

North Yorkshire County Council

16 May 2012

Statement of Schools Portfolio Holder

County Councillor Arthur Barker

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 which 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 2011-12 the initial CYPS MTFS target as of £9.150m has been more than achieved. As reported to Executive in Q2 and Q3, acceleration of our MTFS by over £2.6m will give a cash benefit (although the overall four-year target does not change) and will begin to contribute to the One Council savings.

The Directorate is facing a number of cost pressures over the next few years, principally arising from external changes in policy and legislation (e.g. troubled families, costs of secure remand and the transfer of responsibilities from the Young People's Learning Agency) and is committed to meeting these pressures from within its own resources

A specific MTFS reserve for the Directorate has been set up to ensure that cash savings are achieved over the next four years. This is still the intention and these will be used in addition to the acceleration referred to above to ensure the maximum cash benefit for the Council.

This information appears in the Statements to Council for both Executive Members for the Children and Young People's Service as this reflects their joint responsibility for all the relevant resources.

Schools Capital Programme

The official opening of the £35m redevelopment of Richmond School will take place in June 2012 to tie in with the Olympic torch passing through North Yorkshire. The new accommodation is now fully in use.

The County Council has been undertaking a £5.5m adaptation of the former Royal Navy training base at Forest Moor, Darley near Harrogate to provide new accommodation for pupils with behavioural, educational and social needs. This is now complete and open to pupils. It replaces the provision previously provided at Baliol School which has now closed.

Work has started on the adaptation of a previous NHS clinic to provide a base for the Pupil Referral Service at Raincliffe Street in Selby. Work will be complete and the provision opened in Autumn 2012. Work will also start this summer on a replacement primary school for Bentham, additional teaching space at Settle Primary School and £2m of improvements to Settle College associated with the implementation of the North Craven Review in September 2012.

On 3 April the Executive approved a further £21.7m one year programme of improvements to schools and other children's services premises. Almost £5m will be spent providing extra school places to accommodate growing pupil numbers in a number of primary schools. £11m will be spent on improvements to the physical condition of buildings including replacing temporary buildings that are beyond their economic life. Just over £3m will be spent to bring specialist teaching accommodation in secondary schools up to modern standards including science labs, technology facilities and teaching space for drama, art and music. Also approved on 3 April was a £1.8m programme of improvements to Voluntary Aided schools agreed in conjunction with Dioceses. Full details of the allocations are available on the County Council website.

School Attendance

The county's school absence rates have fallen year on year with particular success in reducing the number of persistent absentees in both primary and secondary schools. Nationally persistent absenteeism has fallen to 3.9% from 4.4% in primary schools and from 9.2% to 8.4% in secondary. In North Yorkshire however, primary school persistent absenteeism has fallen to 2.9% and secondary persistent absenteeism to 7.7%, based on the government's new tougher criteria. Persistent absence thresholds have now changed following the Secretary of State's decision to lower the threshold at which a pupil is deemed to be a persistent absentee from 20% of possible sessions to 15% of possible sessions. This came into effect in September 2011.

The priorities for 2011/12 are for all schools to continue to bear down on high overall absence and, within this persistent absence. Within this broader drive to reduce school absence the Education Social Work Service are focusing increasingly on individual pupils with very high rates of absence (persistently absent pupils) who are at particular risk of achieving poor outcomes at school and beyond. Early intervention to prevent emerging patterns of absence, and making full use of the support available from the local authority and other agencies has helped to address problems that are beyond the capacity of the school to deal with unaided.

Safeguarding in Education and Exclusions

Annual monitoring reports have been presented setting out performance in relation to the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements for children and young people in education and early years settings (including arrangements to monitor and track children missing from education) and exclusions from schools for the academic year 2010/11. Both show strong and improving performance and copies of the reports are available from the Corporate Director – Children and Young People's Service if you would like further detail.

Consultation on Raising Participation Regulations

In December 2011, the government published its Raising Participation (RP) Strategy for 16-24 year olds, entitled 'Building Engagement, Building Futures'.

The report renewed the commitment to Raising the Participation Age, identified key strategic priorities and confirmed that Local Authorities were seen as being at the heart of the Raising Participation agenda. More recently, there has been a specific consultation on the Raising Participation Age Regulations - the consultation sought views on a range of technical issues around the reporting of 'participation' from 2014 onwards. The key headings were residency qualifications; definitions of full time education; ways of working and financial penalties for employers. The County Council produced a written response to this consultation which took account of a wide range of views from interested parties and was the result of discussions at the County Raising Participation Group and with Executive Members. The response made two strong points:

- That a single definition of 'participation' was not appropriate and there needed to be a lower threshold (re hours) for those involved in re-engagement activities.
- That there was little or no support for the proposed system of fines which was felt to be unworkable, costly for the LA to 'police' and very likely to be counterproductive in that it would result in fewer opportunities for young people.

County Councillor Arthur Barker
Executive Member for Schools