

YOUNG PEOPLE'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Executive Member for Schools – Looking Ahead to 2007

Context:

The overall position on schools is positive, characterised by very good outcomes, value for money and overall high levels of public confidence.

The principle issues we face are to do with maintaining that, developing it further, and improving it most where it is not good enough. The position is uneven between different schools and different parts of the County. Some more urban areas present particular challenges, so do some rural areas.

Our overall objective is to do consistently well for young people everywhere in the County. This involves maintaining support across the County, because all schools continue to value and gain from the right support. It also involves targeting extra effort to the issues and areas that need it more. Striking that balance – or maintaining that stretch – in the context of a financially challenging Medium Term Financial Strategy is our major strategic priority.

In the next six to nine months we will need to give thought to the following aspects of the service to ensure that we can maintain the right quality and keep moving forward. Many of these things are inter-connected.

1.0 Primary Education

- Despite overall high standards there are signs of progress stalling – more in some places than others – in Key Stage 2. We will be looking more closely at this.
- Primary Headship recruitment is getting harder and we have a significant proportion of Heads in their mid and late fifties. We will look at how we might promote and support Primary Headship to make it a more attractive career option.
- Changes in pupil numbers present different challenges and opportunities in different parts of the County. We need to consider how to optimise all the options for school and Children's Service developments to ensure sustainable, quality provision everywhere. We need to identify priorities for Primary Building Schools for the Future, which should come on stream in the next three years.

2.0 Secondary Education

- A major priority is continued work with our under-achieving schools, especially those in special measures or under notice to improve.
- More generally, there is more to do on 14-19 to increase the number of good quality vocational options which could help make education more interesting for some pupils, and more immediately relevant to some employers' priorities. This will also help to address under-achievement.
- The Education and Inspection Bill will be in place this year, and we will need to consider its implications for school planning.

3.0 Cross-phase issues

- It has always been important in North Yorkshire to maintain some local priorities for a rounded education. These things help young people's development. Our Outdoor Education Service makes a valuable contribution to this, and this was recognised as a strength in our recent JAR report, which gave us a Grade 4 for Enjoy and Achieve (one of only three nationally so far). Our challenge is to achieve a higher quality of experience by improving accommodation and under-pinning income by increasing use of the Centres outside the normal period of school bookings.
- School Meals and the Catering Service will continue to be a focus of attention to take account of quality, promotion and any changes to the costs to be covered.
- SEN and Behaviour Review highlighted the continued importance of monitoring and developing the current practice in mainstream schools, and we will be taking forward the commitments given to strengthen that work. We will also be continuing to look at ways forward for REOTAS, though now as an integral part of an implementation plan for the Review. We will want to ensure that we end up with the best all round service we can get from the combination of REOTAS, PRUs and so forth.
- Home-to-School Transport is a major service but also a major cost. In the context of planning our Medium Term Financial Strategy we will need to ensure that we are doing all that we reasonably can to contain those costs.

4.0 Schools and the wider Children's Agenda

- Schools will be playing a major part in wider developments of services for Children and Young People. Whilst that is part of Caroline Patmore's portfolio, it is worth mentioning for completeness here because it is part of the picture at policy level and at local level for individual schools:
 - Children's Centre implementation.
 - Further Extended Service developments.
 - Locality developments, particularly Parent Support Adviser Service.
 - Integrated Youth Support Service/Connexions transition to Locality Authority/Children's Partnership and re-commissioning of services.

- Schools, and our work with them will form significant parts of:
 - JAR Action Plan – due March 2007.
 - Revised Children and Young People's Plan – due April 2007.
 - Annual Performance Assessment – due May 2007.

CW/BAW
3 January 2007