

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

15 FEBRUARY 2017

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 final Inspection report has now been published and confirms that North Yorkshire is well placed for further developments in SEND and is fully aware of both its strengths but also areas for further development. The recommendations from the inspection and the additional SEND reviews commissioned through ISOS in 2015 into education provision have been incorporated into the SEND Strategy which will be finalised imminently. Work is already underway in addressing the recommendations from the Inspection. A few examples include the redevelopment of the web based Local Offer and the reshaping of the range of education provision for children and young people with primary needs of Autism and Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs.

Retirement of Pete Dwyer, Corporate Director – Children and Young People's Service

Members may be aware that Pete has announced his retirement to take effect later in the summer. Pete has been a director of children's services for 10 years, most importantly for the last four years at North Yorkshire County Council, joining us from City of York in 2013. He has led significant improvement in our children's services: North Yorkshire's "Good" Ofsted judgement, DfE Partners in Practice status (one of only eight authorities nationally), 10,000 more children now in good or outstanding schools than two years ago, a 20% reduction in the care population which has saved £2M with less young people placed out of county than ever before, to name but a few. Pete will be very much missed but is here for the next six months to make sure good transition arrangements are in place for his successor. We will have further opportunities to wish him well in his retirement.

Children in Care

Although the number of Looked After Children appears to have increased again this quarter, this is a direct result of the increase in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children. If these are counted separately, as North Yorkshire has received funding for them from the Government, the number of Looked After Children has decreased slightly on last

quarter. The rate of Looked After Children, at 34.8 per 10,000 children (under the age of 18), remains significantly lower (better) than both the rates reported nationally (60 per 10k) and by our Statistical Neighbours (57.2 per 10k). North Yorkshire remains in a strong position to achieve the ambitious target of safely reducing the number of Looked After Children to 400 (excluding unaccompanied asylum seeking children) and the rate (per 10,000) to 34 by 2020, whilst ensuring that children's safety remains at the very centre of everything we do and our procedures to responding to all safeguarding issues remain robust and swift.

The percentage of Looked After Children in North Yorkshire with three or more placements in the last 12 months has fallen this quarter. We are pleased to report that North Yorkshire's rate for this measure has returned to being lower (better) than both the latest known rate for England and for our Statistical Neighbours. According to the latest Growing up in North Yorkshire survey results, Looked After Children in primary schools feel safer both at home and at school than their non-looked after counterparts, showing the safety and stability North Yorkshire's placements offer. There are consistently high levels of Looked After Children with the various appropriate Health and Dental checks in place and up-to-date. We currently have universal coverage of eligible children having an up-to-date Under 5 development check for the eighth consecutive quarter and our percentage of up-to-date dental checks remains higher than the national average.

North Yorkshire continues to place a significant majority of children in a stable family home environment, which is testament to the high quality of our foster care placements and the strength of the relationships that foster carers develop with the children they care for. Although North Yorkshire continues to make very low use of Residential Care, Sir Martin Narey has identified and highlighted in the Residential Care in England review that "residential care in North Yorkshire is of exceptional quality"

Regional approach to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

In my last statement to Council we were in the very early stage of developing a welcome centre approach for unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC). This was being done through using the building which was previously occupied by Woodleigh children home. This approach has proved to be very successful, enabling us to receive a group of young people of the same nationality (Sudanese), language and religion. The group were later joined by two further young people from Sudan and Egypt. The welcome centre approach has received substantial support from all partner agencies and the community. It has enabled us to provide support (such as health services and assessment) to them as a group creating some efficiencies that could not be achieved through other less planned arrangements.

The current group, having been through an assessment process, are now safely moving on to other more independent arrangements, with three moving to an adult centre in Wakefield, having reached 18 prior to accruing leaving care status. Although the numbers arriving in the country have reduced, there is still a demand for further placements from overstretched southern port LAs. We will shortly receive a further five young people, again within a group. Once these have arrived we will have 19 UASC with one young person due to move to a neighbouring Authority. The numbers therefore remain significantly lower than the total number (96) which could be placed over a period of two years, although it is not anticipated that numbers will go beyond 50% of this ceiling.

Regionalisation of Adoption

As previously reported 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.

We are part of the North hub with York anticipated as the lead (subject to Executive approval). Significant progress has been made in the North and we anticipate going “live” in some form as an agency by 1 April 2107, with an implementation plan through to the end of 2017.

LGC Awards

The Children and Young People’s Service has been shortlisted in two categories this year: Best LA Children’s Services and Partnership Council of the Year for its Multi-Agency Assessment and Screening Team. The winners will be announced at the LGC award ceremony on 8th March

Children and Families Performance

North Yorkshire’s Children and Families Service continues to perform very strongly across the board, with top quartile performance in a number of indicators. The service continues to perform ahead of national benchmark in many performance areas whilst ensuring that the appropriate support remains available where it is needed.

The work of the Multi-Agency Assessment and Screening Team (MAST) continues to ensure that all contacts are directed to the service that is able to provide the most suitable level of support/ intervention. The strategic investment targeting early help and intervention, through the Prevention Service providing support to families, continues to ensure that a wider range of provision is available to provide help and support at the earliest opportunity. The number of referrals to Children’s Social Care fell to the lowest figure since at least 2011/12 despite the continued high number of contacts. Of these referrals, all subsequently led to a Children & Families Assessment. The proportion of children subject to a Child Protection Plan for a second or subsequent time continues to decrease and further evidences that if families are worked with at an early stage fewer then require social care intervention. Of the children who are subject to subsequent Child Protection Plans, it is reassuring to know that, for the most part, they are unrelated to the previous plan: the numbers of children who are subject to subsequent Child Protection Plans are often increased due to large sibling groups coming back onto a Plan.

Partners in Practice update

The DfE Partners in Practice Programme continues to develop. Following communication of our offer to regional authorities to share best practice, advice and support in 11 specialist areas, we have received numerous requests for support from other LAs. These are now being considered and arrangements formalised. Adding extra service capacity to support this work is crucial and we have increased our own capacity to enable such work elsewhere to be safely undertaken. Following extensive design work both of our No Wrong Door Extension projects now have focused plans for delivery and are clear on what specialist roles are required to ensure the support and guidance is available for this methodology to be extended successfully. Colleagues from the Department for Education have been attending the Programme’s Strategic Board regularly and have stated that they are very pleased with the way in which North Yorkshire is progressing in all aspects. I was delighted to meet with the Secretary of State Justine Greening for her to see first-hand the quality of work undertaken at Stepney Rd in Scarborough, as part of a wider visit to the Opportunity Area programme.

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