

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

16 May 2007

STATEMENT OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES PORTFOLIO HOLDER (Early Years education and all school related education issues and advisory services)

COUNTY COUNCILLOR JOHN WATSON OBE

Exclusions in North Yorkshire

When compared to national figures, North Yorkshire's exclusion rates are low. Our schools recognise that permanent exclusions will usually be the final step in a process dealing with disciplinary offences following a wide range of other strategies. Fixed period exclusions are, however, more generally used in response to serious breaches of a schools' behaviour policy for the shortest time necessary.

The Children and Young People's Service has developed many strategies to reduce exclusions. These include learning/teaching strategies, training, data sharing, target setting, flexible approaches towards curriculum and additional support for specific vulnerable groups. Where a school's exclusion rate is high, specific focussed challenge and support is offered. Significantly joint/collaborative working of schools has encouraged a reduction in school exclusions.

Overall, permanent exclusions (secondary, primary and special) remain low.

Fixed term exclusions have plateaued after significant increase over previous years.

The developing strategies in light of collaborative working and enhanced initiatives should further support to de-escalate the overall situation.

Confederation and Federation

New guidance on Confederation and Federation of Schools is about to be launched by the Authority after half-term. We are seeking to promote this even more than in the past because it is a way of preserving education in our communities. Schools are very dependent on having a good quality headteacher to lead and manage the school. However, it is becoming more difficult to recruit headteachers both nationally and locally. This position is going to worsen in the short term future. Nationally, half the headteachers are over 50.

In North Yorkshire it is three out of five. Confederation or Federation allows for shared headship between a number of schools and is one way of preserving the quality of education across a number of school sites.

The new guidance published sets out the steps involved in these new ways of working and encourages governing bodies to think about these issues in good time so when the headteacher of their school leaves, they are in the best position to consider this as an option to secure the education for children in their community.

Central Ryedale Sports Facility

Ryedale District Council wish to construct a Sports Centre on land at Malton School. The intention is, as with some existing Leisure Centres, in North Yorkshire, that it would be jointly used by the District Council and Malton School. The facility would also be available to other local schools and for wider use by the Children & Young People's Service.

Since Malton School does not have a Sports Hall the Authority affirmed, as long ago as 1999, that it is supportive in principle to the project and is prepared to contribute, in accordance with its agreed policy, the appropriate share of running costs and to provide the land for the project. In recent years District Councils have received considerable assistance from Lottery Grants to fund the capital costs of sports facilities but these are no longer available. Consequently the anticipated capital cost of £3M represents a considerable burden for the District Council.

Consequently the District Council approached the County Council seeking additional support. Given that capital and revenue resources are both fully committed it is not possible for the County Council to make any additional contribution. However we did agree to explore with District Council Offices, in more detail, the revenue cost sharing arrangements – these are linked to the respective levels of use between the two authorities. This included seeking to maximise the availability for the facility both for all local schools and for aspects of the service including, for example, the Youth Service. It was also agreed that we would explore whether any additional sources of funding could be identified.

The District Council have endorsed proceeding with the project but on the basis that further investigations are required particularly in relation to the revenue cost implications.

ICT Services in Schools

Following concerns raised at the last County Council meeting a report was presented to the Executive, at its meeting on 1st May. The report outlined the progress which had been made in resolving breakdowns in ICT connectivity for schools. These breakdowns had arisen in the period immediately after the introduction of a new Internet Service Provider in January 2007. In advance of the change schools were informed, in a number of different ways, of the change and the possibility of temporary breakdowns in service. They were also informed of the potential benefits when the new service was fully operational.

This has been a complex technical change because of the need to merge a number of different systems. The frustrations caused to schools are very much regretted.

I have received regular reports from the Schools' ICT Service who, together with Corporate ICT Services and the two main contractors (Bull, who provide the ISP Service and MLL who provide the connections between schools), have worked to resolve both problems which have impacted on the overall school network and individual local issues. The next challenge is to regain the full confidence of all schools. This will be achieved by both the development of the new facilities which are now available and a minimum number of disruptions in service.

Increase in sophistication of schools' ICT provision, especially the development of home and remote working for teachers and pupils adds to the challenges regarding security and the protection of pupils and other users from inappropriate material. Consequently the development of relevant filtering, virus control and security arrangements is an increasingly important feature of the support the Authority gives to schools for the operation of their ICT arrangements. There are similar issues for the County Council as a whole and a detailed report on these issues has recently been submitted to the Audit Committee.

Finally the Communications and the Transport & Telecommunications Overview & Scrutiny Committees are to consider all these issues at a joint meeting in June.

County Councillor John Watson OBE
Executive Member for Education

8 May 2007