

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

21 May 2008

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

COUNTY COUNCILLOR JOHN WATSON OBE

Schools Capital Programme

The process for setting the 2008/11 capital programme is now drawing to a close. The Executive received a report on 27 March on the overall position which is that although the Council had received £60 million for the three years the demands on this were very significant. £12 million is earmarked for the Primary Capital Strategy. A further £22.5 million is required to implement the first stages of the Review of SEN and Behaviour provision in mainstream schools, to provide a Pupil Referral Unit in Selby and a new BESD school. There are also significant demands for health and safety expenditure including a large bill for gas ventilation in school kitchens.

The Executive were sympathetic to the pressures on the programme and indicated that possible additional funding might be available from Corporate resources to support the programme. On 6 May the Executive received a report and allocated a further £6 million (£2 million in 2009/10, £4 million in 2010/11). This means that considerably more necessary improvement work to schools can be carried out.

The Executive will consider the full programme on 27 May. The report will be issued about the time of the County Council meeting and it will contain good news for many schools across the county.

Low Bentham CP School

Statutory notices have been published for the closure of Low Bentham Community Primary School from the end of this summer term. Pupil numbers have fallen to nine and were expected to fall further to six pupils by September. In January this year the governing body asked the County Council to consider closure of the school because they were concerned about the future educational provision for the pupils. The final decision will be made by Executive on 24 June 2008.

In January 2006 the Executive approved the publication of proposals to amalgamate Low Bentham Community Primary School with High Bentham Community Primary School and to build a new school on a new site. These proposals were approved by the School Organisation Committee in March 2007 subject to the acquisition of a site. Considerable effort has been made to find a site. Two local landowners have refused to sell and the search continues. Despite the possible closure of Low Bentham at the end of this term, the site search will continue to build a new school for the Benthams as the condition of the building at High Bentham still gives cause for concern.

School Admissions

There have been changes in admission arrangements this year as a result of the new Code of Practice and Members will have seen that there has been some coverage in the national press about the effects, particularly in the London area. There has been some impact in North Yorkshire and the indications are that the number of first preferences satisfied will go down this year. We are also experiencing a trend for the number of admissions appeals to rise from an average of 450 in the years up to 2005 to 573 in 2006 and 918 in 2007. It is expected that there may be 1000-1100 appeals this year.

Members will be interested in learning more about the changes and so Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be considering admissions on 20 June and Members are welcome to attend the meeting.

Primary Capital Strategy

The consultation period on Primary Capital Strategy draws to an end on 16 May. The strategy is complex but has been well received by schools, Area Committees, Diocesan Authorities and other consultees. The final submission will be considered by the Executive on 17 June. We will hear from the Department for Children, Schools and Families in early autumn about whether the strategy has been approved and the money released.

CYPS ICT Strategy

The Executive have recently approved a new ICT Strategy for the Service covering the period to 2010/11. This includes the aim of a single computer record for every child which is readily available to those who need it through high quality connectivity to and from schools and partners. The vision clearly needs to support and facilitate integrated locality based working including collaboration with partners such as the Health Service. It also gives priority to measures to improve efficiency by using technology to support business improvement and taking maximum advantage of the corporate and ICT national products available to support these developments. Finally the approach aims to foster and promote e-Learning but ensure that all the data and information has the appropriate security arrangements and is only available to those who need it.

Given the rate of change, rapidly rising expectations and the particular demands created by the demography of North Yorkshire, these objectives are very challenging. However many of the "foundations" on which the strategy will be implemented are already known. This includes taking advantage of the connectivity available through the new NYNET infrastructure and the purchase of a major computer system, IMPULSE, which is the single package to provide a record in one place of all issues regarding an individual child. This will be integrated with a similar system in Children's Social Care – Protocol. (It is a Government requirement to have a separate system for Children's Social Care.) There are also major developments arising from the provision nationally (for local implementation) of ContactPoint (a database of basic information for each child/young person) and the electronic Common Assessment Framework (e-CAF). There are existing contracts with the private sector to provide e-mail and ISP services to schools and we have recently negotiated a framework contract to provide all schools with a facility which will bring together their curriculum learning requirements – Learning Platforms.

The challenge in implementing the strategy is to ensure that all the separate systems have appropriate links and complement existing and future corporate products, protocols and practices.

Finally given the rate of change in both Children & Young People's Service and technology the strategy needs to be sufficiently flexible to respond to these changes.

NUT Industrial Action

The NUT called National Strike action for 24th April 2008 as a response to the pay award on offer to teachers. It appears that action in North Yorkshire was less well supported than in other Local Authorities with 16 schools fully closed and 13 part closed. Staff who were not on strike attended schools as normal and deductions from salary will be made for those who took action. Information was provided to Headteachers on the action they needed to take and information was also provided on the North Yorkshire website of schools who had notified us of their intentions.

County Councillor John Watson OBE
Executive Member for Education