

**NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**24 July 2019**

**YOUNG PEOPLES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT**

**Disabled Childrens Service**

1. We all want the best possible outcomes for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. The committee wanted to know more about how we promote the health, safety and well-being of disabled children and young people, ensuring they can fully participate in family and community life, enjoying themselves with friends and making decisions about their lives. We were looking, for example, for reassurance that the service is geared towards preventing family crisis through the provision of the right level of support at the right time.
2. Eligibility criteria determines that support is provided for disabled children and young people where the disability has a substantial and long term effect on their ability to carry out day-to-day activities AND there are *significant* difficulties in meeting needs within their family, broader support networks or through local universal provision. Some members queried what constitutes *significant*; furthermore, how can we be sure the interpretation of criteria was being fairly made. Applying this criteria and its correlative definitions is inevitably complex; but we were encouraged by the degree of confidence shown in how professional judgement, together with an increasing body of national knowledge from SEND tribunal decisions, was ensuring a fair and consistent level of support.
3. Out of a budget of circa £5m:
  - staffing is provided by DCS Manager, 4.5 Locality Team Leaders, 18.5 Social Workers and 2.5 Family Support Workers.
  - 3 Children's Resource Centres are NYCC managed: Nidderdale (Harrogate), Morton-on-Swale and Cherry Tree Lodge (Scarborough). All 3 of these are rated as Outstanding by Ofsted.
4. Of the 400 children supported by the service:
  - 27 are Looked After Children.
  - 20 classed as Looked after because they who have substantial packages of short breaks sometimes in more than one setting.
  - 5 are covered by a Child Protection Plan.
  - 340+ are receiving a service under s17 Children Act/Short Breaks Guidance

5. In terms of short breaks - a lifeline for many parents and carers, and an issue of interest for some time for the committee - many families use direct payments as part of exercising choice and control. We were pleased to see a willingness to take a proactive approach to promoting direct payments as an option.
6. We considered the challenges facing the service:
  - The cost of purchasing care is high and increasing; National Living Wage, Auto-Enrolment pensions are factors here.
  - The availability of domiciliary care is less and decreasing.
  - Parents find it hard to use Direct Payments because they cannot recruit Personal Assistants.
  - Recruiting and retaining skilled staff in Children's Resource Centres is difficult.
  - Reductions in the budget for DCS is affecting support to families.
  - Significant reduction in health funding (over £200k less since 2017).
  - The service has - with good cause we accepted - overspent since 2012.
7. More widely, for the council the key issues are:
  - The range of legal duties in respect of disabled children is wide and the Council has to balance the budget against the risk of legal challenge.
  - Availability of budget cannot be used as a reason not to meet assessed needs.
  - Rising expectations from families, especially those with children with autism who do not meet the DCS eligibility criteria – this creates pressure in the Children and Families Service.
  - Reducing the budget of DCS does not necessarily save the Council money long term because short breaks help sustain children to stay with their families.
8. Although this was the last meeting's major topic and the evidence we reviewed was succinct and very well presented, it would be rash, given the level of detail we were able to go into, to make bold assertions about the effectiveness of the authority's approach. That said, members were impressed with:
  - the commitment to meet the needs of disabled children and young people in a way that addresses the considerable complexity, both for professionals and families;
  - the understanding that different families will welcome different forms of support;
  - the commitment to empowerment in decision making and accessing resources - making sure the views of disabled children and young people themselves are taken into account in the provision of service;
  - the commitment to improving the quality of responsive services and timely support; and
  - the adoption of a range of actions in support of the further development and sustainability of short breaks.

9. Transition at all stages, whether from birth to home, home to nursery, primary to secondary, to a new home or residential situation or transition into a new specialist service, is a key issue for children, young people and families. We were, therefore, pleased to hear that HAS and CYPS have worked hard at improving the sharing of information and the planning and budgeting for services. We were advised that clear protocols are consolidating better integration of services in appropriate areas to ensure appropriate support is in place as children move to adulthood.
10. Appropriate support into adulthood is the responsibility of a wide range of partners. Our interest in this is shared by the Care and Independence Overview Scrutiny Committee. I look forward to some joint work on this topic in the very near future.

### **Schools Finances Update**

11. School finances clearly remain challenging for a number of schools in North Yorkshire. Funding has not kept pace with cost pressures which adds to local issues such as fluctuations in pupil numbers. Aggregate school balances have continued to reduce in 2018/19 although they remain in a surplus position.
12. The concern is that the financial position of maintained schools will continue to deteriorate. However, it was clear that the local authority is not complacent and will continue to work proactively with a range of individual schools to avoid deficits wherever possible and to develop robust recovery plans for those projecting a deficit, or in the worst case, tackling accumulated historical deficits.
13. We will keep a weather eye on this issue over the course of the year.

### **Looking ahead**

14. At our next meeting we will discuss with Professor Maggie Atkinson, Chair of the Children's Safeguarding Board, how effectively local safeguarding arrangements are protecting children and young people.
15. We will also review how NYCC supports children in and out of education who have medical condition, especially a chronic (life threatening) illness.

### **JANET JEFFERSON**

Chairman, Young Peoples Overview and Scrutiny Committee

County Hall,  
NORTHALLERTON  
5 July 2019

Background Documents - Nil.