

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

23 July 2008

STATEMENT OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES PORTFOLIO HOLDER (Children's Services Issues, SEN, Special Schools, Youth Service and Youth Offending Team)

COUNTY COUNCILLOR CAROLINE PATMORE

“Stay Put” Pilot (allowing young people to remain in foster care beyond 18)

North Yorkshire has been awarded pilot status by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to enable young people who have been fostered to remain beyond 18 and until 21 years of age. 'Stay Put' is part of the Care Matters agenda.

We are one of 10 local authorities chosen to pilot 'Stay Put' and will receive an annual grant of £100 K for the next 3 years. This will allow us to further develop our existing arrangements for young people to remain beyond 18 years of age with their foster carers. We will explore extending our post 18 arrangements to include care leavers attending University and those serving in the Armed Services.

The DCSF were particularly impressed with the fact that our existing post 18 arrangements received funding from Supporting People and considered it as indicative of integrated commissioning within North Yorkshire. The £100K grant may be used to assist the Council in its recruitment, retention and support of foster carers and to offset some of the costs incurred in paying foster carers an allowance for the young people who remain with them after reaching adulthood. This service will provide continuity and stability to young people engaged in education, training or employment and will help vulnerable young people achieve economic well-being.

Culture Shock Festival

The Youth Arts Festival has been run by the Youth Service and the Connecting Youth Culture Team for 7 years, growing from a 1 day event with 15 workshops and 2 performance spaces to a unique 3 day event with over 25 innovative arts workshops on offer and 6 performance spaces. For 2008 the Festival was re-badged (after consultation with a group of young people) as CultureShock, and continued the development with an opening carnival and procession down Northallerton High Street on Saturday 28 June.

The Secondary Schools' Day on Thursday 3 July was attended by nearly 500 youngsters and was followed by the first CultureShock Proms in the Park - a collaboration with Whitby Music Centre and the Northern Chamber Orchestra. The Primary Schools' Day on Friday 4 July was attended by nearly 1000 youngsters and was followed by a concert by Ro:toro - a three person ensemble playing traditional Estonian music. The Festival ended with the Youth Arts Day on Saturday 5 July which was attended by nearly 2000 young people from all across the county and offered top class bands, a skatepark, dance, graffiti art, rap, street performers, films, environmental art and animation. It was only the weather that was occasionally disappointing!

After two highly successful years in Northallerton, next year the Festival will be held in Pickering.

Children's Centres

We are in Phase 3 of the development programme for Children's Centres, which are now seen as a new, universal service. This means we must achieve countywide coverage. We currently have 29 centres operating. By the end of Phase 3 we will have 40 centres and hubs. The 11 newly determined locations have been shared across all parts of the County.

The capital allocation for the additional centres is £4.6M over three years. At current prices, the approximate revenue costs of the full 40 centres will be £5.5M. Financial provision is made via General Sure Start Grant. The programme has always been a challenge in a rural county, but our progress remains good.

Adoption Inspection

North Yorkshire County Council Adoption Service was inspected earlier this month. Inspectors conducted an extensive assessment which included file audits, policy analysis, observation of Adoption panels and interviews with key operational staff members, adoptive families, managers and elected members.

The assessment concluded that our practice promotes safe and secure futures for vulnerable children, supports families well before and after adoption and involves birth families in planning effectively. Management and leadership were rated as good. Inspectors advised that OFSTED had 'raised the bar' over the past year which means that a rating of 'good' this year, would have attracted an 'outstanding' rating last year. Our adoption service was rated as 'good' in each category and therefore received an overall rating of 'good'.

Adoption Conference: post Adoption services

A conference on improving post adoption services and practice was held in June. The event was a multi agency conference and was attended by more than 150 participants from a wide range of agencies. It included over 40 adoptive parents and elected members. Speakers presented papers on research messages about what works in adoption, what are the support needs of adoptive families and issues around children's rights.

The conference was a success with excellent ratings and a set of clear plans as an outcome of the day. This will help us to further improve post adoption services in North Yorkshire.

Restorative Practice Conference

Restorative Practices are increasingly being used in Children's Social Care Residential settings to manage conflict. They help to tackle challenging behaviour and improve relationships in homes with good results. However, interest in this style of work is growing within other areas of service delivery such as schools, police work and the Youth Offending Team. A multi agency event has been held to explore the use of Restorative Practices in a multi agency context. Although still at a very early stage there is a lot of support for this work, and a multi agency group is examining how to extend its use.

Young People's Council

The Government's 'Care Matters' White Paper, places an expectation on all Local Authorities to set up a Children in Care Council' to make sure that every child gets a chance to have their say and put their experiences of the care system directly to those responsible for running it in their area'.

The Children's Rights Officer consulted with many looked after young people and care leavers to ascertain what form they wanted their council to take. The young people's ideas were endorsed and the first 'Young Person's Council' took place on the 28th June 08 and will be held every 3 months thereafter. The Council meeting was attended both by myself and the Director.

County Councillor Caroline Patmore
Executive Member for Children's Services