

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

9 NOVEMBER 2016

STATEMENT OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES PORTFOLIO HOLDER

COUNTY COUNCILLOR JANET SANDERSON

Medium Term Financial Strategy & 2020 North Yorkshire

The Children and Young People's Service has continued to meet its savings 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. Although the Directorate is facing emerging pressures in some of the higher need budgets, such as Special Home to School Transport and Disabled Children's Services, we are on track to achieve the savings and transformation projects agreed by Council.

Although this information appears in my Statement to Council it should be noted that both Executive Members for the Children and Young People's Service have joint responsibility for all relevant resources.

Local area inspection of arrangements for children and young people with SEND

As mentioned in my last Statement to Council, North Yorkshire children's services, along with health providers underwent a five day Ofsted/Care Quality Commission inspection of arrangements for assessing and meeting the needs of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities in June 2016. The inspection identified North Yorkshire as an area with an ambitious culture for children and young people with SEND and a strong awareness of both strengths and areas for development. They acknowledged some good performance against the implementation of the SEND reforms from September 2014 and statutory indicators of performance. Publication of the final letter setting out inspection outcomes is imminent but work is already underway to ensure all recommendations are embedded in the new SEND strategy.

Regional approach to unaccompanied asylum seekers - developing a welcome centre approach

Due to the news over recent days that the Calais camp is closing, Councils have received notification that Local Authorities could receive two groups of young people:

- Asylum seekers who have family members in the UK. Authorities will be contacted to make arrangements for safe reunification.
- Unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

We had already been working in collaboration with regional Yorkshire and Humber colleagues to develop a "welcome centre" approach which will in the future see most of the unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people coming to our region receiving an initial six to eight week assessment to determine their needs and the best onward placement for them. It is envisaged that there will be between three and five centres of welcome across the region, which may be a small cluster of specialist carers or a residential centre, and these will provide a consistent initial comprehensive assessment of each young person. Using this model there is scope to pool regional expertise to support each centre and to maximise an economy of scale approach. The proposal has full support of the Home Office and the DFE as the young people going through this process are more likely to feel supported, less likely to

run, more likely to engage in the assessment process, and have more access to physical and emotional health interventions.

However the model proposed will take time to establish and does not meet the very pressing need to find places as the Calais camps are dismantled. North Yorkshire is and will play its full part in supporting these vulnerable young people. Whilst any under16 will be placed in foster care we are also keen to model the welcome centre approach described above through the reopening of Woodleigh Children's Home. This will enable us to better plan with health colleagues to ensure full assessments are undertaken to identify specific support and longer term accommodation needs for this particularly vulnerable group.

Partners in Practice

We were very pleased to receive confirmation that our Partners in Practice bid has finally been approved by the Minister of State for Vulnerable Children and Families, Edward Timpson MP. The bid brings almost £8 million of investment into children and young people's services, providing great opportunities to improve our services even further whilst helping the wider sector to improve. The funding extends the "No Wrong Door approach to care leavers of wrap-around services for young people aged 18-25, including education, employment and training support. It also extends the programme to young people in residential special schools and pupil referral units with social, emotional and mental health needs. Fiona Fitzpatrick, who joined the service on 17 October as the Partners in Practice Programme Manager, will oversee delivery of the programme in the County.

Children and Families Service Performance

Children and Families service performance continues to be top quartile in virtually every performance area. The strategic investment in targeted early intervention through the 0-19 Prevention service is delivering the greater capacity to work with families who need help at the earliest opportunity. The prevention service is working ever more closely often collocated with the Health Child Programme teams of Health visitors and nurses. This all in turns ensures our social care teams receive a level of protection to enable them to concentrate and impact on the more complex cases.

Children in Care

The overall performance at the end of Quarter 2 2016/17 was excellent and consistently strong in most areas. The number of looked after children in North Yorkshire fell again at the end of the first quarter to its lowest number for more than six years and the Council is now well placed to achieve its ambitious target to safely reduce the number of looked after children to just 400 by 2020. At the same time, we will also continue to ensure that children's safety stays at the very heart of everything we do and our procedures for responding to all safeguarding issues are robust and swift.

The rate of looked after children in North Yorkshire also continues to fall in line with further reductions in the numbers of children who enter into the care system and the Council is well positioned to achieve the target rate of 34 per 10,000 by 2020. The rate has been significantly below (better) than both the statistical neighbour and England averages for at least five years now and North Yorkshire has one of the lowest recorded rates of looked after children in the country thanks largely to the significant investment which the Council has made to support families to stay together. I am also pleased to report that the large majority of children in our care continue to live in a stable family home environment, including high numbers of children who are placed with long-term foster carers, which is largely due to the high quality of foster care placements and the strong relationships that foster carers develop with the children they care for. The rate of looked after children with the various health and dental checks that are up to date also remains consistently high and highlights the continued strong performance in this area.

Regionalisation of adoption

The Government requires all adoption agencies to move to larger agencies by the end of this parliament in a desire to see fewer agencies in their drive for improvements in three key areas:

- A system where children are matched with the most suitable adopter as quickly as possible;
- Recruitment taking place at an efficient scale to provide a pool of ‘adoption ready’ adopters large enough and well enough matched to the needs of children waiting; and
- Sufficient high quality adoption support services available nationwide.

The 15 local authorities in Yorkshire and Humber are working to a model of a single Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) with three sub-spokes: North, West and South with a central hub led by the voluntary sector. We form part of the North alongside York, East Riding, Hull, North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire. Significant progress has been made in the North and we anticipate going “live” as an agency by 1 April 2017.

Social Work Awards

I am pleased to report that colleagues from the Children and Families Service have been shortlisted in four categories in the national 2016 Social Worker of the Year Awards. These include Best Social Work Employer, Best Social Worker, Innovation and Creativity in Social Work and Social Work Team of the Year. The winners and runners up will be announced at the Awards ceremony in London on 25 November.

Children’s health outcomes update – Healthy Child Programme 0-5 Contract launch

‘Healthy Start to Life’ is one of the Young and Yorkshire three priority outcomes and the launch of the new North Yorkshire 0-5 Healthy Child Programme (HCP) service, as mentioned by the Portfolio Holder for Public Health, is a critical element of the local strategy to improve children’s health outcomes. The new contract will see Health Visitors work closely with our Prevention Service and alignment of their service teams with Prevention Service localities and where possible co-location of staff.

Concordat on Children in Custody

When the Police charge a young person (10-17yrs) with a criminal offence, they will usually be bailed to appear at Court later and allowed to go home. However, under certain circumstances, the Police may withhold Bail and in these circumstances there is then a strict legal duty upon the Police to “PACE Transfer” the young person to the care of the local authority, and reciprocally upon the local authority to accept the transfer. Across the country, and for many years, these duties have often gone unmet leading to frequent and unlawful overnight detention of children in Police cells. The government is now pressing hard for improvement, and all services have been required to pledge written compliance to the Concordat on Children in Custody (which sets out the required standards and services).

North Yorkshire is ahead of this challenge. The York & North Yorkshire PACE Youth Multi-Agency Working Group was established in 2012, and has made substantial progress in developing local practice. Joint guidance and procedures have been agreed and briefed out to key professionals. Review and challenge processes are well-established and improper detentions have already been reduced by approximately 75%. North Yorkshire has signed up to the Concordat on Children in Custody and the PACE Working Group will continue to lead further improvement in this important area.

County Councillor Janet Sanderson, Executive Member for Children’s Services and Special Educational Needs