

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

19 DECEMBER 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 – in fact we again expect to make savings earlier than anticipated in some cases. 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 2 (at the end of September 2012) the number of looked after children totalled 466. At the end of March 2012 the number of looked after children was 470. During the period since March 2012 the maximum number of looked after children has been 473 and the minimum number has been 465. So, for the first six months of the 2012/2013 reporting year, the total number of looked after children has remained relatively stable.

When there are child protection concerns then there is a clear imperative to admit to care. All families are considered for targeted support from Family Intervention and Outreach Teams. Initial outcome data is showing that the Family Intervention Team has had a positive impact on preventing children and young people coming into care. Out of 161 referrals to the Family Intervention Team in the first six months, 49% of referrals were to prevent admission to care. Only 6% of these cases went on to be accommodated. Admissions to care are planned to meet the needs of the children and scoped with respect to duration and cost.

Robust gatekeeping arrangements are in place to ensure that placements are made when necessary and that the correct type of looked after arrangements are made. Social care senior managers also ensure:

- that social workers present good, analytical assessments that identify the most appropriate provision to meet need
- any drift in plans for children within the care system is challenged

- unplanned admissions are on the decline
- maximising the use of in-house foster carer vacancies
- speeding up the assessment of potential new foster carers
- developing a Marketing Strategy that targets new foster carers to provide currently unmet demand, in particular, teenagers with emotional and behavioural difficulties
- regularly reviewing high-cost and external placements
- introducing the 28-day placement strategy
- addressing the need for emergency placements to avoid young people being placed in residential homes based on lack of alternatives rather than need.
- continue to evaluate the impact of the Family intervention team in enabling families to stay together

Outcome of Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Arrangements for the Protection of Children

A team of Ofsted inspectors was on site for 10 days from the 1st October to conduct an unannounced inspection of Child Protection arrangements, including preventative services.

The inspectors commented on the following areas which they found to be generally adequate or good: -

- The people who run North Yorkshire County Council are very clear about what they want to do to make life better for the children and young people in their area. They have put more money and staff into making sure they know which children need to be protected and kept safe.
- Children and families who begin to find life difficult can be put in touch with a number of people and services who work together to help them and to stop the problems getting worse.
- Any children who are at risk of harm are immediately protected by social workers and other services.
- Children who need to be protected and kept safe are helped by people from a number of services who regularly check on how well they are doing.
- The North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Board brings together the right councillors and experts to check that children and their families get the proper help when they need it.

Overall the inspection judged the child protection arrangements in North Yorkshire as “Adequate”, which means that the service is doing what is required to keep children and young people safe. This is a new inspection framework which has a much stronger focus on frontline practice and analysis of case file recording. North Yorkshire has been inspected very early on in this new cycle of inspections.

An action plan has now been developed to address the inspection recommendations and to drive continuous improvements for children, young people & families.

Children’s Social Care performance

Timeliness of Initial Assessments - at the end of Q2 the countywide figure for timeliness of initial assessments completed within seven working days was 88.7%. This is ahead of the 2012/13 target of 87% and represents improvement from the 2011/12 outturn figure of 83.8%.

An alternative measure of timeliness concerns initial assessments completed within ten working days. On this measure, North Yorkshire’s performance at the close of Q2 was 93.5%. This represents an improvement from the 2011/12 outturn figure of 90.8%.

The most recent set of comparative performance data was published by the government in October. For timeliness of initial assessments comparative data was published for the ten-day

measure only. This shows that North Yorkshire's 2011/12 outturn (90.8%) and current performance (93.5%) are well ahead of the 2011/12 averages for statistical neighbours (76.2%) and for England as a whole (77.4%). North Yorkshire was in the top performance quartile with a ranking of 21st out of 146 authorities for which data is available, a strong improvement from 88th position in the previous year.

Timeliness of Core Assessments - at the end of Q2 the countywide figure for timeliness of core assessments was 88.4%. This is slightly below both the target of 90% and the 2011/12 outturn figure of 89.9%. However, this figure is still well ahead of historical performance which has been around the 70% mark.

The most recent set of national comparative data, published in October, shows that North Yorkshire's 2011/12 outturn (89.9%) and current in-year performance (88.4%) are well ahead of the 2011/12 averages for statistical neighbours (74.6%) and for England as a whole (75.5%). North Yorkshire was in the top performance quartile with a ranking of 12th out of 146 authorities for which data is available, a strong improvement from 89th position in the previous year

Child Protection Plans - at the end of Q2 the number of children with a child protection plan had risen to 450. The Q2 figure is an increase of 42 child protection plans from the position at the end of Q1, a rise of more than 10%. This rise is consistent with increases experienced across a range of business activity in children's social care. For example, in recent months there have been increases in the number of referrals received and in the numbers of assessments being undertaken.

Speech, Language and Communication Needs

A draft strategy for children and young people with additional speech, language and communication needs has been approved for consultation to commence in the New Year. Communication is the gateway to learning, friendships, academic achievement and success at work. It is a skill which needs to be learned and honed and which continues to develop from birth to adulthood. The strategy will assist schools and settings to have the knowledge, skills and confidence to support children's language development and to identify where a child is at risk of language delay. It will promote integration, the dissemination of best practice and the development of new approaches to targeted support, where that is required. The strategy will continue to promote the long established partnership with speech and language therapy services to make best use of their specialist knowledge. It is ambitious but it also recognises that, especially at a time of financial challenge, it is ever more important that 'communication is everybody's business'

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