

North Yorkshire County Council**18 July 2012****Statement of Children's Services Portfolio Holder****County Councillor Tony Hall****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 the outturn report, 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 target for 2012-13 is £2.8m. This is from a 5-year total of £23.2m, of which over 80% was achieved in the first two years, 2010-12.

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 high cost placements for some teenagers, the transfer of responsibilities from the Young People's Learning Agency and Friends & Family Care) 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.

Looked After Children

At the close of 2011/12 the number of looked after children totalled 470. This number peaked at 499 during the final quarter of 2010/11. Since then there has been a downward trend followed by a slight increase with the current number standing at 465 children.

Children's Social Care Performance 2011/12

The outturn performance for 2011/12 was recently reported to Executive Members. The overall position is one of sustained improvement and good performance in most areas of the service. The recent transformation of the children's social care service is expected to consolidate and extend these improvements. In relation to Contact and Referral, the number of contacts received was broadly stable throughout the year whilst referrals fell by 10% compared to last year. The rate of repeat referrals has reduced and is now in line with comparators

Timeliness of initial and core assessments is a key priority for the directorate, the County Council, the Children's Trust, and the Safeguarding Children Board. Improvement in the timeliness of assessments has been a central focus of the directorate's post-inspection action planning and remains important to ongoing service planning and improvement work.

Of the 3212 initial assessments completed in 2011/12, 2692 (**83.8%**) were completed within seven working days. This represents further improvement from the 2010/11 outturn of 69.1%, and is very close to the targets for the year of 85%. The 2011/12 outturn for timeliness of initial

assessments was more than 28% points better than the outturn in 2008/09 (55.2%) and 2009/10 (55.1%). This is further evidence of strong and sustained improvement. North Yorkshire's performance is well ahead of the most recent performance data for statistical neighbours (69.1%) and England (64.3%).

Of the 1732 core assessments completed during 2011/12, 1558 (**90.0%**) were completed within 35 working days. This represents further improvement from the 2010/11 outturn of 74.3%, and exceeds the 2011/12 target of 85%. Timeliness of core assessments is now more than twenty percentage points better than the annual outturn achieved in 2008/09 (69.7%) and 2009/10 (69.9%). North Yorkshire's performance is well ahead of the most recent performance data for statistical neighbours (74.2%) and England (75.1%).

- **Child Protection**

At the close of 2011/12 there were 438 children and young people subject to a child protection plan. This is an increase of 68 (18.4%) from the 370 child protection plans in place at the close of 2010/11. The number of child protection plans has doubled from 218 in early 2009/10. The service is investigating the reasons behind this. Note, however, that after a period of consecutive quarterly rises spanning more than two years, the number of child protection plans stabilised during the later months of 2011/12 and even fell slightly. It is too early to say whether this heralds a period of greater stability, or even the start of a downward trend, in the number of child protection plans.

North Yorkshire's performance in respect of the number of child protection plans that last two years or more, the number of children subject to a second or further child protection plan, and the timeliness of child protection reviews, is good.

- **Looked After Children**

One of the two main indicators of placement stability measures the percentage of looked after children who experience more than two placements during the year. Low percentages indicate good performance. At the end of 2011/12 the countywide performance figure was 6.4%, which is an improvement on the 2010/11 outturn of 9.3% and is also better than the most recent position of statistical neighbours (9.9%) and the England average (10.3%).

The second indicator of placement stability measures the percentage of looked after children whose placement has lasted for two years or more. In this instance, high percentages indicate good performance. At the end of 2011/12 the countywide performance figure was 66.5%, which is a decline compared to the 2010/11 outturn of 76.0%. The 2011/12 figure places North Yorkshire's performance slightly below the most recent performance data for statistical neighbours (71.2%) and for England as a whole (68.6%).

The percentage of care leavers in suitable living accommodation is high and stable whilst the percentage in education, training and employment is increasing

Family and Friends Care Policy

In March 2011 the government published new statutory guidance for local authorities in respect of Family and Friends care arrangements. The guidance sets out a framework for the provision of local authority support to Family and Friends carers. It addresses local authorities' duties under the 1989 Children Act and associated Care Planning Regulations for children and young people who are unable to live with their parents and are being brought up by members of their extended family, by friends, or by other people connected to them.

The Local Authority is required to publish a Family and Friends Care Policy and the North Yorkshire Family and Friends Care Policy was submitted to The Executive for approval on 3rd July 2012.

The policy sets out the Council's intentions to support children and young people to live with family or close friends whenever they cannot live within their birth family and where it is in their best

interests to live with appropriate family or friends carers. It will ensure that carers are aware of the help and support that can be provided for them and, where support services are identified as necessary to meet the child's needs, these will not be withheld merely because the child is living with a carer under an informal arrangement rather than in a placement with a foster carer or with a person with a residence or special guardianship order or an adopter.

For children who do become 'looked after', our policy is to offer a range of support to ensure that such placements are adequately supported regardless of whether they are classed as friend and family foster carers or the children are placed under a Residence Order, Special Guardianship Order or an Adoption Order and so that the best permanent solution for each child can be found without there being any financial incentive or disincentive for a particular type of order over another.

Homelessness – Implementation of young people's accommodation pathway

The accommodation pathway for 16 to 25 year olds was launched on 1 November and is now operating county-wide, through Hubs in Skipton, Harrogate, Northallerton, Selby, Malton and Scarborough. This service has been jointly commissioned through a Community Budget including the SP partnership, District Councils and the Children and Young People's Service. The Hubs provide a single point of access to accommodation services for young people. Each has a multi-agency team able to provide a full service including information, advice, assessment and mediation. Where needed the Hub provides access to emergency accommodation, supported accommodation and accommodation with support.

The pathway has made a good start, being built on successful practice developed in Scarborough and Ryedale. 88% of young people had their homelessness prevented in the first 5 months of operation, with the balance needing to be accommodated in specialist provision. The success of prevention with those having medium needs has resulted in a greater proportion of young people actually entering supported accommodation having a high level of needs. This will require a review of the types of accommodation commissioned with a shift of resources into higher needs provision.

Whilst a good start has been made, we must, however, consider the potential for increased demand for services, as benefit changes impact and the economic downturn continues. The pathways can prevent homelessness - and through close integration with wider services can we secure economic and emotional well-being for this vulnerable group in the longer term.

Area Reviews of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Provision for 16-25 year olds

The local authority has a duty to ensure that there are suitable education and training opportunities for all young people with SEN throughout the 16-25 age range. It is timely to undertake a programme of strategic reviews across the county with a particular focus on 16-19 provision which will take stock of opportunities available, identify any gaps in provision and bring forward proposals to address needs.

The first such review will focus on need and provision in the Hambleton/Richmondshire area and will focus on all provision available to all young people with high need SEN across all settings, including special schools, mainstream schools, colleges of further education and other providers. It is likely that options/proposals will come forward for consultation in the New Year for possible implementation in September 2014.

The expectation is that changes to provision will be underpinned by maximising use of existing facilities and resources and by providers working together on collaborative delivery.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Tribunal

Executive Members have recently considered a monitoring report on appeals made by parents to the SEND Tribunal, an independent tribunal established to hear and decide parents' appeals

against Local Authority decisions relating to children's special educational needs, in cases when parents cannot reach agreement with the Local Authority. North Yorkshire has fewer appeals lodged than comparator local authorities and there was a reduction in the number received in 2010/2011 over the previous year. The work of the Parent Partnership Service assists in earlier resolution of disputes.

The SEND Green Paper, 'Support and Aspiration' proposes that independent mediation should be required between local authorities and parents; that consideration be given to providing children with the right of appeal, and that the right of appeal should extend to young people to age 25. The services of specialist solicitors have been utilised to assist with the most challenging cases going to Tribunal and to provide specialist training to officers.

County Councillor Tony Hall, Executive Member for Children's Services