

North Yorkshire Council

Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday, 17 September 2025 commencing at 10.00 am.

Councillor Barbara Brodigan in the Chair plus Councillors Caroline Goodrick, Alyson Baker, Stephanie Duckett, David Jeffels, Tom Jones, Cliff Lunn, John Mann, Andy Paraskos, Yvonne Peacock, Kirsty Poskitt, John Ritchie, Monika Slater, Andrew Timothy, Martin Macaulay and Gary McVeigh-Kaye.

In attendance: Councillor Roberta Swiers (part).

Officers present: Rosie Appleby (Head of Placement Support), Amanda Fielding (Assistant Director Inclusion), Sir Stuart Carlton (Corporate Director Children and Young People's Service), Alice Fox (Senior Scrutiny Officer), Daniel Harry (Head of Democratic Services), Mel Hutchinson (Assistant Director Children and Families), Diane Parsons (Principal Scrutiny Officer), Chris Watson (Corporate Strategy and Performance Lead).

Apologies: Councillor Nathan Hull, Stephen Jennings and David Sharp.

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

85 Welcome by the Chair

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. She informed the committee that due to the level of public interest the meeting was being live streamed, and that Item 8 (briefing on the Post Implementation Review of the Home to School Travel Policy) would now be heard at Item 6.

86 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Nathan Hull and co-optee members Stephen Jennings and David Sharp. Councillor Derek Bastiman attended as substitute for Councillor Nathan Hull.

87 Minutes of the meeting held on 18 June 2025

Resolved

That, the Minutes of the meeting held on 18 June 2025 be confirmed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

88 Declarations of interest

Councillors Brodigan, Bastiman, Duckett, Goodrick, Jeffels, Paraskos, Ritchie and Slater declared an interest as they are members of the Appeals (Home to School Transport) Committee. They were permitted to participate in Item 6 as it was a discussion on the proposed scope and timings of the Post Implementation Review, and not the development, implementation or application of the Home to School Transport Policy. Councillor Peacock declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest on the basis that she was a private hire driver.

She left the room when Item 6 was discussed.

89 Public questions/statements

Three public statements were received, and read as follows:

Statement 1: Jo Foster, S.T.A.G

Councillors,

Parents across North Yorkshire have lost faith in this council's school transport appeals process. They are sick of being put through a system that feels more concerned with protecting policy than protecting children.

Here are two examples of what is going wrong:

First, restrictions on representatives:

Six weeks ago, parents attending Stage 2 hearings were entitled to take a representative — just as they are in every other council in the land. They could work as a team to present the case clearly and take part in the question-and-answer sessions.

But from the 11th of August, that changed. Parents arrived to be told, without notice, that new restrictions were in place — representatives could only make a short closing statement, and were barred from asking or answering questions directly. Families who had prepared for weeks walked in to find the rules rewritten and, five weeks on, this gagging order remains in place. The motivation behind this move is worrying. Appeals must be based on fairness. To pile extra pressure on parent in this way tilts the balance in the Council's favour. One Conservative councillor has described the process as 'rigged to give the Authority an easy ride'.

Second, the handling of mistakes:

We know now that a catalogue of errors has been made in applying the policy. For example, school gates missing from maps, unviable routes used to calculate nearest schools and, the now accepted, plethora of communication failures. These same issues are cropping up time after time in appeals. Yet too many parents are still being denied transport, not through any fault of their own but on the back of mistakes like these made by the Council. I'm talking here about mistakes that have been acknowledged — not ones that are contested. Richard Flinton has at last confirmed such errors are valid grounds for appeal. Yet families still face a lottery — one week transport is granted on the back of accepted communication failures, the next week a case is rejected on the same grounds. No wonder parents are furious.

Families now attend Stage 2 hearings simply to "go through the motions." Many feel their only real hope for a fair trial lies with the Ombudsman. They describe the process as humiliating, upsetting, and pointless.

They are wondering what tricks are going to be played next. Just last week parents who requested minutes from their meeting were refused and told they must submit an FOI request. Why? The week before others had just been sent them. Goal posts shifting - again.

Attempts to stifling debate, failing to act on errors and changing the rules from one week to the next are signs of a broken process — and your help is needed to fix it.

Remember these people are not the enemy – they are just Mums and Dads trying to get their kids to school. And they are not asking for any favours. They are asking for a process that is fair, transparent, and consistent.

This committee's remit is to make sure the needs of children in our county are protected and that the Council is doing right by them. So, I ask you directly, today to call this out.

Demand an inquiry into the way these appeals are being run, before any more families are treated unjustly.

Please do not put your heads in the sand. North Yorkshire's children need you to speak up.

Response to Statement 1: Daniel Harry, Head of Democratic Services

The written guidance sent to appellants in advance of the Stage 2 appeals hearings explains that they can be accompanied to the hearing if they wish, for example by a support worker, friend or relative. Those people attending a Stage 2 appeal as a supporter can still make a statement at the meeting and supporters can then raise any points of clarification or questions through the appellant. There has been no 'restriction'.

The role of the Appeals (Home to School Transport) Committee, when considering a Stage 2 appeal, is to assess whether the Home to School Travel Policy, that was adopted by Council in July 2024, has been correctly applied and then to assess whether there are any exceptional individual circumstances that are significant enough to depart from the policy. This is in-line with the DfE Guidance 'Travel to school for children of compulsory school age' (2024). It is and always has been acceptable for appellants to submit information regarding the measurement of the statutory walking distance to the nearest school, the safety of the walked route to the nearest school and the suitability of the transport travel arrangements for an eligible child. All appeals are considered on their merits. This has been consistent throughout.

The Policy Implementation Review will look at the administration of the Home to School Travel Policy including a summary of the enquiries, complaints, appeals and the Council's responses to these.

Statement 2: Jo Foster, S.T.A.G

Home to School Transport Policy Review – a request.

Something has clearly gone wrong with Home to School Transport. The new policy is failing families, schools and communities across North Yorkshire.

Most of you already know this. You've seen it in your inboxes, in Stage 2 appeals, and in your local newspapers. For those who haven't, parents have asked me to extend a genuine invitation: they would value the chance to speak to you directly and share their stories.

Fifteen months on, it's clear that changing school transport eligibility has proved to be a lynchpin decision of this brand-new local authority — one that is set to define this council, and one that could shape the future of rural schools and communities for a generation. What looked manageable on paper has fallen flat in the real world, creating chaos, stress and hardship for families.

When this policy was passed in July 2024, members were promised safeguards:

- A post-implementation evaluation in Spring 2025.
- A policy review starting July 2025.
- And a working group to oversee the process.

None of these have been delivered. The evaluation was dropped. No working group was formed. And the review has been pushed back — with officers now suggesting Autumn 2026, meaning no change until September 2028 at the earliest.

Officers may argue the delay is to allow a full year of data. But the picture is already clear. We know how many children have chosen catchment versus nearest school, how many qualify for free transport, how many have slipped through the net, how many bus passes have been sold and on what routes, and what vehicles have been commissioned. That is more than enough to project forward and give a clear fiscal picture — exactly as intended when a 2025 review was promised to you ahead of last year's vote.

Can this council really afford three more years of this mess? Families left in limbo, schools destabilised, resources wasted, and trust draining away. And does anyone here really want this broken policy to be the backdrop to the 2027 elections?

On behalf of 857 members of the School Transport Action Group, we are asking you to act now:

1. When – start the review this year, with conclusions voted on next spring, so improvements are in place for September 2027.
2. What – make it comprehensive, taking a full 360° view of social, environmental, educational and community impacts, not just financials.
3. Who – it must be fully independent. Given everything that has happened, officers cannot be allowed to mark their own homework.
4. How – by voting today to recommend the formation of a politically neutral working group, including key stakeholders, to oversee and deliver a review that people can believe in.

These are not radical asks. They are simply about delivering on commitments made when this policy was first passed.

An accident of timing meant this committee was side-stepped last July. You didn't get the chance to scrutinise the policy then. This Policy Review is your chance to put that right.

Use the power you have. Please make sure this review happens this year and that it has proper teeth. Parents, schools — and above all, children — are depending on you.

Thank you.

Response to Statement 2: Amanda Fielding, Assistant Director Inclusion

Thank you for your statement. Your views on the policy are noted. The reasons that the post implementation review was agreed to take place in July 2026 are as you have suggested - there are benefits to seeing data associated with the 2025-26 academic year and this has been noted in the report presented in this meeting. The report also sets out the extent of the proposed content of the PIR.

However, to further your understanding I can provide some additional details about the timing of the review.

Whilst you are right in that we know how many NY children were offered places in which schools on national offer days in March and April this year, we always see significant movement between the national offer days and the new term in September. This year has been the same across primary and secondary places. As councillors know, changes in admissions result in changes to eligibility for H2ST.

And whilst you are right that we know how many children were eligible for travel when we assessed all admissions applications this summer, and whilst most appeals have been completed, this process is still underway and so the learning from appeals cannot yet be comprehensively evaluated. Passes have been sold on several contracted routes, but requests are still coming in and payments have not yet been taken.

Consequently, the focus of the transport team in recent weeks has been on ensuring arrangements are in place for known eligible children for the start of this academic year.

For the reasons given above, each September and October we see a settling of the network, and that will be true this year too. Regardless of the policy in place, many children move schools at this time of year, eligibility can change, and this requires adjustments to services especially over the first half of the autumn term.

We know that the network usually settles after a couple of months and by November we can start to evaluate the precise operational costs of the new school year's arrangements. This work alone is substantial as we look at the costs of supporting eligibility under the 2019

policy alongside eligibility under the new 2024 policy.

National school census information is collected in October, January and May each year. These are the data points that will provide accurate pupil cohort information allowing a more detailed analysis of pupil cohorts comparing this year to the same points in the two previous years. This will allow us to assess changes over time (both for admissions and transport) and understand what this means to NY schools. The second set of admissions data will allow us to identify any emerging patterns in admissions preferences and consider whether these could be connected to the home to school travel policy.

Finally, in November as part of our annual routine contract procurement exercise, roughly 30% of all mainstream home to school contracts are scheduled to be reviewed in time for April 2026. The completion of this exercise will allow accurate information to be fed into the PIR so that a robust evaluation of the cost of the policy change going forward can be considered.

Supplementary Question

Jo referred to the equality impact assessment which stated that the review would begin in July 2025. Amanda explained that Full Council agreed in July 2024 to amend the review start date to July 2026. Jo asked if the transport network for this year will become more settled by October 2025, could the review begin in November 2025, rather than July 2026. Amanda responded by saying that data is collated at different points in the year and not all of it will be available for analysis until July 2026.

Statement 3: Ian Shepherd

Adoption Disruption Procedures.

My wife and I adopted two children in 2010. After gradually escalating violence and criminality from my son - to the point where we were living for years in an essentially abusive household, in 2023 we were obliged to disrupt our adoption of him aged 15. Between the time that our adoption of him became fundamentally untenable and the time he was accommodated, my wife and I were badly treated by the very agents that should have been supporting us at that time but also for the preceding years. Our extended families were emotionally black-mailed and allusions were made to the consequences for my wife's employment should child protection arrangements be deemed necessary. Threats were made that our other child may be removed.

Once our son was accommodated – in the clumsiest, most traumatic way - I wondered why all we should have been treated in this way.

Thus, I requested to see the council procedures or guidelines that cover adoptive family breakdown, so that I could determine whether I had been badly treated as a result of missteps by individual social workers, or because of institutional systems that were operating exactly as intended by their architects. Essentially, I wanted to know if there existed a council document that read "Step 1: threaten the parents with prosecution for child abandonment".

My multiple requests were dismissed.

I conversed at length with my MP - his requests on my behalf were likewise dismissed - more than once.

These dismissals made me realise that either:

- this council has procedures of which it is ashamed
- this council is ashamed of lacking procedures in this area and is reluctant to admit it, or
- the council simply resents the prying of a mere *voter* into the mechanisms by which

it conducts itself. (Or of an MP, indeed).

I conclude by requesting in person that this committee shares with me the written guidelines or procedures governing family breakdown according to which I was treated and others remain governed – *or* admits to their absence.

Thank you.

Response to Statement 3: Mel Hutchinson, Assistant Director Children and Families

Thank you, Mr Shepherd for sharing your views and your difficult family circumstances with us.

Children's Services can confirm that all procedures are followed and in line with Statutory Regulation, under the Children Act 1989 and Adoption and Children Act 2002.

The Children Act 1989 sets out the framework for the support of children in need and this is underpinned by a Children and Families Assessment. The Adoption and Children Act is principal legislation that includes provisions and support for the welfare of children who require adoption support post the Adoption Order, granted by the court.

Children's Services practice model is strength based in relationships and looks to working with families and their family network to support and offer assistance to progress change, where able. For those families who are unable to care for their children, either by ensuring safety or maintaining the child living at home, those children are placed into the local authority care, under the Children Act 1989, by Section 31, Care Order or Section 20, voluntary agreement. Children can receive Section 17 support and accommodation when they reach 16 years old. A homeless assessment is undertaken, and consideration given to Section 17 services or Section 20, of the Children Act 1989.

North Yorkshire has clearly outlined these processes, and Regulation within previous communication. North Yorkshire like other Local Authorities within the Regional Adoption Agency does not have a separate policy on family breakdowns which occur after the making of an Adoption Order. All families regardless of whether the Young Person was adopted or not, fall under the same legislation of the Children Act 1989. As the child is legally adopted and part of their adoptive family the process followed is that of family breakdown which is overseen by Children's Services, Family Assessment and Support Team and in consultation with the Adoption Support Service throughout any assessment process.

The Adoption and Children Act 2002, and Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 state where a child who has been placed for adoption prior to the making of an Adoption Order, and this placement ends a disruption meeting is undertaken. This meeting is to understand the reasons for the disruption. Whilst this was not the policy/regulation required following your son not being able to remain in your care, we can confirm that the Assistant Director and Head of Service met with Mrs Shepherd and other parents to listen and understand individual circumstances.

We are confident that all policies and procedures were followed, and complaints received have been investigated fully.

Supplementary Question

Mr Shepherd asked if social workers are encouraged to threaten families with social abandonment. Mel replied that they are not. Instead, social workers work with families to explain the legislation, so everyone understands the process.

90 Chair's remarks

Due to today's full agenda, the Chair was unable to verbally provide her remarks under this

item. However, the key points around performance monitoring are provided under Item 9.

91 Progress on issues raised by the Committee

Considered

A report by Alice Fox, Senior Scrutiny Officer.

Resolved

- 1) That, the report is noted.
- 2) That, the Neurodiverse Member Champion report to be discussed at the next Mid Cycle Briefing.

92 Briefing relating to the Post Implementation Review of the Home to School Travel Policy

Considered

A report by Amanda Fielding, Assistant Director Inclusion.

Councillor Yvonne Peacock left the room for this item.

Amanda gave a summary of the report and asked for comments on the outline structure and content of the post implementation review (PIR) of the home to school travel policy. The committee had the following questions and comments:

- To what extent will colleagues in other council services referenced in the report be involved in the review and how will they work together?

Finance colleagues have full sight of the financial implications and will obtain information from the Integrated Passenger Transport Team who will provide financial data to them on a monthly basis. Current data on individual pupils is limited and the Admissions Team and the Transport Team will work together to provide data around those who are and are not eligible for transport. The Inclusion Team will provide SEND transport data and Transformation colleagues will work on the digital tool and calculator. Legal and Democratic Services will oversee the appeals.

- Why will it take so long to complete the review?

Data will be obtained at different times of the year and from different databases and datasets. Payments to transport providers are paid in arrears, so September/October payments are paid in November. It takes time to be able to gain a firm idea of the cost of the policy change. The May Census is the most comprehensive data.

- Will the May 2027 Elections impact the review, given that Purdah will start in March 2027?

Recommendations resulting from the PIR will be brought to the Executive in October/November 2026. If the Executive would like to make changes to the recommendations, this will be completed after November 2026 and before Spring 2027. Consultation will be carried out before Purdah. The report will come to

Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Audit Committee in September 2026.

- Please ensure that schools are notified of the policy well before parents start to apply to secondary schools.

Information was sent out to all schools to pass onto Year 6 families last year. This year, a dedicated school bulletin was circulated, and schools have been asked to share it with families to ensure they are all aware of the current policy. The council has also circulated a set of slides for schools to show to families at open evenings. A tick box has been included on application forms for families to confirm that they understand the policy.

- Can a rolling programme be introduced for the council to contact schools every year to check if any new gates or entrances to their premises have been installed. Schools are being contacted to request that they notify the council about any changes so that the mapping system can be updated if necessary.
- Given the feedback that some councillors have received from parents about the policy, is an internal review credible? Could there also be an independent oversight?

The review is comprehensive, and an independent review would not be recommended as it sets a precedent for other decision making within the council. Policy decisions are political and carried out in a structured and democratic way. They are not independent. There is not a legal requirement to do a policy review, it is undertaken as good practice. Officers would not recommend an independent review, but this is a decision for councillors to make.

- One councillor asked to clarify the appeals process, specifically whether a supporter can speak on behalf of the appellant. The Democratic Services Manager confirmed that the appellant can bring a supporter, but any questions or statements should come from the appellant. The supporter may be able to present the case in exceptional circumstances, and the appellant should talk to the committee before the meeting about it. It was acknowledged that the appeals process can be intimidating, and the appeals meeting can be adjourned if the appellant needs to take a break.

One councillor felt that scrutinising the PIR should be the responsibility of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Chair asked Amanda to review the indicative timeline and include more updates to the committee.

Councillor Poskitt stated that irrespective of how councillors voted on the home to school travel policy, it has had a significant impact on some families. She proposed a motion of setting up a politically balanced working group to ensure transparency, fairness and public confidence in the PIR. The Democratic Services Manager said a working group can be established, but the committee would usually decide whether one is needed after the work is finished, not while it is still ongoing. If a working group was set up now, there would essentially be two reviews running in parallel.

There followed a debate, which included its remit, terms of reference and implications on officer time. If the working group wanted to focus on the home to school transport policy, reports would be required for the Executive and Full Council. Since the policy was considered by Full Council in May 2025, it cannot be reconsidered until 12 months later, which would be after May 2026. It was pointed out that recommendations from the working group could have significant financial implications for the council.

Councillor Poskitt proposed the motion, and it was seconded by Councillor Slater.

Following the vote, the motion failed.

Resolved

- 1) That, the report is noted.
- 2) That, the Assistant Director Inclusion reviews the indicative timeline to include more updates to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 3) That, the motion to establish a working group is not supported.

93 Performance Report for Quarter 1 2025-26

Considered

A report by Alice Fox, Senior Scrutiny Officer.

Members asked the following questions:

- Are primary schools required to follow a council policy when it comes to permanent exclusions, or do they have their own procedures?

The head teacher will apply the school's behaviour policy and then make the decision on whether to permanently exclude a pupil. The local authority is notified of the exclusion and a statement of care will be drawn up. The council is currently carrying out a consultation to address the number of primary school exclusions and how excluded children may be taught in the future.

- Is data available to record the number of children coming back into mainstream schools after being home educated?

The council tracks the re-enrolments of pre-16-year-olds and this data will be incorporated into the next performance monitoring report. For post 16-year students, the council provides signposting to appropriate schools and colleges.

- Can the council manage the number of Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs) assessments?

The council has recruited more clinical psychologists to manage the backlog and continues to invest in officers to retain staffing levels.

- Why is the number of children in care so high?

The increase reflects the rise in referrals due to issues such as child poverty. North Yorkshire is still lower than regional and national figures.

- Is there any reason why the rate of first time entrants (FTEs) into the Criminal Justice System for North Yorkshire is higher than the national rate?

The most recent data for FTEs has shown that the numbers have reduced and are lower compared to figures from 5 years ago. Some cases included in the report includes offenders from Out of Area, and the Youth Justice Board is amending the way it measures offending rates to improve the accuracy of recoded data.

Resolved

- 1) That, the report is noted.

- 2) That, the next performance monitoring report includes the number of children who have re-enrolled in schools after being home educated.

94 Fostering Service Update

Considered

A report by Rosie Appleby, Head of Placement Support.

Rosie provided a summary of the report. The Mockingbird Family Model has proved to be very effective in supporting foster families and children, and the council has recently recruited to a fourth Mockingbird Hub Home in Selby.

Whilst it was welcomed that there are 52 post 18 year old foster young people who are still living with their foster families, it was acknowledged that this impacts the number of available foster carers. However, there continues to be a steady number of enquiries and recruitment of family and friend foster carers, and a high number of children are remaining in North Yorkshire.

Rosie informed the committee that Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) who are under 16 years are placed in foster care, whilst those aged 16-18 years move into supported accommodation.

It was noted that there are gaps in the data in Appendix 5 of the report (children looked after achieving 9-4 pass in English and Maths). The table will be updated and circulated to the committee.

Resolved

- 1) That, the report is noted.
- 2) That, further data for children in care achieving 9-4 pass in English and Maths from 2017 – 2024 is circulated to the committee.
- 3) That, an update is provided next year.

95 North Yorkshire Council Adoption Service

Considered

A report by Rosie Appleby, Head of Placement Support.

Rosie provided a summary of the report. She highlighted that most children being placed for adoption remain in North Yorkshire and the Humber. Adoptions for North Yorkshire remains low, which demonstrates that's it is in line with the practice model. The figure of 11 children with Agency Decision Maker (ADM) approval for Q1 2025/26 is higher than previous quarters as this includes siblings within the same family. Over the last five years, there have been no pre-adoption disruption orders which demonstrates that the right adoption matches are in place.

Once an adoption order has been granted, the child falls under the same legislation as every other child, which is the Children Act, and there is not a separate policy on family breakdowns. Numbers of family breakdowns post-adoption order are very low, and support is provided, ensuring that statutory procedures are followed throughout.

The government funding for the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) has changed the remit on the total amount of funding that can be claimed. To mitigate the impact of this, the Regional Adoption Agency has advised that service providers are

adjusting their pricing structures and so the impact on families has been minimal. North Yorkshire Council will be closely monitoring this.

Resolved

- 1) That, the report is noted.
- 2) That, an update is provided next year.

96 Work programme 2025-2026

Considered

Workplan for 2025-2026.

It was pointed out that the independent trust which will be providing SEND support on the former Holy Family School in Carlton will not affect the council's SEND school being built in Selby.

There was a request for the SEND update at December's meeting to include some information of how many of the primary and secondary school exclusions were SEND pupils.

There was also a request for an update on the special school being built on the former Woodfield School site in Harrogate.

Resolved

- 1) That, the workplan is noted.
- 2) That, updates on SEND primary and secondary school exclusions and the new special school to be brought to December's committee meeting, if not before.

97 Any other items

The Chair has received a letter from Settle College regarding the Home to School Transport Policy requesting for it to be circulated to members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. It was agreed to also circulate it to members of the Appeals (Home to School Transport) Committee and to the Director of Children and Young People's Service.

The committee wished Sir Stuart Carlton all the best in his retirement as Corporate Director.

Resolved

- 1) That, the letter from Settle College will be circulated to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Appeals (Home to School Transport) Committee and the Director of Children and Young People's Service.

98 Date of next meeting

Wednesday 17 December 2025, County Hall, Northallerton, commencing at 10am.

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The meeting concluded at 12.30 pm.