

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

16 FEBRUARY 2022

STATEMENT OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES PORTFOLIO HOLDER

Virtual School Graduation Ceremony

The Virtual School held an online graduation ceremony on the evening of 27th January, inviting all the young people who are in our care or care leavers who have completed Secondary school, Further Education and Higher Education courses, as well as inviting inspiring care leavers to share their stories.

It was well attended with over 100 people listening to the welcome from myself as Lead Member and Stuart Carlton. We celebrated achievements including, passing their GCSEs, A levels and University Graduation with flying colours, as well as engaging in education through adverse and challenging circumstances. Each of the 19 young people had a video message from important people such as foster carers, teachers, social workers and leaving care workers and then celebrated in their own breakout room. I would like to send my huge thanks to the University of York for their sponsorship for this wonderful event.

Children & Families Performance

As we continue to return to some degree of normality, we continue to see demand remain high for North Yorkshire's Children and Families Service. Whilst the number of contacts to the front door has reduced by 5.1%, partially due to universal services being encouraged to undertake an Early Help Assessment, the number of referrals to Children's Social Care remain high, increasing by 41 (3.8%) compared to Q3 last year, with 1,115 referrals received last Quarter. The reduction in the number of contacts and continuing high referral rate is suggestive of more families presenting at the "front door" needing support from statutory Child Protection Services.

Despite more families needing support, assessments are still being completed in a timely manner, with 99% of assessments completed in the 45 working day threshold, with the average duration being 16 working days (nearly half the national average of 30 days). Reflective of the sustained referrals, we are seeing an increase in the number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan, up to 418 at the end of Q3 – an increase of 92 compared to Q3 2020/21. The continuing demand is leading to some teams facing pressures from a high number of cases coupled with increasing complexity.

Whilst the number of referrals and Child Protection plans have increased, the number of Children in Care (excluding UASCs) remains stable at 403 compared to 402 last Quarter. This being said, the increase in children subject to child protection plans coupled with the increased complexity of cases may result in an increase in the number of children in care. We are continuing to see Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires indicating an increase in the mental health and wellbeing needs of children in our care, with scores rising from 14 at the end of 2020/21 to 17 (a higher score being indicative of raised mental health needs). Given the strains and pressures on wellbeing brought about by the pandemic this increase is not unexpected and the service is undertaking focused work to ensure that children in care receive the right support at the right time. There has been a slight decrease in performance against health checks during Quarter 3, although this is largely due to the impact of the vaccine rollout on health colleagues.

Local Area Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Strategy

As highlighted in my November Statement, a period of formal consultation on the common aims, principles and strategic priorities of a refreshed Local Area SEND Strategy has now concluded.

The strategy aims to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND across the county by identifying needs early, providing timely and effective support at all levels and being ambitious for their future and has been developed in partnership with, and the support of, North Yorkshire County Council, Local NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups and Parent Carer Voice.

The outcome of this formal consultation and the draft Strategy will be presented to The Executive and full Council once finalised.

Medium Term Financial Strategy & Beyond 2020

The main financial pressure for the Directorate continues to be an increase in the number of children assessed as requiring Education, Health and Care Plans. This impacts on high needs and SEND budgets, SEND transport and sufficiency of specialist and local placements. Despite additional funding announcements for high needs in 2022-23, this does not provide any additional funding for the cost of SEND Transport which is funded by the local authority.

Following a DfE consultation late in Autumn Term 2021, the DfE have announced proposals that will withdraw 50% of the School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering Grant by April 2022; 100% of the grant will be withdrawn by April 2023. Regulatory changes enable the local authority to seek to de-delegate funding, with the agreement of the local Schools Forum, to fund core, statutory functions. Following discussions with the North Yorkshire Schools Forum, the local authority have submitted a disapplication request to the Secretary of State to de-delegate funding in 2022-23. We will continue to work with maintained schools and the Schools Forum on a sustainable model for 2023-24 onwards.

Although this information appears in my Statement to Council it should be noted that both Executive Members for the Children and Young People's Service have joint responsibility for all relevant resources.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR JANET SANDERSON