools work in partnership with Connexions, the Youth Offending Service, the Youth Service, Police and other agencies to offer support to encourage regular school attendance for young people. The important message given to parents, children and young people is that missing out on education will have an impact on their life chances and future. There could also be concerns about their safety and involvement in crime or anti-social behaviour. 'Every day at school counts.'

Safeguarding children

During 2006 some significant progress has been made in the way in which we support our schools in helping to safeguard children and young people. In September, following an unsuccessful attempt earlier in the year, an Assistant Safeguarding Children Officer was appointed. This post holder now works to support the Principal Education Welfare Officer in the development and

delivery of training to school staff and in providing advice and guidance to schools about safeguarding children. A training programme has been running throughout the year to school staff (teaching and non-teaching), to school governors and to staff in support services. A total of 89 events have been delivered, with a total of 2,103 staff and governors having been trained.

The local authority is required to monitor the compliance of schools and governing bodies with the child protection elements of the safeguarding children agenda. This is carried out through a tick box questionnaire during the autumn term each year to each governing body. The local authority is then required to follow up with governing bodies where all requirements are not yet being met.

Future of the Student Finance Service

Colleagues may remember that in my report to the County Council on 7 September 2006 I explained that the government had decided to transfer responsibility for administering the student finance service from local authorities to the Student Loans Company, currently based in Glasgow. Local authorities at present have responsibility for assessing students' eligibility for financial assistance towards the cost of courses of higher education but it is the government's intention to transfer that function to the Student Loans Company (SLC) on a staged basis, starting with new students seeking admission to higher education in the 2009/10 academic year. By the 2011/12 academic year it is intended that all cases will be dealt by the SLC.

In early December, we received a discussion document from the DfES seeking our comments on how the residual information, advice and guidance function for students seeking entry to higher education might best be delivered when the student finance service is centralised. There is a belated recognition by the DfES that some kind of locally accessible face-to-face service may still be required for some students and their families. Currently, in Nottinghamshire, we receive nearly 2,000 personal visits per annum to our student finance service at County Hall. Our staff also visit secondary schools and colleges of further education to give talks to students considering their higher education options. Currently 84% of the 44 secondary schools in the county with sixth form provision avail themselves of this service and so it seems to us that the government may well have underestimated the scale of this particular issue.

There was a short deadline for the response to the DfES discussion document and a copy of our response, sent on 20 December 2006, is **attached**.

COUNCILLOR JOYCE BOSNJAK

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services

M19C1709

INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE UNDER A TRANSFORMED STUDENT FINANCE SERVICE**NOTTINGHAMSHIRE LOCAL AUTHORITY'S RESPONSE TO THE DfES DISCUSSION PAPER*****The overall vision and high level requirements for information, advice and guidance in the new national student finance service.***

1. We are only able to comment on this in the context of our experience in relation to the existing system for applying for student finance. Any new arrangements for IAG – which from the discussion paper appear to place a heavy emphasis on telephone and web-based services – will only be successful in our view if the existing student finance forms and procedures are considerably simplified as set out in paragraph 20 of the discussion paper.
2. In Nottinghamshire we offer a counter service as part of our student finance service. Despite the service's location in the southern part of a comparatively geographically large county, we receive up to 2,000 personal visitors per annum. Even if half of these visitors were repeat callers, it still represents a significant proportion (c 9%) of our total clientele of 11,500 new or returning students.
3. A high proportion of our current visitors bring in application forms and other documentation (e.g. passports etc) rather than trust to the vagaries of the postal system. These customers prefer to make personal visits with their student finance details and a customer focussed service should recognise their needs.
4. We recognise that a majority of IAG services can be provided over the telephone from anywhere in the country (in an average year in Nottinghamshire there are almost 29,000 student finance related telephone calls to the local authority). The key consideration is that students are able to readily access skilled and knowledgeable staff who understand the student finance regulations and procedures and who can deal consistently, accurately and quickly with requests for information and advice in a customer friendly way.
5. The IAG vision should also, however, recognise that some students will always need or want a face-to-face service – even if the current procedures are simplified. Not all students or their parents have ready access to computers. Additionally, some queries specifically benefit from a face-to-face approach.
6. The IAG vision should in our view be flexible enough to embrace this difference in customer need. It should be customer-driven and should be responsive to customer needs and perceptions, not designed around organisational expectations or needs.

The local promotional work which would best increase prospective students' and sponsors' understanding of the support available to them.

7. Nottinghamshire's student finance service has over the years established excellent relationships with schools in the area, in terms of promoting the support available to prospective students and their sponsors. All schools in the county are offered an individual visit from an officer to brief students and their parents. On average, 84% of the 44 secondary schools in the county with sixth forms avail themselves of this service each year, with over 2,000 students and parents attending the briefings.
8. We feel it is important that this successful promotional work is not lost in the proposed new arrangements. Schools are not well placed or generally willing to fulfil this role. We did trial an alternative approach with schools some years ago when heads of sixth forms were trained to cascade the information to their students – this was not generally successful, with the majority of schools preferring the information to be provided direct by skilled and experienced student finance service staff.
9. We believe therefore that the current promotional work involving visits to school sixth forms should be retained, along with a service for individual students to raise specific queries related to their individual circumstances.
10. It would be helpful, however, for any new IAG arrangements to have a particular focus to provide better promotional work for the benefit of mature students who do not attend schools. Take-up of our promotional service by colleges of further education in our area has not been as good as schools and so we would welcome any attempts which are made to reach this group of customers. A locally available IAG service would be of particular help in these circumstances, supported perhaps by a promotional campaign through locally accessible media, retail outlets etc.

The groups of customers (students and sponsors) who we feel are most likely to need local face-to-face IAG.

11. In our experience, prospective students with relatively complex domestic circumstances (including those with dependants) are the most likely to need face-to-face assistance. This is usually where circumstances are such that an assessment is relatively complicated and can best be clarified by face-to-face discussion. At certain times of the year we can have as many as 20 such students visiting us each week.
12. We have c. 530 students in Nottinghamshire (c. 4.6% of our student clientele) who receive the Disabled Student Allowance. Many of these students require individual, personalised advice and guidance but most queries are dealt with by telephone, albeit by staff with specialist knowledge in this area.

Which bodies could have a role to play in delivering IAG on student finance?

13. As explained in paragraph 6 of our response, we do not believe that schools have the time or expertise to offer information, advice and guidance on student finance issues. We would not favour schools being asked to undertake this additional task which, it seems to us, runs contrary to the government's long stated intention to reduce and minimise the bureaucratic burden on schools.
14. A locally available, accessible and knowledgeable IAG service is essential in our view. Connexions, as currently constituted, would be well placed to deliver that service. However, the future delivery of such services will depend on the way that IAG services are commissioned by local authorities in 2008 when the responsibility for such provision transfers to them. Connexions have the infrastructure in Nottinghamshire to deliver such a service but currently do not have the expertise in student finance. There would, therefore, be a significant training need to develop staff with sufficient knowledge in this area in whatever IAG and targeted youth support arrangements are developed in each local authority area from 2008. We would see the specification for IAG services as being a particularly important vehicle for commissioning such arrangements for the area.
15. The continued availability of funding for the development of new IAG arrangements to replace the current student finance service will be of critical importance and it would be helpful if the DfES could clarify the funding position in that respect at the earliest opportunity.

How local IAG services could best be organised and made accountable to deliver a consistently high level of service.

16. Nottinghamshire local authority currently achieves the range of DfES set performance indicator targets for its student finance service. Additionally, we have a number of customer service standards (e.g. telephony response times etc.) to which our student finance service, like all Nottinghamshire County Council services, are expected to work. We would expect any IAG provider to be required to meet appropriate targets and standards too. It would be helpful to have a nationally recommended set of targets and quality standards that could be reflected in the specifications local authorities will need to develop when commissioning IAG services from 2008 onwards. Accountability could be through the contract management arrangements between the local authority and the IAG provider in each area.