

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

18 February 2009

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

COUNTY COUNCILLOR CAROLINE PATMORE

Safeguarding

I wrote to Members in December to let you know about the actions being taken following national concern arising from the death of Baby P.

Safeguarding is a multi-agency responsibility which is co-ordinated by the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB). The LSCB has conducted an audit of arrangements for Safeguarding in North Yorkshire, as required by the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). The audit has checked for compliance with the statutory requirements introduced following the death of Victoria Climbié. These are known as the "Working Together" requirements specified in Section 11 of the Children Act 2004. Fourteen agencies have responded to the audit and the findings have largely confirmed the priorities for improvement or further development work which the LSCB has in its Business Plan and the Children and Young People's Plan.

The DCSF has also required that a check is carried out against the findings in the Joint Area Review (JAR) Inspection Report on Safeguarding in the Haringey Council area. This has also been carried out by the North Yorkshire LSCB. Again, initial responses have been received from 14 agencies and they have been considered in detail by the LSCB. Whilst some of the issues raised overlap with the Section 11 requirements, others explore communication, leadership, supervision, integration and record keeping across all agencies. The initial responses to the audit provide a helpful "snapshot", but the LSCB considers that more detailed follow up work will be needed to ensure that there are consistent standards across all agencies on some of the matters considered. The LSCB has a number of multi-agency working groups and a high level Executive to which these follow up areas of work will be assigned.

The LSCB has agreed its job description for an Independent Chair and recruitment will begin shortly. Costs can be met from existing LSCB resources in the first year, but the LSCB Executive has recognised that all partners are likely to need to increase financial contributions for this in future, particularly as competition for a limited pool of suitable people is likely to drive up costs.

The Haringey JAR raised questions relating to the role of elected Members as well as management issues. We are considering ways in which training for County Councillors might be refreshed, and the induction training to be provided for Members following the County Council elections later this year. The LSCB is also enquiring into training needs of members of other representative Boards (eg the Board of the Primary Care Trust, the Police Authority) to see if there is potential for some inter-agency training at this level, as there is for staff. Operationally, there is increased pressure in the Safeguarding system, and particularly increased pressure to place children under protection and to bring them into Local Authority care. Nationally, increases of 40%-60% are being reported, and in North Yorkshire the increase has been around 50% over the last few months. This is placing significant pressure on the staff, particularly as it is happening at the time when we are also implementing the Integrated Children's System. Naturally, this is the Directorate's highest priority and the whole Directorate is providing resource and management support.

North Yorkshire has been involved in three Serious Case Reviews during the last year. Two were led by other Safeguarding Boards (Hull and Camden) and one by North Yorkshire. All have been deemed Adequate by OfSTED and the Board is therefore able to get on with implementing recommendations. Very few Serious Case Reviews have received higher gradings nationally, and a significant number have been deemed Inadequate. The LSCB will be looking at best practice in order to ensure useful lessons of analysis and reporting are learned from elsewhere.

Integrated Children's System

The Integrated Children's System (ICS) is a DCSF requirement. It is a computerised system which aims to regulate and standardise Social Care processes and information. Its basic principles are sound because it requires assessments to have a thorough evidence base and front line workers to have appropriate supervision and support in the assessment process. It will also improve and standardise record keeping and should support case reviews and performance management.

Nationally, however, implementation has proved problematic, and we are experiencing significant problems with it in North Yorkshire. The original software provider selected by the Council from the DCSF shortlist failed to deliver a workable product. The replacement provider was already operating in a number of Authorities but has introduced a later version of their product in North Yorkshire which, despite assurances, has proved to be incompatible with the SWIFT system here. The software is taking much longer to master than anticipated and, at present, the system is unreliable for record or data retrieval. The current impact of implementation, therefore, has been to absorb significant additional time for front line workers and managers and to impair our record-keeping and performance management systems.

The Directorate has taken this extremely seriously. Resources have been prioritised to ensure all cases can be allocated. A recovery plan has been agreed which involves a simplified version of the software and the training mentoring team has been retained for a further year; this will enable us to recover frontline workers' time for frontline work. A data recovery programme is also underway.

This has been underpinned by resources allocated from in-year savings across the Directorate. Looking ahead, however, and drawing on national evidence from the Authorities which have been operating ICS the longest, there will be a need to increase frontline capacity to ensure that we can protect time for frontline work even when ICS is embedded.

Fostering Inspection

OfSTED inspects Fostering Services annually under the Care Standards Act 2000. Its framework for inspection, rightly, becomes more exacting each year. The outcome from our 2008 inspection was that we were deemed Satisfactory, though in the previous year we were Good. This reflects a change in the inspection framework, not a deterioration in our practice. The inspection confirmed the many strengths reported on in the previous year, especially the overall quality of care and the comparatively good outcomes which young people experience.

The report also identifies, however, that there is a considerable amount to do to strengthen regulation, monitoring, and support to the foster care network, and to update policies and procedures in line with a rapidly moving national framework. This reflects the fact that whilst we have done well in North Yorkshire to expand our frontline provision for fostering, we have not done sufficient to strengthen the infrastructure need to maintain that extended service. We have, therefore, allocated resources in the Medium Term Financial Strategy to strengthen service management for fostering, as well as for policy and safeguarding work.

Young People's Council:

The Young People's Council (for Looked After Children) was established in June 2008 and meets every three months. It has a membership of twelve looked after young people and Care Leavers from across the County and has an independent chair. Meetings are attended by myself, the Young People's Champion, the Director and the Assistant Director for Children's Social Care.

The young people have so far identified four key issues to be addressed. They would like to see better accommodation for care leavers, more training for foster carers, more support for Looked After Children, and clearer information about their financial entitlements in care and as care leavers.

Extended Funding for Early Education for 3 – 4 year olds

From September 2010, there will be an increase in the entitlement of three and four year olds to early education from the current 12 ½ hours per week (5 x 2 ½ hour sessions) to 15 hours per week.

As an interim measure this is to be made available to 25% of the most disadvantaged three and four year olds from September 2009. Revenue funding for this is being provided through the Standards Fund (£1,175,853 for 2009-10). There is also a limited amount of Capital Funding to assist with this.

We have already run pilot projects at Selby Community Primary School and Colburn Community Primary School and the feedback is that the extended hours have been welcomed by parents. Instead of 2 ½ hour sessions, the time has been extended to 3 hours.

Several options have been looked at for the new scheme, which will only operate for one year before the entitlement becomes universal. We have looked at targeting children but this could lead to stigmatising children. We have looked at targeting settings but this could lead to parents moving children to settings with funding in an area leading to other settings losing out as parents move their children to gain the extra free 2 ½ hours. In the end it was decided that the fairest system would be to fund all settings across particular areas.

The areas which will benefit are therefore Selby Town, Brotherton, Whitby, Scarborough, Filey, Colburn, Harrogate North and Skipton town. This will fund 31% of the settings in North Yorkshire. Next year all settings will come into this scheme.

Integrated Youth/Targeted Youth Support Update

NYCC successfully implemented Targeted Youth Support (TYS) within the timeframe set by Government (December 2008.) The referral process meets all the key deliverables and is currently being rolled out across the county. This process should enable young people who are in need of additional support to be identified early and receive targeted prevention work based on a common assessment.

The introduction of YYS has enabled a joint project with the police to be established which should result in a reduction in the numbers of first time entrants to the criminal justice system. The police will use alternative approaches to deal with young people including referral into YYS as opposed to issuing a disposal. This project is due to begin in Scarborough in February.

It was disappointing that Integrated Youth Service (IYS) failed to achieve its NEET (reducing numbers of young people not in education, employment or training) target this year. The target was 4.1% (based on the average for November, December and January) with the

predicted figure being 4.6%. This was due principally to there being a high number of vacancies during the summer and early autumn, which we have now addressed. As a reduction in NEET is identified as a LAA stretch target it is essential that these problems are addressed to ensure we meet the 2009/10 target of 3.6%. A shared action plan between IYS, igen (as the contracted information, advice and guidance providers in schools), and the Performance and Outcome team has been established. Employment opportunities will also be affected by the economic downturn which will impact further on the NEET figures.

County Councillor Caroline Patmore
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