



Norfolk County Council @ your service

Dear Colleagues

On February 1st I will take up my new post of Director of Children's Services. I am looking forward to the role and the opportunities that an integrated service offers to help improve outcomes for children and young people in Norfolk.

Sadly, I won't be in work to actually take up the job for a few more weeks yet because I am recovering from an emergency operation that became necessary over the Christmas holiday. Nevertheless I wanted to take this opportunity to write to you to share my thoughts about the role and my approach to it, and emphasise my recognition of the value and importance of schools as essential partners in this crucial improvement agenda. I thought you would also like to know of the arrangements that are in place to ensure that we maintain services and progress during my temporary absence.

Schools and Children's Services

Firstly, the central focus of my role, the new integrated service and the whole Every Norfolk Child Matters project, is to ensure that by working together more effectively, we enable every child and young person in Norfolk to reach their full potential in all aspects of their life. For this to happen, we must improve the way in which we help and support all children to benefit from the learning opportunities that are available. We must ensure that specific needs and vulnerabilities are recognised and appropriate support given at the right time to enable every child to achieve their full potential. I know that these objectives will resonate directly with you, and across schools, teaching and support staff and across other, currently separate services and professions.

It is essential that Schools be at the heart of the new service and the wider improvement programme because this is where children and young people spend significant and regular time between the ages of 4 and 16+. In their own right, schools represent over 450 "children's services" and 80% of the county's total relevant funding and staffing resources for the education of our children and young people sit directly with schools.

So I am looking forward to working closely with you in a spirit of shared purpose to wards a common aim of securing a brighter future for all of Norfolk's children and young people.

I recognise that there is a great deal of work to do over the coming months if, together, we are to agree how best to achieve our Norfolk vision and what this might mean for schools. When the new service was approved, its aims were agreed as ensuring better and more joined up support for children, young people and their families, which are available locally wherever possible, and

which support and enhance the work of schools. Achieving these will require us to build on collaborative arrangements between schools and many other agencies that are already in place in many parts of our county, and on the good practice that has developed over the years locally.

I know that we won't be able to move successfully to more local planning and delivery of services unless schools are actively involved in the planning process. I am firmly committed to working with others through sound collaborative arrangements and where schools are concerned, I hope that you will see the forthcoming consultation on Area SEN partnerships, and current proposals for collaborative development of 14-19 opportunities as examples of the approach we want to take, and that I intend to build upon.</p>

Some timescales

In his letter to you last November, Bryan Slater explained that we would use the months between February and April to talk with staff, schools and other stakeholders to help develop proposals for the longer term structure and organisation of the Children's Services department.

In May we propose to consult on proposals for the new service with a view to implementing the new structure with effect from 1 September. Headteacher meetings scheduled for the summer term will help me consult with you as part of that process.

Hopefully, the work that is planned will mean that by the end of the summer we will have a better understanding of how together we are going to achieve better outcomes for all children and be in a good position to engage in more detailed and practical discussions during the autumn.

Before Easter, I will also discuss with the relevant headteacher, staff and governor organisations about how best to ensure that everybody can have a proper input into the planning and thinking.

While I am away

In my absence over the next few weeks, I am pleased to tell you that Tim Byles, the Chief Executive will lead the Children's Services Management team as well as continuing to chair the Every Child Matters Project Board and Advisory Group. Tim taking this personal lead demonstrates the priority that the County Council places on maintaining its progress towards a fully integrated department and making the new service a success.

The Children's Service management team comprises Fred Corbett, Sue Rossiter and Mike Shenstone from Education, Geoff Gildersleeve from Social Services and Frances Kemp who manages the wider Every Child Matters Project and programme.

In addition, I expect that by, or very soon after 1 February, the team will be strengthened still further by the addition of two new members - an interim Head of Resources and an interim Assistant Director with responsibility for Vulnerable Children. We are currently recruiting to these posts and the appointment process is well in hand.

I am confident that this is a very strong team that will ensure a secure and high level of continuity between the many good things already in place and the exciting journey we are now embarking upon.

In relation to schools and education-related matters, please do use Sue, Fred or Mike as your first point of contact for any urgent issues in the coming weeks, which you might have wanted to raise directly with me.

And finally...

I want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to Bryan Slater, the outgoing Director of Education. Bryan has worked tirelessly and effectively with schools and the education service to raise standards of achievement in the county and ensure that all schools are good schools. He has also made a major contribution to increasing the collaboration and partnership between individual schools and between schools and the department. At all times he has put children first. I know you will join with me to wish him well in his secondment to the DfES and in his future career.

I would like to extend my best wishes to you and your school for 2005; I hope you have a very enjoyable and successful year.

I am looking forward to a speedy return to work and meeting up with you directly in the near future.

Lisa Christensen
Director of Social Services