

# North Yorkshire Council

## Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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

Councillor Barbara Brodigan in the Chair plus Councillors Caroline Goodrick, Alyson Baker, Stephanie Duckett, David Jeffels, Cliff Lunn, Andy Paraskos, Yvonne Peacock, Kirsty Poskitt, John Ritchie, Monika Slater, Andrew Timothy and David Sharp.

In attendance: Councillors Janet Sanderson and Annabel Wilkinson (via Teams) and Councillor Carl Les.

Officers present: Amanda Fielding (Assistant Director, Education and Inclusion), Alice Fox (Senior Scrutiny Officer), Jonny Hoyle (Group Leader, Leaving Care), Mel Hutchinson (Assistant Director Children and Families), Diane Parsons (Principal Scrutiny Officer), Heather Pearson (Chair of NYSCP and Independent Scrutineer), Chris Reynolds (Head of SEND Strategic Planning and Resources), Cath Ritchie (Transformation and Innovation Manager), Pete Thorpe (Interim Director of Children Services).

Other Attendees: Sarah Holbird, Bethany Laskey-Heard and Luke Mackintosh (Appeals Team).

Apologies: Councillor John Mann, Tom Cavell-Taylor, Stephen Jennings, Martin Macaulay and David Watson.

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### Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

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#### 99 Welcome by the Chair

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

#### 100 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor John Mann, and Co-Optee Members Dr Tom Cavell-Taylor, Stephen Jennings, Gary McVeigh-Kaye and David Watson.

#### 101 Minutes of the Meeting held on 17 September 2025

The Chair informed members that there that there has been a correction to the Progress on Issues Raised report regarding the Post Implementation Review (PIR). It was previously stated that all necessary PIR data will be collated by Spring 2026. This has now been corrected to say "Children and Young People's Service will have started to collate data for the PIR by Spring 2026. The planned PIR timeline includes attendance at a Members' Seminar in March 2026 to present an update".

#### Resolved

That, subject to the changes stated above, the Minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2025 be confirmed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

#### 102 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

## 103 North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (NYSCP) Annual Report 2024-2025

### Considered

An update by Heather Pearson, Chair of NYSCP and Independent Scrutineer. Heather explained that the Partnership regularly reviews national reforms and although there are already strong arrangements in place, they will still look to improve how multi-agency teams work together.

Members of the Committee asked the following questions:

#### **How is the Partnership working to improve the emotional and mental health of children and young people, especially Yr 8 and Yr 10 girls?**

Heather explained that partners regularly meet, and they receive updates from the Health and Wellbeing Board.

#### **70% of children think “lots of people care about them”. How does this compare to children in other parts of the country?**

North Yorkshire benefits from regular feedback from children, primarily through the Growing Up in North Yorkshire Survey, which allows year-on-year comparisons. Although there are no national benchmarks for comparison, the 70% figure is not considered a concern. Heather can take on targeted work to address areas of concern. For example, she is currently exploring if there are ways to improve the process for handling child sexual abuse cases.

### Resolved

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

## 104 Public questions/statements

There were no public questions or statements.

## 105 Chair's remarks

The Chair attended the quarterly performance review meeting but was unable to attend the Executive on 18 November. Councillor Baker provided feedback on the children and young people's related questions she asked.

#### **Timeliness of Children and Families Assessments – whilst performance is above the national average and the statistical neighbour average, performance has deteriorated. Why and what is being done to address this?**

Whilst timeliness of assessments was above national and statistical neighbour averages, completion times had increased due to record numbers of contacts at the front door, and also from police and health services. Actual referral numbers were falling and practice incentive training was being implemented to improve timeliness.

#### **Child Protection Plans (CPP) – what is driving the increase in the number of Child Protection Plans and what is being done to address the underlying causes? A CPP relates to ‘children presenting to services at risk of significant harm’ and so the increase is concerning.**

Numbers of child protection plans were at a ten-year high, reflecting societal pressures and rising deprivation. A shift in the deprivation profile of North Yorkshire showed more were

living in the 30% most deprived communities and fewer in the least deprived, which was an indication of when families would come under strain. Thresholds were being reviewed and early help provided where needed.

**Timeliness of EHC plans – the high performance for the timeliness of new EHC plan is encouraging. How are schools managing with the resultant increase in children with a plan on the school roll and the additional time and resources that it requires to meet these assessed and documented needs?**

Schools were adapting to the increased use of Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans by deploying specialist staff, investing in training, and working closely with the Council and external agencies. The Council would continue to advocate nationally for fair funding and it was noted that North Yorkshire remained one of the lowest funded authorities for high needs, ranking 146 out of 151. The importance of ensuring that funding followed identified need was highlighted, regardless of whether a child had an EHC plan or a formal diagnosis.

## **106 Progress on issues raised by the Committee**

### **Considered**

A report by Alice Fox, Senior Scrutiny Officer

A detailed discussion took place about the proposal to appoint a Neurodivergent Young People's Champion, which had been deferred from the last committee meeting. It was recognised that the Young People's Member Champion approaches her responsibilities with great diligence and is fully committed to championing all children and young people.

A vote was taken and the results were as follows:

- 6 votes against the proposal.
- 6 votes in favour of waiting until the final version of the Children's and Wellbeing Bill is published before deciding whether a Neurodivergent Young People's Champion is required.

The Chair used their casting vote and it was resolved that the Committee will wait until the final version of the Children's and Wellbeing Bill is published before deciding whether a Neurodivergent Young People's Champion is required.

### **Resolved**

That, the Committee will receive a summary of the final version of the Children's and Wellbeing Bill (due to be published in early 2026) before it decides whether a Neurodivergent Young People's Champion is required for North Yorkshire Council.

## **107 Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Notice of Motion**

### **Considered**

A report by Alice Fox, Senior Scrutiny Officer.

This item was chaired by Councillor Goodrick, Vice-Chair of the Committee, due to the proposer of the Motion being Councillor Brodigan.

Councillor Brodigan welcomed the Government's White Paper on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) but expressed concern about the high levels of profits made by private SEND providers. As seconder of the Motion, Councillor Timothy talked about the financial hardships that some schools are experiencing because of the high costs of SEND

support. It was clarified that when the Motion refers to “private” SEND providers, it means equity backed private providers and not the voluntary sector.

Amanda Fielding, Assistant Director Inclusion, explained that there are some children requiring specialist support that can only be provided by the private sector, and this can be costly. National SEND reforms appear to be following a similar approach to North Yorkshire, with an increase in Targeted Mainstream Provision (TMPs) and special schools, and a strong focus on keeping children within their local communities rather than placing them across the county. However, we will have to wait until the White Paper is published. The Council has a choice on whether to use an independent provider and is looking to increase capacity of council-owned provision. There are currently 280 children (representing 4.5% of all children with an Education, Health and Care Plan, accounting for 22% of the total high needs block allocation) in independent special schools, with some being in North Yorkshire and some out of county. The quality of provision is closely monitored and for the most complex cases, a panel regularly meets with health and social care professionals to obtain a comprehensive overview of the placement.

Members discussed the issue of supply and demand, and it was commented that if private providers stopped making a profit, they would withdraw their services, leaving children without any support at all.

Following the debate, a vote was taken, and the results were as follows:

- 8 votes against the Motion.
- 3 votes for the Motion.
- 1 vote to Abstain.

### **Resolved**

That, the Motion is not supported.

## **108 Approach to, and use of, Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Children's Services**

### **Considered**

A report by Jonny Hoyle, Group Manager, Leaving Care and Cath Ritchie, Transformation and Innovation Manager.

Jonny provided an overview of the report, highlighting how officers utilise AI tools such as Magic Notes and Policy Buddy, alongside developing a tool called FinYd. He explained that the council’s approach to AI is to focus on functionality, rather than the products because these will change over time and that the tools currently being used are only rolled out after a significant amount of pre-testing to identify and remedy any issues.

It was stressed that the AI programmes have been developed to assist officers, and they are still expected to liaise with their managers for advice and support.

Some Members were concerned about General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and whether external bodies could access confidential information.

Cath explained that FinYd, Magic Notes and Policy Buddy are corporate tools, the questions, answers, and information from Policy Buddy are secure. The teams work closely with data governance colleagues so that, in the case of Magic Notes, once case notes have been written, they are securely stored in the case management system. Whilst the intention is to give other Local Authorities the ability to have their own version of FinYd, they would not be able to access North Yorkshire information when using it.

Cath also provided reassurance that AI development also includes thorough review and sign off from data governance, information security, and completion of an AI Ethics impact assessment.

During a pilot of Magic Notes with Social Workers, testers said that using the tool saved them up to a day per week of administration time, so they have more time to directly support children and their families, which is invaluable.

The Chair invited Jonny and Cath to provide an update at a future meeting, especially considering that AI programmes are constantly being updated and improved.

### **Resolved**

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

## **109 Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Inclusion Update**

### **Considered**

A report by Chris Reynolds, Head of SEND Strategic Planning and Resources.

Chris gave an overview of the report, highlighting the steps taken to ensure the best possible outcomes for SEND young people as they transition into adulthood. The number of SEND children and young people is continuing to increase both locally and nationally. Chris informed the Committee that the Executive agreed at their meeting on 16 December that the age range at 3 Pupil Referral Units (PRU) in Northallerton, Skipton and Selby will be lowered to 5-16 years.

Members asked the following questions:

### **Do we know how many SEND children are in elective home education (EHE) or have been suspended or excluded from school?**

Regarding EHE, Children's Services can record SEND figures at the pre-decision stage, but it is up to the families to declare if their child has additional needs. Many children who request to be home educated have mental health and anxiety issues, and the Council work hard to support them to still attend school. Schools are encouraged to participate in the pre-decision meetings.

The reason a child is suspended or excluded may be due to an unidentified SEND issue, and parents can speak to Children's Services about this. Schools have a duty to inform the Council of any exclusions, and in some cases, the Council has challenged their decision, and an exclusion has been overturned, with reasonable adjustments put in place so the child can remain in a school environment.

Children's Services recognise that some schools have higher suspension and exclusion rates than others and is actively challenging them on this.

### **How can we make sure that those who are home educated are able to attend a school or college to sit their GCSE exams?**

The Council can signpost to schools and colleges but if a child is home educated, the parents are responsible for securing a place and paying exam fees. Schools and colleges are not legally obliged to provide a place.

### **How long does it take for an academy school to open (such as the new special school to be built on the former Woodfield Community Primary School)?**

There is a lengthy process that an academy trust must go through, which includes securing a funding agreement from the Secretary of State. Arranging land transfers or lease agreements take at least 12 months. The consultation with families regarding the former Woodfield Community Primary School is due to start in early 2026, but an opening date is yet to be confirmed.

**It is encouraging to hear that Supported Internships have doubled to 106 in the last year. Are there any further targets we are aiming for?**

The Council is working to bring more employers and providers on board to increase placements and internships.

**There will always be a demand for SEND provision in the Scarborough area. Will there be more Targeted Mainstream Provision (TMP)?**

Scarborough has been identified as an area of high SEND need and schools will be invited to apply.

**Resolved**

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

#### **110 Child Death Overview Panel Annual Report**

**Considered**

To note the Child Death Overview Panel Annual Report 2024-2025.

**Resolved**

That, the report was noted with no further questions or lines of enquiry.

#### **111 Work programme**

**Considered**

Workplan for 2025-2026.

**Resolved**

That, the workplan is noted.

#### **112 Any other items**

There were no other items of business.

#### **113 Date of next meeting**

Wednesday 25 March 2026, County Hall, Northallerton, commencing at 10am.

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The meeting concluded at 12.45 pm.