

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

16 FEBRUARY 2011

STATEMENT OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND SCHOOLS PORTFOLIO HOLDER

COUNTY COUNCILLOR JOHN WATSON, OBE

Medium Term Financial Strategy

The statement to Council on 13 October 2010 set out the approach being taken under the Children and Young People's Service Savings and Transformation Strategy. Members will recall that it is committed to giving highest priority to frontline services, while acknowledging that the scale of savings needed means that they cannot be protected completely. In relation to progress on specific projects:

Project 4 - Youth Support Service

The final decisions from Project 4 (Integration of Youth and Youth Support Services) have been implemented with appointments made to all the senior manager posts within the Youth Support Service. The overall funding reduction of this project was around £1.3M (from a service budget of around £8M).

One of the key objectives of this project was to create a single Youth Support Service bringing together the work of the Youth Service and Integrated Youth Support. There were significant changes to the Connexions service which has resulted in a reconfiguration of the service including the launch of a remote guidance facility. There was also a reduction in staffing with the number of senior management posts reduced from eight to five alongside a significant reduction in the number of the existing NYCC-employed Connexions staff. IN reaching the reduction of 35 posts, regrettably 10 people were eventually made redundant.

Safeguarding children - performance

The provisional end of year data for children's social care shows that performance continues to improve. In 2010/11 the proportion of initial assessments completed in a timely manner was 68.8%, the best ever performance for North Yorkshire and a strong improvement from 55.1% last year. The proportion of core assessments completed in a timely manner was 74.3%, a steady improvement from 71.4% last year. Performance in other areas of child protection is generally good.

The number of looked after children appears to have stabilised following significant increases in recent years. During 2010/11 the number of looked after children peaked at more than 500, but the provisional figures indicate that this had reduced to 482 at the end of 2010/11. These figures remain higher than the previous average annual figures, which reflects the changed position nationally. There are rigorous arrangements for managing entry to the care system.

Academies

There are four Academies in North Yorkshire: Harrogate Grammar School, Skipton Girls Grammar, Norton College and South Craven College. Five other schools have either applied or are consulting with interested parties about conversion. These are Malton School, Ripon College, Harrogate High School, Rossett School (Harrogate) and Great Smeaton CP School. County Council officers are providing appropriate support to those schools changing status.

The majority of schools in North Yorkshire are not however voluntarily pursuing the option. The Directorate will ensure that schools which choose to continue to be maintained by the Local Authority will not be disadvantaged either in funding or other support services as a result of some schools becoming Academies.

In the last few weeks, the government has issued more up-to-date figures relating to the amount of money Academies will receive (in lieu of services) when compared with schools that do not convert (who will continue to receive the services from the County Council). The updated figures are significantly lower than those which were well-publicised last summer.

At the same time, the government has begun a consultation on the future funding of Academies, stating that the current system is unsustainable. The uncertainty about future funding levels is problematic for schools as they attempt to take well-informed decisions about possible conversion.

School Admissions 2011-12 academic year

There has been an increase in the number of first place allocations to both secondary and primary schools this year. In the case of secondary schools the increase was 2.6% to 95.2% and for primary 2.4% to 94.5%. Whilst not a universal improvement because of oversubscription in some particular areas of the county, this is an improvement when compared with figures for last year. The percentages are higher than for most other parts of the country.

The total number of children in North Yorkshire applying for school places was slightly lower at 6115 for primary schools and 6267 for secondary schools when places were initially allocated this year.

Reviews of School Provision

Following the determination of the North Craven Review by the Executive in late February, schools in the area are now working with the Authority to ensure a smooth transition to the new arrangements for a two tier, primary/secondary model from September 2012.

The review of primary schools in the Upper Wharfedale area concluded earlier this month with the uncontested closure of Arncliffe CE School, following the publication of statutory notices. Children from Arncliffe will be provided with places at Grassington CE School.

At the request of the two schools, the Authority has been carrying out consultations on the proposed amalgamation of Graham and Raincliffe schools in Scarborough. The two schools have been working closely through a federation and bringing them together into one school now seems the most appropriate way forward. The Executive are to take a decision on whether to publish statutory notices in June.

Adult Learning and Skills Service

The service was formally consulting with Skills for Life, Family Learning and other staff on proposals to ensure that the service is offering a cost effective delivery model that is accessible to learners across all areas of the county. This review has been brought to an end as feedback from colleagues and the views of senior management indicated that a full service review would be a more appropriate approach. The proposals for this full service review are currently being developed and the timescale for the implementation has been revised.

The service is continuing to improve the online enrolment facility as well as developing targeted marketing materials to attract priority groups into learning.

County Councillor John Watson, OBE
Executive Member for Schools