

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

20 FEBRUARY 2013

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 (eg 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

I am very pleased to inform you that the Looked After Children Strategy should be approved by the Children's Trust on 13 February on behalf of all partners. This is a significant document joining up the many facets of this important work.

At the close of Quarter 3 (the end of December 2012) the number of looked after children totalled 480. Prior to December, the number of looked after children in place during 2012/13 had ranged from 465 to 473. So, for the first eight months of the year (April to November) the total number of looked after children 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 with only 9% of referrals to the team in the first three quarters needing to be accommodated in care.

Post-Inspection Action Plan

As reported in my last Statement to Council in December 2012, the Authority received a statutory unannounced inspection of its arrangements for the protection of children last November. The outcome of this inspection was a creditable overall effectiveness grade of "adequate". At the time of writing only three Authorities out of 23 inspections have achieved "good" and eight are "inadequate" The inspection report set out a series of recommendations to direct improvement activity. These are set out below:

Immediately:

- ensure that from now on children's views are explicitly detailed in children's social care case files in addition to the record that they have been seen and spoken to.

Within three months:

- ensure that up to date chronologies are in place for all children subject to child protection and child in need plans
- ensure that front line managers receive consolidated training in relation to the application of thresholds for commencing section 47 enquiries
- ensure all children in need who receive social work services have individual, outcome focused plans in place and that they are regularly reviewed to monitor and drive progress
- ensure that the North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Board (NYSCB) has a robust understanding of the quality of multi-agency child protection practice and that this information is effectively used to challenge and drive ongoing improvements.

Within six months:

- ensure all children and young people in receipt of children's social care services have information about, and good access to, appropriate advocacy services
- ensure staff supervision is recorded consistently and in detail across the county
- ensure that all data collected is evaluated to inform understanding of the impact services have on improving outcomes for children and young people
- the NYSCB and the council should develop and implement effective mechanisms for collecting and evaluating feedback from children, young people and their families and ensure that this is used to influence service development
- ensure that elected members routinely scrutinise the effectiveness of child protection and preventative work.

The Children and Young People's Service has developed a detailed Post-Inspection Action Plan to deliver these recommendations. This plan has been developed in consultation with Executive Members, the Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and Children's Trust partners, most notably the Safeguarding Children Board and sets out a programme of change and improvement work, together with milestones and any resource implications (although it is important to note that the actions in the plan are expected to be met from existing resources). County Council should also note that there is a specific recommendation concerning the role of Elected Members in scrutinising the effectiveness of child protection and preventative work.

The inspection found that in most areas of activity there were many examples of good and outstanding practice, but others that were not so good. One of the themes within the Action Plan, therefore, is to improve consistency within and across teams.

The inspection also found that in many instances the required improvements had been identified by the Authority and that development work was either planned or already underway. In this respect, the Action Plan brings together a programme of ongoing improvement work, but also accelerates its delivery. The delivery of the Action Plan will be subject to close monitoring, with formal reporting to the Directorate leadership team, Executive Members, the Children's Trust Board, the Safeguarding Children Board, and the Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Inspection of Private Fostering Arrangements

In November the County Council received a statutory Ofsted inspection of the children's social care private fostering service. Relatively small numbers of children live in a private fostering arrangement at any one time: at the end of December just 23 children and young people were known to be privately fostered in North Yorkshire. However, a private fostering arrangement can present risks for the child or young person, and so it is important that the local authority has good services to monitor and support such arrangements.

The recent inspection found that North Yorkshire's private fostering service is 'good' in all respects. In the Ofsted terminology, 'good' indicates a service that is of high quality and which exceeds the minimum requirements. This inspection outcome is a welcome improvement from the previous inspection (in 2008) which found the service to be inadequate.

The inspection found that the service is effective at raising awareness of private fostering, is good at supporting private foster carers and children, and works well with partner organisations. Inspectors received positive feedback from private foster carers and children, and found that privately fostered children and young people feel safe and have confidence in their social workers. The inspection found that the service is well managed, with regular monitoring and evaluation which contributes to the effectiveness and improvement of the service.

The inspection identified two areas for improvement. One concerned the local authority response to notifications of new private fostering arrangements, the other concerned improvements to the annual report to the Chair of the Safeguarding Children Board. The service is developing a delivery plan to take forward these improvement recommendations.

National Adoption Plan and Adoption reform

The government has embarked on a range of initiatives to improve the performance of local authorities in relation to all aspects of adoption services for looked after children.

The overall intention of "The Action Plan for Adoption" is to enable more children to achieve a sense of stability and permanence through adoption and to reach this point faster. Many of the measures proposed in the Action Plan are welcomed and bring together government aspiration with aspiration and best practice in adoption services.

The Adoption Scorecard now reports local authority performance nationally. It breaks down the different aspects of timeliness throughout the process. The targets are increased over time and so performance will need to improve to maintain this standard.

Our performance is relatively strong. For example:

- The first threshold is that the average time taken between a child entering care and moving into an adoptive family should be no more than 639 days (21 months). North Yorkshire's performance (at 636) is 24th position nationally, which is in the top quartile
- The second threshold is that the average time taken from receipt of a court order to adopt to the local authority finding a suitable placement for the child should be no more than 213 days (7 months). North Yorkshire's performance (at 195 days) is 37th position nationally, which again is the top quartile.

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

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN – MEMBERS GROUP

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN

25TH January 2013

1. Purpose of the Report:

To provide an Annual Report to inform Members of the Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee on the work of the Looked after Children-Members Group.

2. Recommendation:

Members of the Committee are asked to note or comment on the information contained in this report and attached at Annex A and B.

3. Background and Context

Corporate parenting places a collective responsibility and accountability on Local Authorities to achieve good parenting for all children and young people in their care. Good corporate parenting means that all the needs of children in care are met to the highest standard possible. It requires ownership and leadership at a senior level with a central principle that each elected member and each employee within North Yorkshire along with partner agencies should seek the same outcomes for the children in our care as they would for their own children.

4. The Looked after Children-Members Group

The Looked after Children-Members Group is made up of eight elected members and one non-elected member and supported by the Lead Member for Children & Young Peoples Service County Councillor Tony Hall. As a group we monitor all aspects of the Council's responsibilities as a Corporate Parent in relation to looked after children. During the past twelve months we have held four meetings and been well supported by Officers from Children's Social Care who give an honest portrayal of the service, informing us of any developments and keeping us up to date regarding Ofsted Inspections.

We have encouraged young people from the Young Peoples Council to attend our meetings and share their news, views and ideas with us and have watched several

videos made by young people which helped them put into words what being in care has meant to them.

At each meeting we are provided with quarterly statistical information which tells us that the total number of Looked after Children (LAC) at the end of Quarter 2 was 466. This number has remained steady for the last 15 months with an increase of only 5 from the end of the previous quarter. Sadly, abuse or neglect remains the major category of need and accounts for 65% of LAC (an increase of 9% over 18 months) followed by “family in acute stress” (approx. 13%) and “family dysfunction” (approx. 12%).

The health of all looked after children is important and earlier in the year Members raised their concerns regarding the number of Dental and Health Assessments that were being undertaken within the appropriate timescales. Officers from NYCC, NHS North Yorkshire and York and Harrogate District Foundation Trust explained that in the past the data had not been robust and interrogation of different IT systems had been challenging. Since the beginning of the year (2012) a great deal of qualitative work has been carried out surrounding these datasets and around the recording of this dataset on the NYCC database. Figures now show that recorded dental checks have increased from 52% at the end of 10/11 to 78% at the end of 11/12 and recorded health assessment have increased from 57% at the end of 10/11 to 73% at the end of 11/12. Members and Officers agree there is more to do so we will monitor this issue carefully.

Safeguarding the vulnerable young people in our care is another area Members keep at the top of their priority list and regularly review detailed information on North Yorkshire’s Missing Looked after Children and Looked after Children who do not return on time. *(The term ‘missing’ refers to children and young people up to the age of 18 who have left their placement, their whereabouts is unknown and there is a concern for their safety).* We check on what is done to help and support these young people and the families/homes they are placed with.

Raising the educational attainment of Looked after Children who may have experienced significant challenges in their education is so important. Therefore, on a regular basis our Members Group receive detailed briefings on the educational achievement and attainment of all children and young people in the care of North Yorkshire County Council from the Head Teacher of the Virtual School Team. To reflect the success and challenges some young people experience in their learning Officers provide us with case studies so we can better understand the differing backgrounds some of the young people come from and which highlight the fact that they can start at very different levels. But we are delighted with the result that there are 19 care leavers at University this autumn (2012).

Supporting young people leaving care is just as important if we are to improve their life chances and delay their discharge from care until they are ready and prepared.

Regular updates from the Leaving Care service provides us with information on the number of young people over the age of 16 (343) to whom North Yorkshire is responsible for providing services under leaving care legislation. More importantly it is reassuring to know that care leavers with multiple vulnerabilities can access services that keep them safe.

Members continue to undertake Regulation 33 Inspections with Officers across the five North Yorkshire County Council Residential Children's Homes. It is a good opportunity for Members to inspect the premises, speak to staff and meet and talk with the young people who are in residence at the time.

5. Next Steps

We have started to develop the Looked after Children's Forward Plan for 2013/14 which is attached at Annex A and welcome any comments or additions on the content.

With the support of the Lead Member and Officers in the Children and Young Peoples Service we will continue to monitor all aspects of the Council's responsibilities as a Corporate Parent in relation to looked after children and to help increase the awareness of all County Councillors of their corporate parent responsibilities.

County Councillor John Batt
Chairman
Looked after Children-Members Group

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Background documents: None

Annexes: Annex A – Looked after Children Forward Plan

The role of the Looked after Children- Members Group

Extract from North Yorkshire County Council Constitution (Issue 7 – October 2012 Page 128)

9.5 The role of the Looked After Children Members' Group will include the following (which is not exhaustive):

- (a) Monitoring and reporting to the Executive Member on all aspects of the Council's responsibilities as a Corporate Parent in relation to looked after children, and on any specific issues they are required to consider.
- (b) The monitoring shall include performance against key indicators for the quality, stability and outcomes of Looked After arrangements for all children and young people in the preceding year.
- (c) Enquiring into issues about looked after children who are also disabled.
- (d) The numbers of teenage pregnancies arising in relation to looked after children and their health and sex education.
- (e) Health issues affecting the Council's looked after children.
- (f) The educational attainment of the Council's looked after children and the work of the Virtual Head Teacher.
- (g) Considering the minutes and reports from the Young Person's Council.
- (h) The recruitment and retention of social workers and staff and the morale of all service staff and officers.
- (i) Any issues affecting looked after children in relation to drugs, alcohol and smoking.
- (j) The transition arrangements for all looked after children as they enter adulthood.
- (k) The work of the Young People's Champion.
- (l) The Looked After Children Members' Group will undertake inspections under Regulation 33 of residential homes. This will involve reporting any concerns from the residential homes and receiving any concerns raised by officer Inspections of residential schools.
- (m) Any other relevant matter considered appropriate by the Lead Member for consideration by the Group.

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

20th February 2013

ANNUAL REPORT YOUNG PEOPLE'S CHAMPION 2012/13

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this Annual Report is to inform North Yorkshire County Council on the work of the Children and Young People's Champion for 2012/13.

Background

2. I first took on the role of Children's Champion in 2008 and my role as the Young People's Champion is defined as:
 - To help raise standards and performance
 - Promote effective communication and positive working
 - Ensure that the views of children and young people and other interested parties are heard
 - Foster relationships with the voluntary and community sector and help facilitate communication between the Council and this sector

This year I have focussed my attention around vulnerable groups of young people and where I can help families and individuals who contact me for help.

Looked After Children

3. I realised early on that there is a real need for the Young People's Champion to be involved with this group of vulnerable young people who are either living in North Yorkshire's residential children's homes or in Foster Care. The number of children in care at the moment remains steady at 466.

Four years ago we had two youngsters in the care system at University, this year it is something like 19 which is very much to the credit of the Officers who support them through their education.

The young people invite me to their Young Peoples Council along with the Executive Member and Chairman of the looked after Children-Members Group and will tell us about any issues they have.

I am invited to local Foster Carer Group meetings usually with 12 to 14 parents at a time who share some of their concerns and experiences with me. Sometimes they just want to tell a councillor what they really think.

I make a point of visiting all North Yorkshire County Council Residential Children's Homes unannounced and talk to young people and meet with staff in the home and discuss any concerns or needs they mention.

Regulation 33 Inspections

I undertake Regulation 33 inspections at Morton on Swale residential resource centre on a quarterly basis with a Senior Manager but will also help out with Inspections at other children's home if there are others to be done.

Case Studies

4. I have summarised a few of my activities for you over the past year and provided anonymised case studies of the different types of problems families contact me about.

Case Study 1

I was contacted by a family who had four children, one of whom required 24 hour care. The family complained saying they had problems with getting respite care. I made enquiries and found out that the family had not returned requests for possible respite care in the summer-holidays within the holding time and had missed out on a number of other services they were entitled to.

I can now report that Officers have a good working relationship with the child and the family and the child receives their entitlement of care.

Case Study 2 - Transferring from Children's to Adult Services

I have been working with a family with regard to independent living accommodation for their 20 year old who has special needs. This family asked me to look into all possible avenues of care that is appropriate.

I have put them in touch with a Housing Association who are working to resolve their problems.

Case Study 3 – Out of County Adoption that broke down

When an adoption breaks down it is a really difficult time for the whole family. I have been helping a family in difficulties and put them in touch with NYCC Officers to see if there was anything they could do. Even though it was an out of County adoption North Yorkshire County Council has to become involved to see if they can resolve any problems. Sadly, this child has since come back into our care.

5. The Young Peoples Champion is:
 - An observer on the North Yorkshire Children's Trust Board

- An observer on the North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children's Board
- A full member of the Looked after Children-Members Group (LAC-MG) which ensures that the County Council continues to be an effective corporate parent and I am there to represent the views of young people in care and to bring any concerns they may have raised with me to the attention of the elected member.
- A full member of the Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee
- A full Member of the Virtual Schools Management Board

Conclusions

6. Since taking on the role of Young People's Champion I have listened to many young people who have described to me what it is like being in care.

The most rewarding thing about being the Young Peoples Champion is the satisfaction I get in having helped a young person or family to resolve their problems.

County Councillor Tim Swales
Young Peoples Champion

February 2013