

North Yorkshire County Council

Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2015 at 10.30 am at County Hall, Northallerton.

Present: - County Councillor Janet Jefferson in the chair

County Councillors: Val Arnold, Andrew Backhouse, Bernard Bateman (as a substitute for David Ireton), Lindsay Burr MBE, Tony Hall, David Jeffels, Cliff Lunn, John Ritchie, Elizabeth Shields, Liz Casling, Cliff Trotter.

Co-opted Members: Louise Alder (Primary Teacher representative), Paul Bircumshaw (Secondary Teacher representative), Dr Tom Cavell-Taylor (Parent Governor), David Sharp (Voluntary Sector representative), Graham Richards (Church of England representative).

In attendance: Executive Members County Councillors Arthur Barker and Janet Sanderson.

Officers: Pete Dwyer (Corporate Director - Children and Young People's Services), Katharine Bruce (Lead Advisor Vulnerable Learners - Children and Young People's Services), Janet Bates (Principal Advisor Secondary Education – Children and Young People's Services), Ruth Mason (Lead Improvement Advisor Early Years – Children and Young People's Services), Bryon Hunter (Scrutiny Team Leader - Central Services), Mark Taylor (Project Officer - Central Services), Neil White (Corporate Development Officer - Central Services).

Witnesses in attendance:

Chairs of Governors: John Warburton (Selby Community Primary School), Steve Hatcher (Ripon Cathedral Church of England Primary School), Anne Vetch, (Kettlewell Primary School), Lucy Legard, (Malton School).

Head Teachers: Caroline Spencer, (Sleights Primary School), Susan Gill (Broomfield Primary School Northallerton), John Wood, (St. Aidan's Church of England High School Harrogate), Carl Sugden, (King James's School Knaresborough).

Teaching School Alliances: Jane Pepper, (Childhaven Community Nursery School, Scarborough Teaching Alliance), Jenn Plewes, (Skipton Girls' High School, Northern Lights Teaching Schools Alliance), Kate Walter, (Assistant Headteacher, Northern Lights Teaching Schools Alliance Development Director).

York University: Dr. Peter Rudd, (Reader, Institute for Effective Education).

Apologies for absence were received from: Councillor David Ireton, Councillor Joe Plant, Pam Crabtree (Roman Catholic Church Representative), Jeremy Noot (Parent Governor Representative), Jon Carling (Voluntary Sector Representative).

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

76. Minutes

Resolved –

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 17 April 2015 having been printed and circulated be taken as read and be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

77. Public Questions

The Committee was advised that no notice had been received of any public questions or statements to be made at the meeting.

78. School Leadership and Governance in Closing the Gap

North Yorkshire is moving to a school-led improvement system where four Improvement Partnerships (Early Years, Primary, Special and Secondary) have responsibility for improving outcomes and ensuring that all North Yorkshire schools are good or outstanding. A key priority for all Improvement Partnership Boards, given the end of key stage outcomes is to close the gap in educational achievement between vulnerable learners and their peers.

Whilst the attainment and progress of all children and young people is crucial, the North Yorkshire Closing the Gap Strategy focuses on vulnerable children and young people who, as a group, do not usually make as much progress or attain as well as their peers. This is more pronounced in North Yorkshire (NY) where the gap is wider than the national average. In particular, pupils in receipt of the pupil premium are a key focus.

The Committee considered evidence from schools that have been successful in closing the gap and who can demonstrate the most effective practice in closing the gap and progressing the ten priorities described in the Closing the Gap Strategy.

Considered -

The Committee received a presentation from Kirsty Hallett (Lead Advisor Standards and Research, Education and Skills – Children and Young People’s Services) considering the 2015 data monitoring the performance outcomes against Closing the Gap.

Introducing the presentation Kirsty brought to the Committee’s attention that the 2015 data had only just been released and for this reason the data was currently provisional and may need amendment once all the data had been validated. Kirsty noted that the 2015 overview was one of cautious optimism for North Yorkshire with overall outcomes for all pupils in-line with the national, or above the national average in all areas apart from key stage 2 where North Yorkshire was 1% below the national average. For disadvantaged pupils 2014/15 had seen improvements in attainments in all ages with key stage 4 and post-16 ages improving more quickly than the national average. However, there is more work to be done particularly at key stage 2 and particularly with girls, where the gap had got wider.

Raising achievement amongst special educational needs (SEN) and disability students outcomes were up at all ages apart from key stage 4 where outcomes had dropped by 4%, although this could be due to new classifications in recording, a change in the identification of those as SEN, provisional data and a new database for recording.

For service children (4% of NY pupils) attainment and progress was still below that of non-service children with the gap unchanged at key stages 2 and 4 although the early years gap had narrowed by 2%. There were significant improvements at key stage 4 in English and mathematics performance. For pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) attainment had improved at all key stages and gaps were narrowing. Progress in mathematics is above the progress of other pupils, whereas progress in English was below other pupils.

In response to a question Kirsty confirmed that the data can, and will be broken down at a district level once the final figures have been received.

A Member wanted to know the reasons why the outcomes for service children were consistently below other pupils. In response, it was noted that results at a school level had not yet been examined but generally service children were highly mobile and often transferred school as well as experiencing more emotional difficulties, which could explain the gap in outcomes.

A Member wanted to know if volunteers were recruited to help pupils where English wasn't their first language. It was also asked if provisions had been put in place to cater for refugee children and their schooling needs. Kirsty highlighted that Minority and Ethnic Achievement Hub Schools (MEA Hubs) work particularly for EAL children and are specialists in this area. Kirsty responded that a North Yorkshire Syrian Refugee Group had been established to consider the needs of Syrian Refugees that will be settled within the County and that schooling is considered as part of the remit of that group.

In response to a Member, Kirsty answered that the Council was expecting the numbers of service children to change with the expansion of Catterick Garrison and the arrival of service personnel from Germany. A Member brought to the Committee's attention that service children face a unique problem around family holidays in that service personnel understandably can't always fit in to the normal holiday periods and take their children out of school in term times and that this must be acknowledged.

A Member noted that there were large pockets of different ethnic communities throughout North Yorkshire and wanted to know if teachers were drawn from these communities. Kirsty noted that there were no restrictions on ethnicity for teachers and that schools around the County do employ minority ethnic teachers.

A Member wanted to know if the data the Council receives is based on a settled system of strategies that work or whether new strategies are being experimented which leads to new recording methods and different information being recorded. In response, it was noted that there were some settled nationally acknowledged headline figures and data however, every year there is some change to the way this is recorded, and what is recorded.

Considered -

The Committee received evidence from four Chair of Governors representatives who attended the Committee to provide responses to pre-arranged questions.

- 1) How does your school decide which approaches and programmes to adopt to improve pupil learning?

School approaches vary according to need, both what the individual needs of the children are and also what the school needs to do to be able to satisfy this.

Research locally and nationally is very important as a guide to be adapted to your own school, but it is important to get the views of staff and governors. The role of governors through visits and monitoring performance is to help identify if programmes are working and what gaps there are in learning. It is important to have governors with the right qualifications and skills to be able to do this function. Past experience and learning is a useful tool to quickly identify measures that have worked in your own school but also best practice elsewhere.

- 2) Whose advice do you follow to make that decision – i.e. it is good practise from other school, the local authority, your own research or own sources?

We find that there is little advice from North Yorkshire County Council and in recent years this advice has vastly reduced in both quality and quantity. Visiting schools locally and nationally is an excellent way to share best practice and pick up new ideas. Best practice guidance was available from expert bodies such as Ofsted and the Sutton Trust but it would be good to have more evidence for rural schools.

- 3) What are the actions that have had the greatest impact on outcomes for vulnerable pupils and, in particular, those eligible for Pupil Premium?

Small schools can target individual pupils in depth and dedicate resources based on the individual's need. Culturally there is a strong emphasis on inclusivity and ambition and that every child can achieve their potential. Senior leadership team member engaging with this, and improving the outcome of vulnerable pupils is central to teacher performance monitoring. The schools represented had a long list of programmes and initiatives aimed at improving the outcomes of vulnerable pupils. On the practical side it was noted things can be done to ease that process, such as holiday classes to support learning, free revision packs, paying for school trips, ICT provision, employing a speech therapist. The best way to improve outcomes is to deploy good leadership and excellent teaching.

- 4) Which initiatives haven't worked so well?

Most initiatives work well, if anything doesn't work it is stopped immediately. It is important not to have too many programmes on the go at the same time for risk of diluting the efficacy. A pupil premium governor to monitor programmes to ensure their success. The hardest thing to monitor is emotional and social development, academically it is easier to measure outcomes and success. NYCC's Achievement for All programme was useful in some areas but it was often overly bureaucratic and time consuming.

- 5) Tell us about how you use resources in your school to drive improvements in closing the gap?

A number of ideas have already been mentioned in question three but there is also: the Achievement for All programme has been used, one-to-one interventions, learning mentor support, free examination retakes, afterschool homework and maths clubs, in classroom support, pastoral care, an attendance officer, employing a disproportionate number of teaching assistants with specialist skills, individual pupil led action plans for development and self-evaluation, home-to school support work where turbulent family life may be affecting school performance. There is a strong emphasis on quality first teaching and promoting the best possible learning environment.

- 6) How do you challenge your head teacher to meet closing the gap targets and how resources are best used?

Regular meetings are held with the head teacher to focus priorities and evaluate performance. All new governors are given an induction which focusses on the role of governors and teaches them the questions they need to be asking and the areas they need to be challenging performance. Tough head teacher appraisal targets and an effective structure to hold them to account, involving sub-committees were very useful. It is important that governors have a clear understanding of data and finances both nationally and in the school to ensure progress is being made around disadvantaged pupils and that resources are being used effectively and appropriately. It was warned that data should be used with caution, for instance in a small school with a small cohort of pupils, one or two children might be a high proportion and skew data, considering individual students in the case is more appropriate.

- 7) Tell us about how your school tracks and monitors pupil attainment and progress to check whether gaps are being closed and whether any interventions are working?

Question not used.

- 8) What are the messages that the school gives about its aspirations for all pupils and how are these communicated?

It is important to emphasise that every child matters. The schools have high expectations of all children. Children should aspire for excellence and it was about breeding that culture and mind-set within the school. This message is conveyed through the school council, coffee morning for pupils and parents, via the website, in school assemblies, notice boards and through staff setting clear aspirational targets with pupils.

- 9) What would you expect from the Improvement Partnerships, Teaching School Alliances and /or the Council in order to progress your work most effectively and at a pace?

It was appreciated that the country is in financially austere times with ever decreasing budgets and tough decisions that needed to be made; however, finances and difficult decisions do ultimately affect outcomes and if money is taken away outcomes will diminish. The Local Authority does work hard to provide alternatives to these diminishing services however, specialist services within the Local Authority are lacking and there is nowhere for schools to turn. Improvement partnerships are volunteers who are stretched to capacity and cannot be relied on for transformational change and support.

Governance positions are now becoming untenable. There are blocks to seeking Local Authority or cluster head teacher advice on issues. There is concern that some schools have a mentality of pulling up the drawbridge and concentrating solely on their own pupils, and while focussing on your own schools pupils is key schools do need to work in partnership to pool resources and overcome common obstacles. The Local Authority needs to get tough with schools who don't want to work with other schools.

There may also be occasions where the governing body wants to be strategic but it is blocked by senior leadership who don't want to be challenged and this needs to be overcome. Progress at key stage 4 can be an issue as children are often forced to study subjects that they are not equipped to study, which is a retrograde step and affects outcomes. It was noted that small schools receive more provision and that this was a fault in the formula for equal distribution of resources. It was noted that

the Local Authority supported Malton School through its current strategic change by delaying cost cutting measures and that there is an opportunity for progressive change in this area through partnership working.

10) Tell us about the challenges within your particular geographical area?

One challenge that was noted was for areas with higher EAL children it wasn't language that was the barrier but attendance. It might be a cultural thing but it was particularly prominent in eastern European families. If there was a wedding or a family event the whole family would travel for the event and the children would be pulled from school.

Following the pre-arranged questions Members congratulated the chair of governor witnesses for the insightful and illuminating comments.

A Member asked for expansion on a point that was made in response to question 2 about the quality and quantity of advice that is received from Local Authorities. In response a governor noted that the school had always had a good working relationship with educational advisors but those advisors have now gone. There was nowhere to go for information, the chair of governors would have to go to the head teacher or self-research, neither of which were ideal. Instead the school has gone private for an excellent package of support.

A Member wanted to know what the Local Authority could do to promote emotional and social development. In response it was highlighted that schools were not social care and that a lot of help and support was needed in that direction both with the individual pupil but also their family.

A Member noted that as Councillors they cannot always rely on figures and that an open forum like this one is useful to help draw up strategies.

A Member noted the emphasis that was placed on high quality teaching in the governor's responses and wanted to know how the schools had found recruiting and retaining quality teachers in relation to closing the gap. The rural location of many schools in North Yorkshire was raised as a particular challenge in recruiting and retaining staff due to the perception of social and family life particularly for young teachers. One governor noted that for his school and other local schools he felt that retention of key staff was higher than it had ever been and that the school benefited from dedicated hard working staff. Another governor noted that smaller schools have different challenges and often merged classes and ages which can be difficult for inexperienced staff.

Considered -

The Committee received evidence from four head teacher representatives who attended the Committee to provide responses to pre-arranged questions.

1) How do you establish what is likely to have the greatest impact for each pupil in accelerating progress to close the gaps?

The schools closely monitored feedback and performance of targeted programmes

and discussed their outcomes with the teachers involved. Staff were trained in interventions and identifying when early intervention is needed. Schools often bring in external agencies to deliver programmes, learning from past experience, as well as looking at local and national best practice as other ways of discovering effective methods to close the gap.

Consideration of Department for Education guidelines are a good indicator of how good a school is, and how it should be performing. It was noted that the governors had emphasized partnership working and this is a crucial area to share best practice and pool resources. It was stressed that every child is different and that there are variations in every year. There may be pupils categorized as disadvantaged who are high performers and similarly children who do not receive pupil premium but face difficult academic and social challenges. One head teacher highlighted the positive impact of individual education plans, led by the pupil which looked at what makes learning hard for you, what works well for you and what can we do to help you. All the teachers have access to all the plans so they know what works for each child in their class.

2) How does your school challenge/support/enrich the offer to ensure the more able disadvantaged pupils make accelerated progress?

Schools have a number of voluntary workers who mentor and support some of the children in cross curriculum activities. Engaging with other schools for instance in a maths competition is a great way to both challenge and offer new opportunities. Staff use targeted interventions based on need and are aware of needs and can adapt their teaching. The school can help to address practical difficulties in a similar vein to the points that the governors raised in response to question 5. Finally, there is always a constant focus on disadvantaged pupils; pupil premium is the first item on all school leadership meetings and there are constant reviews throughout the year to consider interventions, programmes and support and to consider their efficacy.

3) How do you ensure that teachers' expectations of vulnerable children and young people are high?

There is a high expectation for every child which is founded upon high quality teaching. Core school ethos has got to be about ensuring all children do their best. Teachers are set performance management targets which are reviewed termly. Registration forms are regularly updated with the children's needs. Profiles of vulnerable children are sent to the heads of departments. It is also important to stress confidentiality and that information is provided on a need to know basis. However, following on from question 1 there is no generic way to deal with disadvantaged children but the process needs to be robust to ensure that it is tailored to the individual.

Key aspects of home life need to be considered, sometimes the biggest barriers to learning can be at home and it is crucial to get parents buy in to aspirational targets. Communication both to teachers and parents but also to pupils is essential. Fostering the staff/pupil relationship ensures that all of the programmes and aspiration works; the pupil has to go with you and needs to feel valued and wanted.

- 4) How do your governors evaluate the impact of your closing the gap strategies?

It is important that the governor role is one of a critical friend and that they are there to challenge but also to help improve. Governors have a tight grip on the data as well as the finances to ensure that investment leads to positive outcomes. The potential issue is that governing bodies can be a fluid body and training is essential so that new governors know their responsibilities and can probe into the detail appropriately. One school had a specific pupil premium governor who focused solely on pupil premium outcomes and could observe programmes and ask teachers and pupils for soft evidence. All or other/ schools had sub-committees to look at disadvantaged pupils and pupil premium was the first item at governing body meetings.

- 5) Tell us about your use of data to identify underperforming pupils and how do you compare the performance of pupils eligible for the Pupil Premium with other eligible pupils nationally or with all pupils?

Progress is dependent on an accurate baseline assessment of each child. Is that starting point a fair reflection of the child's ability? Looking back at outcomes is a chance to reflect on the accuracy of the process that the school has in place to do those assessments – did the child achieve what we were saying they were going to achieve, and if not why not and is it the fault of our processes? There is always one eye on the national expectation of children but it is vital that the story behind the data is known such as soft data and knowing your pupils, as this can often highlight need better than numerical data.

- 6) Do you have a number of transient pupils and how do you ensure their educational progress?

The schools had settled populations but the importance of a quality baseline assessment was again emphasized for transient pupils. It is also essential to liaise with the previous school to gather as much information about the background of the pupil.

- 7) Tell us about the challenges within your particular geographical area?

Aspiration was raised as a salient challenge for schools, particularly in market towns where there can be a huge variance of housing from million pound properties to social housing. Drawing from a wide range of primary schools means that children can come into a secondary school and see other children who are more privileged than they are which means raising aspiration can be a real challenge. Attendance can also be difficult to manage as parents often have holiday jobs and as a result want to take their children out of school during term time.

- 8) What would you expect from the Improvement Partnerships, Teaching School Alliances and /or the Council in order to progress your work most effectively and at a pace?

For many years schools have tended to work in isolation whereas now there is a

real need and a shift in emphasis towards collaboration through things like the improvement partnerships to looking at a wider context for skills, expertise and pooling of resources. There was now a positive attitude for academies towards working with the local authority despite the perception that they were at odds and academies can play their part in supporting other schools across the County.

9) How do you deal with the transition for those children entering secondary school from primary school?

Secondary schools put on transition days where year 6 pupil premium students can shadow year 7 pupil premium students. Engagement and consultation with the primary schools that they are coming from is designed to find out their background and what has worked for them while at school. The primary schools invite secondary colleagues in to work alongside primary teachers to chat and spend some time with the children. Often it is about getting in early to have maximum impact and build up a rapport and this can mean starting in year 4 or 5.

10) What are the barriers for vulnerable children and young people and how do you work with parents and other partners to remove them?

Following on from question 9 the key is early access at a primary age because if you don't get involved with the child then, by the time the child is 12/13 the wheels are coming off.

Members thanked the head teachers for their comprehensive and honest answers. In response to a request for further clarification on buddy schemes between older and younger pupils it was noted that another successful scheme was a year 7 mentoring scheme led by sixth form students. Sixth formers are trained through programmes like RELATE while year 7 students have someone with experience that they can go to who can bring a different dynamic to their teachers. In addition, the school provides at least two sixth formers in each of the year 7 classrooms for at least the first two terms for further support.

Considered -

The Committee received evidence from three teaching alliance representatives who attended the Committee to provide responses to pre-arranged questions.

1) How many schools are in your alliance and what area does it cover?

The Scarborough Teaching Alliance is a Cohort 4 alliance in its second year. It started with six schools and now has 20 formally signed up. The Alliance's reach is increasing all the time particularly as the support offer develops and includes teacher training, continuous professional development, school to school support, identifying and developing leadership, specialist education leaders peer support and research opportunities.

The Northern Lights Teaching Schools Alliance is a Cohort 2 alliance in its fourth year. It covers Lancashire, North Yorkshire and Bradford and has 25 strategic partners in the alliance which is not just schools but also anyone connected to

education and wellbeing in the sector. The Alliance has a moral imperative to improve the standards of schools in the Alliance area and to achieve the best outcomes for all pupils using a variety of packages and programmes.

2) What is the purpose of your alliance?

Question not used – answered in question one.

3) How do you, in your role as an Alliance help to close the gap for vulnerable pupils both in your own Alliance and in a wider context?

It was essential to note at the start that all schools are different and it is important to work to individual areas and needs. Although there might be certain ages that are the majority in the alliance such as early years in Scarborough there are practices, programmes and techniques that are applicable to all ages. The key strength of an alliance is the ability to draw from the experience and expertise of a wide range of diverse partners. Access to a larger array of data and more people to analyze that data means that alliances can often bring a fresh view and a new approach. Some of the practical measures can be to provide support such as special leaders on education who have proven track records of transforming schools or services go into schools that need support. Another measure is a pupil premium reviewer at a senior leadership level who focusses on raising outcomes across alliance schools. There is also a reciprocal relationship with the alliances learning all the time from the partners that they work with.

4) How do you know your work is having a positive impact on outcomes?

The proof is very much in the pudding and is often seen from improving outcomes from Ofsted. The biggest barrier to success was often teacher confidence and it was about developing an ethos and positive culture to promote confidence which then ultimately improves outcomes. Using data to inform outcomes, looking at what is making an impact, what can be done at the earliest possible stage – because smaller differences can then have larger impacts later. The strength of the alliance is the support network it provides and knowing what is available to schools such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services who can help with certain issues that a school cannot.

5) What successful strategies have you seen in your Alliance?

Question not used – answered in question three and four.

6) How will your role fit into the Improvement Partnerships that have been set up?

Teaching alliances fit well into the role of the improvement partnerships. The alliances have the skills to enhance an improvement partnership because alliances need to network and work collaboratively with a range of partners to achieve outcomes. It is about building capacity within schools, alliances offer school to school support to help to do this. It is important to involve all school ages in plans and for the improvement partnerships to collaborate as issues don't stop when children move key stages. Schools need to own the improvement agenda and that

needs to be a key focus of improvement partnerships.

7) What are the challenges in your particular geographical area?

The challenge for North Yorkshire is the rurality and the fact that travelling can be a real problem. The negative perception of rural locations can make it difficult to attract teachers and staff to relocate to the area. Coastal communities also present their own unique challenges. Scarborough, in particular, has a deficit in graduates and has had to work hard to secure a relationship with Hull University. Scarborough also has problems with drug, alcohol, and domestic abuse. A recruitment strategy is essential and it is about promoting the area both professionally and socially as well as encouraging more home grown teachers through teacher training programmes.

Members thanked the representatives for bringing the Committee's attention to a different perspective on the issues schools can face.

A Member wanted to know how the teachers in the alliance are sure that the focus remains on their day job, as well as governance structures more broadly. The alliances are set up like a business entity – with their own board of directors and staff. The staff focus is on development needs and seeks to ensure that the alliance leadership don't get distracted with the intimacies of the day to day operation. School governors are trained to provide that challenge to ensure the focus isn't solely on the alliance, however, they are cognizant of the improvement agenda and understand there needs to also be a focus on this. Capacity building is then key, the alliance aims to improve capacity within schools which then further strengthens the alliance so the relationship is cyclical.

As alliances are always looking for funding in a shrinking pot no programme is conducted without knowing what resources are available and there is a clear plan in place from implementation to evaluating outcomes. This has been brought into even sharper focus now that the number of accountability streams has increased with the introduction of improvement partnerships.

Considered -

The Committee received evidence from Dr Peter Rudd, Reader, Institute for Effective Education at York University who attended the Committee to provide responses to pre-arranged questions.

1) Where and what are the best examples of best practice in closing the gap?

Dr Rudd began by commending the Closing the Gap strategy that North Yorkshire County Council had put forward and that it covered all the key areas in supporting attainment of disadvantaged pupils.

This wasn't an easy question to identify geographically, there was greater clarity statistically. However, there were a few centres that had made strides in closing the gap and were worth studying – such as the London schools, Plymouth, and Poole and Hastings for addressing coastal challenges.

- 2) What are the three most significant “actions” a school can do to make the greatest impact?

Caution must be given to assigning a specific number to the best actions that can be taken as actions are very much dependent on the individual schools and individual pupils. Evidence suggests that too many actions, strategies and interventions can become dissipated and dilute the effectiveness of them. A recent study found that 18 was the average number of interventions in schools which represented small and many pupil premium investments.

Commenting generally three positive steps that can be taken are, to maintain and enhance a focus on child centered learning to improve attainment which involves a move from traditional teaching to investigating exploratory learning. Second, parental engagement is central to children’s learning, absences are correlated to underachievement. Finally, retaining and recruiting high quality teaching and encouraging a can do attitude and positive school ethos demonstrably enhances student learning.

- 3) JRF research in 2010 pointed towards a potentially key role for differences in how children and parents feel about themselves and their prospects – is this still the view and how can this be best addressed?

The Joseph Roundtree Foundation research from 2010 is still valid. Wellbeing is linked to important ways to attainment, while a priority is learning in the classroom it also needs to be learning outside of the classroom to build a whole developed character.

- 4) What is your understanding of the challenges to closing the gap in North Yorkshire?

Underachievement generally has been shifting from cities to rural areas, market towns and coastal communities. It doesn’t always apply there are always exceptions to the rule. Key challenges for North Yorkshire are geographical isolation as well as the poor transport links that come with a large rural area. Expectation and aspirations for some pupils could be higher from parents, teachers and most importantly from themselves. These things seem to have fallen through the gaps of big initiatives so North Yorkshire may have lost out on funding to address these challenges.

- 5) How realistic are the targets set out in the Council’s Strategy for Closing the Gap in Educational Progress and Attainment 2015-2018?

The Council’s strategy contains a good set of targets. Early years and key stage 2 targets are and should be ambitious. There is always the balance to be struck between what is realistic and what is too ambitious. The key stage 4 target could be more positive, perhaps introducing a step change, firstly to get to the national target and then to achieve beyond this.

Members thanked Dr Rudd for offering an academic and informed opinion of North

Yorkshire's Closing the Gap strategy. In response to a Member, Dr Rudd noted that the strategy was very comprehensive and that all the key areas were addressed.

Addressing a Members concern about pushing ambition, Dr Rudd advised that stamina and sustainability of interventions were pillars of longer lasting success.

A Member echoed Dr Rudd's comments and concerns about the shift of underachievement to coastal communities and wanted to know the role of deprivation on attainment. In reply, it was outlined that deprivation can have a detrimental impact on attainment. Recent studies find that around two-thirds of academic outcomes are based on 'in school factors'. School is often a leveler for children given that, regardless of background, they have access to the same equipment, teaching and facilities. But that still leaves a significant percentage, around a third, to out of school factors demonstrating the importance of involving and engaging with parents.

Considered -

The Committee received evidence from three North Yorkshire County Council Officers who attended the Committee to provide responses to pre-arranged questions.

- 1) How do you ensure that the Council's vision on closing the gap is communicated to schools and "bought into"?

The Council collaborates with schools when drawing up the Closing the Gap Strategy, engaging with them throughout the process and not just at the end. Head teachers are consulted during head teacher network meetings to ensure buy in. There is a Closing the Gap Strategy Group that holds regular review meetings and ensures that all the schools are informed. The strategy is part of the wider Young and Yorkshire plan and there is alignment to the 10 priorities within that strategy which had considerable buy in from schools, families and young people. Targeted work is also undertaken with specific schools that are struggling to close the gap.

- 2) How will the Improvement Partnerships support school-to-school improvement for Governors and Head teachers?

The improvement partnerships have only recently come into being. They were drawing up plans focused on closing the gap. Part of the secondary work is about recruitment with specific funding dedicated to this with the Council advertising its vacancies on its website. The partnerships will aim to build capacity amongst head teachers so that they can support and challenge each other on school improvement. The majority of schools have signed up to the vision and potential of the partnerships.

- 3) How does the Council support governing bodies to be able to provide high quality challenge and support to school leaders?

All parties need to be aware of the enhanced responsibilities and expectations of governing bodies. Legally, governing bodies do have to receive external advice to

support management priorities. The Council offers dedicated advice and training of clerks and governors and can offer bespoke training – including on the pupil premium – based on need. As part of school reviews, the Council reviews the arrangements and the effectiveness of the governing body as an integral part of a school.

There are governor network meetings each term across the County where the Council can make governors aware of national bodies or developments as well as upcoming Ofsted inspections. A key support to governing bodies is the clerk and the Council can train clerks to help governors be more challenging as well as supporting them in their roles and responsibilities. All school governing bodies had to reconstitute in September 2015 and support was offered to help them to become as effective as possible.

4) How do you ensure that the support is focused at the right places so that is effective and proactive?

In depth analysis of the data is essential, although as mentioned by the head teachers representatives you also need to be conscious of the size of the schools and their cohorts. Support needs to go to where it is needed most and the Local Authority needs to help the school to build up a bigger picture. Educational advisors engage with staff and pupils within the school as well as looking at the holistic objective view. Tight support plans are then devised in consultation with the head teacher and the governors. One such targeted project that the Council is running is £250,000 per year for the next three years to specifically improve the wellbeing and aspiration of pupils in Scarborough.

Effective communication is essential and key messages focus on the seven building blocks to support achievement produced by the National Foundation for Educational Research. Support drills down across all age groups and all those involved in the outcomes of children. The Council has honed its support for the transitions of service pupils, it has a Service Pupil Strategy Group involving a range of partners including parent representatives and service pupil champions. A lot of targeted work has taken place in schools with a high proportion of service pupils across both academic and pastoral care and despite progress it is still lagging behind that of other pupils. For minority and ethnic communities it is about raising awareness of Minority Ethnic Achievement Hubs through targeting areas of need but there is currently a low take up for it.

5) How do you hold schools to account for the progress of vulnerable learners?

As well as the measures already mentioned such as school reviews the Council receives behavioural and attendance data for schools which provides evidence of progress, or lack of it. Where the Council has real concerns with the progress at a school, it does have statutory powers to intervene where children are being failed however, preceding this usually comes a warning notice to improve standards.

6) How do you measure the impact of the closing the gap initiatives. Are there too many and should there be a stronger focus on fewer initiatives?

Question not used.

- 7) How are the ten immediate priorities described in the Strategy progressing and how are you monitoring impact?

The Council has commissioned Adrian Gray, a former inspector for Her Majesties Inspectors of School and now a professional external advisor on school improvements to drive forward the progress on the ten priorities. Schools have been written to and surveyed to provide the Council with their observations on what is working and what initiatives aren't having an impact and why. There will be 20 school visits in December and this will be ongoing in order to produce a picture for North Yorkshire.

- 8) Given that the Early Years Closing the Gap Strategy is advanced in its implementation, what has been the impact?

Early years needs to undertake a two stage approach to the analysis, firstly to see what the impact has been on each of the 15 reach areas and then, what needs to be done to progress in the year ahead. Areas have been identified such as boys in speech language and communication support, the efficacy of full wrap around support and awareness raising – is the early years gap because 2 year old vulnerable children aren't taking up their places?

Members thanked the officers for bringing the Committee up to date on the Closing the Gap Strategy.

A Member wanted to know if the County struggled to recruit Maths and English teachers. It was noted that there were significant issues nationally and North Yorkshire wasn't exempt from them – such as disjointed teacher training, disparity of geography, teachers leaving the profession as a result of pressure, the appeal of the city particularly for younger teachers and in marketing North Yorkshire. This might even involve schemes like housing teachers if they can't afford a property in areas of teacher shortage. Northern Ireland has an over subscription of teachers and the Council was looking there for teachers.

In response to a Member asking about the usefulness of data for teachers it was stated that the Council only collects data at a school level which was the headline data, whereas schools collect their own individual data. What the Local Authority has to be aware of is the data the schools are collecting accurate? Only then can the data be used to inform schools and teachers however, if the information is incorrect this cannot be done. This may involve training teachers and schools to collect data appropriately.

A Member wanted to ensure that the Syrian refugee children moving into North Yorkshire had been accounted for including where they would live, go to school etc. In reply it was pointed out that there is a North Yorkshire Syrian Refugee Group involving District/Borough Council partners to resolve these problems and that this had been accounted for.

A Member stated that infrastructure was a real issue particularly around new

housing settlements where the number of families' increases but the schools can't keep up with the rises. While you can expand a site to include another classroom you can't expand the kitchen, staff room, parking and other school infrastructure in the same way.

Resolved -

In consideration of the evidence heard from witnesses, the Committee agreed that it should write to North Yorkshire County Council's Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services with their observations and recommendations on the Closing the Gap Strategy for North Yorkshire and that the Councillors comments be collated and finalized into a response by the political group spokespeople at the Mid Cycle briefing scheduled for 4 December 2015.

79. Online Safety – 12 months follow up on the Task and Finish Group's success indicators (moved earlier due to time constraints)

Considered –

The report of Karen Squillino, NSPCC Schools Service, Schools Manager North Region to update the Committee on the implementation of the recommendations from the Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee task and finish group on Online Safety of Children and Young People.

The Committee noted that a campaign plan had been developed by the North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children's Board e-safety task group and was informed by a consultation event with children and young people in February 2013.

The aim of the plan had been to deliver a campaign in North Yorkshire which assisted parents to have conversations with their children about how to stay safe online and promoted online safety to children aged 8-12 years.

The campaign had begun with a period of planning and stakeholder consultation which had resulted in all local stakeholders having an understanding of and opportunity to input into the campaign. Parents feedback was influential in setting the content and tone of the resource for parents.

The campaign had produced a booklet for parents to access and created a number of events to raise awareness for parents and 8-12 year olds. Karen commented that all this campaign activity had now been mainstreamed.

The Committee thanked Karen for her work on the project and were pleased to see the follow up from the report 12 months ago. It did note that a number of success indicators from its task and finish group had looked for improvements being shown in the Growing up in North Yorkshire survey and would like to see the results from the 2016 survey when it had been analysed.

Resolved –

The Committee noted the report and agreed that a further update should be brought to the committee on the results from the 2016 Growing Up in North Yorkshire survey.

80. Report and recommendations from the LGBT Young People Task and Finish Group.

Considered –

The report of the Task and Finish Group.

Introducing the report, the Chairman of the Task and Finish Group, Councillor Arnold reported that the work that the Task and Finish Group had undertaken had been eye-opening and shocking at times. There was a significant difference in North Yorkshire between the experiences of an average Year 10 pupil and LGBT young people growing up. This ranged from increased bullying, poor emotional health and wellbeing and greater engagement in risky behaviours.

The Task and Finish Group had met local LGBT groups in North Yorkshire and listened to some of the stories and experiences LGBT people had when growing up and progressing through school. The findings and recommendations in the report were intended to guide the County Council and its partners on how to raise awareness of the issues faced by LGBT young people. They were also meant to help guide schools to take a more proactive approach in reducing homophobic, bi-phobic and transphobic bullying.

Members thanked Councillor Arnold and noted that this was a very important piece of work that had been undertaken and for those Members on the working group it had been thought provoking and engaging.

A Member commented that the recommendations of the working group were stronger in the draft format of the report. Resources weren't forthcoming so the Working Group curtailed its expectations as to what the County Council as an employer should do. In response Neil Irving (Assistant Director, Policy and Partnerships) highlighted that this was a reference to the County Council signing up to the Stonewall Charter a document pledging to eradicate all forms of workplace bullying and promoting equality regardless of sexuality, race, creed etc. It was noted that the County Council had previously participated in schemes such as the Investors in People however; this had to be stopped due to financial resources making the scheme unviable. It would then be inappropriate to sign up to one charter and not others, instead the resources are better focussed on internal policy and practice to eradicate inequalities.

A Member commented that in recommendation 2 and 3 on page 125 of the report that there was no mention of the VCSE sector. Voluntary and community groups have a big role to play in setting up LGBT groups as well as promoting equal access in their own projects and organisations so could this be written into the report. Councillor Arnold thanked the Member for the important point adding that this would be written into the final report.

A Member highlighted that the Church of England nationally had conflicting views on this issue; however, the Church was committed to fighting inequality and improving the prospects and life chances of young people.

The Committee noted that a video had been produced by the Harrogate LGBT Youth group and one by the Scarborough LGBT Youth group and a link to these videos should be sent to all members of the committee for them to look at.

The Committee agreed with the recommendations set out in the task and finish group's report and that they should be sent to the Council's Executive for its

consideration. It further agreed that the report should be considered again at the 29 January 2016 meeting following the decision at the Executive meeting.

Resolved –

(A) The report and recommendations from the LGBT Young People Task and Finish Group be agreed to be sent out to the Council's Executive for its consideration, and;

(B) The report should be considered again at the Committee's 29 January 2016 meeting following the decision at the Executive meeting.

81. Work Programme

Considered –

The report of the Scrutiny Team Leader inviting comments from Members on the content of the Committee's programme of work scheduled for future meetings.

Members praised the format of the Committee meeting.

Resolved - that the content of the work programme report and the work programme schedule are noted.

The meeting concluded at 15:50pm

MT/NW