

**NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**10 OCTOBER 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 Directorate exceeded its target of £9.150m by over £2.6m.

The target for 2012-13 is £2.8m and we are on course to achieve this. This is part of 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 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 our joint responsibility for all the relevant resources.

**Looked After Children**

At the close of quarter 1 (August 2012) the number of looked after children totalled 467. The number of looked after children peaked at 499 in February 2011. The period since April 2011 could be characterised as one of relative stability, with numbers fluctuating within the range 453 to 473. That said, recent months have seen a gradual increase and the June figure (467) represents the first monthly fall since December 2011. At the end of August 2012 the number of looked after children totalled 469.

All children are considered for Family Intervention and/or Outreach support and comprehensively screened prior to admission into care. When there are child protection concerns then there is a clear imperative to admit to care. Other family needs are offered targeted support from Family Intervention and Outreach Teams. Admissions to care are planned to meet the needs of the children and scoped with respect to duration and cost.

**National Action Plan for Adoption**

The Action Plan for Adoption was published in March 2012 following significant interest in government and media over the preceding two years and in response to reports by:

- Martin Narey, the government's Special Adviser on Adoption

- An Expert Working group report set up through the Association of Directors of Social Services
- The family Justice Review report, published during 2011

There are three main areas addressed which impact directly on the Adoption Service and the wider functioning of Children's Social Care, all of which relate to the speed and effectiveness of different aspects of the service. These are:

- Child care planning – Councils are challenged to increase the speed with which decisions are made about whether a Looked After Child should be adopted and when such a decision has been made, the speed with which they are placed with their adoptive parents. This challenge to councils runs in tandem with the challenge to Courts to complete care proceedings within 6 months of an application being made.
- Adopter Recruitment - The Government proposes a significantly faster process for the preparation and assessment of prospective adopters. The current intention is that it will take no more than six months from an initial enquiry to becoming an approved adopter. This is a very significant increase (this is currently achieved within between 12 and 18 months) and there are concerns about the thoroughness which such a tight timescale will allow.

The North Yorkshire Adoption Service is reasonably well placed to respond to these aspects of the Action Plan.

- Performance and inspection - the Action Plan introduced a “score card”, which will be published annually and will measure performance of each adoption agency against nationally determined target timescales. The intention is that the target will reduce over a 4 year period.

### **Fostering Service Ofsted Inspection outcomes**

The most recent Ofsted Inspection of North Yorkshire County Council Fostering Service was held on 16 March 2012 and was conducted over three days by a single inspector

The inspector identified some strong areas of our service and acknowledged that further progress had been made since the last inspection by “addressing all outstanding recommendations, implementing a range of initiatives and thereby improving outcomes for children and young people“. Examples of areas of strength include:

- children and young people rate the service highly and feel that they are safe, listened to and supported with their health and education
- children know who to turn to if they wish to make a complaint or are concerned about bullying
- young people describe being helped to think about their future and prepare for independence
- overall consensus that the service provides a good standard of care with some birth parents believing the standard of care is excellent
- matching is suitable
- staff are appropriately qualified and supported in their work
- good training provision and supervision for carers around health
- thorough assessments of carers and good safety measures once in placement
- good education arrangements and support from the Virtual school

Some areas for development were identified and an action plan has been produced to meet the inspectors' recommendations.

The overall rating was judged to be “Satisfactory“ with individual judgements being

- Being Healthy – Satisfactory
- Staying Safe – Satisfactory
- Enjoying and Achieving – Good
- Making a positive contribution –Good
- Achieving Economic Wellbeing –Good
- Organisation –Satisfactory

### **Autism Strategy**

A strategy for meeting the needs of children and young people with autism has been approved following public consultation.

In line with national trends, increasing numbers of children are being diagnosed as autistic in North Yorkshire. There are many examples of good and improving provision within the county but the drive now is to achieve greater integration of specialist services and consistency of approach towards meeting need. The Autism Strategy will meet the need for an overarching joint approach with health commissioners and providers to improve diagnostic pathways, advice and support, training, and provision. Work is also being progressed in conjunction with Health and Adult Services to improve transition planning for young people as they enter adulthood and transfer from children's to adult services. A detailed action plan for the strategy will be monitored through regular reports to the Children's Trust.

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