

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**24 JULY 2013****STATEMENT OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES PORTFOLIO HOLDER****COUNTY COUNCILLOR TONY HALL****Medium Term Financial Strategy**

The Children and Young People's Service has continued to meet its savings targets and again in 2012-13 exceeded those targets. The scale of budget cuts required – and achieved to date, whilst maintaining service levels – has been a significant challenge. The objective has been to protect front-line services as much as possible, thus enabling a restructured Directorate to operate effectively across its universal, preventative, targeted and acute service responsibilities, in line with legislation.

Revised targets, including those most recent ones mean that the Directorate's target for the four year period 2011-15 will increase to over £20m.

While the original target was very much front-loaded into years 1 and 2, the revised targets have meant that some additional savings are required in years 3 and 4. Nevertheless, this still means that nearly 75% of the revised target has been met by March 2013. CYPS will seek to ensure that the impact of the cuts is not felt on the frontline where that is possible.

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. Nevertheless, the Children and Young People's Service is on track to realise the savings requirement both for this financial year and the next.

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 end of Quarter 1 the number of Looked After Children was 494. This is a small increase from the number at the end of 2012/13 (489). There has been a gradual rise in the number of Looked After Children during the last twelve months, from 465 in July 2012 to 494 as of 30 June 2013. Encouragingly however the final quarter of the financial year did see significant reductions in the number of new admissions with the lowest quarter figures of the year being reported.

The third annual 'Celebration of Educational Success' Graduation event was held for Children in the Care of North Yorkshire County Council and Care Leavers on 10th July at County Hall followed by photographs and a special lunch. Sixteen young people attended the event accompanied by a special guest of their choice and all were celebrating success either at: GCSE or alternative external accreditation, end of year 13; had provisionally been offered a place at University; or had completed a Bachelor Degree course at University. There are currently 21 young people formally in the care of NYCC attending University.

Our commitment to children in care was demonstrated through the pledge made by the County Council to all young people in care which states exactly what young people can expect from the adults who support them. An important part of the day was the opportunity provided to young people and their carers to reflect, not only on the day but also on the support they had received and suggest improvements that might benefit others.

Adoption Reform Grant

In my February Statement to Council, I drew your attention to the publication of the government's National Plan for Adoption. The Council will receive £1.3m grant funding to take forward the necessary expansion and improvement to services to meet the requirements of adoption reform as set out in the National Plan. On 23 July, 2013, I approved a number of proposals which aim to achieve the Plan's requirements and also address the recommendations of a recent Diagnostic Assessment of our Adoption Service, which include

- additional management and social worker capacity in teams in order to further improve the timeliness of Adopter Assessments
- a target to increase the number of adopters approved over the coming year by 50% and specifically targeting the identification of suitable adoptive parents for "harder to place children", for example sibling groups, older children and disabled children through a range of creative initiatives
- improving our Adoption Support Service to families by the appointment of three additional Adoption Family Support Workers and the development of an Out of Hours telephone support service to adopters and foster carers
- securing a part time specialist legal adviser to provide advice to Adoption Panels
- making a further contribution to our work with the Yorkshire and Humber Adoption Consortium, to enable us to increase capacity for regional recruitment and family finding in full collaboration with our neighbouring authorities. In addition we also would be increasing our in house marketing capacity, to work in partnership with the Consortium to ensure local recruitment requirements are met.

It is also proposed that a proportion of the grant is made available to build on the existing work being undertaken by the Business Improvement Team on streamlining and improving our data tracking systems and IT processes.

Family Proceedings

The judiciary have recognised that there was too much delay in care proceedings where the independent expert's assessments of children and families were too frequently used and where care plans were too actively managed by the courts. The pilot Public Law Outline (PLO) implementation has now been in place in North Yorkshire since 1 July 2013 and, along with a number of other Court areas, North Yorkshire will be the focus of an evaluation by the Ministry of Justice by December 2013.

The pilot is dominated by a set of practice directions which sets out very clearly to social work staff the necessary documentation that needs to be prepared by the time proceedings are issued and will mean that the expert in cases is the local authority social worker with additional experts only being used in future to resolve particular issues. This means a highly competent social work workforce is critical to ensuring that the needs of children and families are met through court processes. Judges are looking for succinct, analytical, assessments which are completed before applications are made to court. It is critical that social workers and their managers are clear about the need to undertake the necessary assessments and be precise and thorough in their social work analysis. The courts will need to see a consistent approach by local authorities, cases to conclude as quickly as possible, streamlined documentation and a reduction in the number of court hearings.

Developing Stronger Families

The Developing Stronger Families (DSF) programme remains a high priority for the County Council and its partners. Significant progress was made in Year One of the programme, which included the establishment of excellent governance and partnership arrangements, reflecting the strong commitment from all partners to drive the programme forward. Within Year One, the DSF

programme identified and targeted a large number of families and, based on this performance, North Yorkshire was placed in the top group nationally, resulting in the DSF programme receiving all Year Two funding payments at the start of the year. The programme is looking to build on the momentum made within Year One and have agreed a robust roll out plan, which will mean the programme will be fully operational in all areas of the county by October 2013. Within July 2013, there is a window to make claims for payments for those families achieving the Payment by Results (PbR) outcomes. For this exercise, significant work is being undertaken to ensure we claim for those families achieving successful outcomes. A Stakeholder Event is to be held on 3 October 2013 and will be attended by Louise Casey, Director General, Troubled Families.

Adult Learning and Skills Service

The service was inspected by Ofsted during the week of 20 May 2013. The inspection focused on three key areas; Outcomes for learners; Quality of teaching, learning and assessment and Effectiveness of leadership and management. All three aspects were graded 3 – requires improvement which gave an overall grade 3 for Overall Effectiveness. There are many positive comments within the Ofsted report but clearly there is work to do to improve the grades. Ofsted will re-inspect the service within 18 months. The senior management team within the service have committed one day a week every week in July to develop a comprehensive Post Inspection Action Plan to ensure the service improves and develops. This will include working with teachers and assessors to ensure that best practice is shared.

Personalised learning for young people with special educational needs and disabilities

There have been a number of positive achievements in terms of the development of Personalised Learning Pathways since the start of the pilot in 2011. The number of learners has increased from 5 in 2011 to 18 in 2012. It is anticipated that these numbers will continue to grow and in 2013 there will be approximately 27 learner's accessing Personalised Learning Pathways across North Yorkshire. There has been a significant shift in expectations in relation to Specialist Provision. More young people and their families are actively seeking to apply for a Personalised Learning Pathway rather than an independent Specialist College. For many they do not see this provision as second best.

In April this year Alasdair Durden from the Department for Education visited the Hub in Scarborough and described personalised learning as one of the best approaches to putting together a package of post-16 learning and support that he has ever seen. On Friday 5th July an event was held at Thirsk Racecourse to celebrate the achievements of those learners accessing a Personalised Learning Pathway. Many of the colleagues who attended the event described it as inspirational. Learners presented their pathways to others and shared how personalised learning has worked for them

FUSE

On Sunday 30th June I had the great pleasure of attending an outdoor theatre production around the theme of a Midsummer Night's Dream at York St John's University by the six FUSE groups in North Yorkshire, bringing together over 70 young people from across the County.

FUSE is a high quality inclusive youth theatre project delivered and coordinated by Connecting Youth Culture, part of the North Yorkshire Youth Support Service who fund the project alongside the Big Lottery's Reaching Communities Fund. The project provides opportunities for children and young people, particularly those with special educational needs and disabilities, to come to meet, work and form positive relationships and gain skills through participation in professional theatre making and performance. There are currently six Fuse Groups across North Yorkshire with a seventh group opening in Craven in April 2014.

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