

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

16TH FEBRUARY 2022

STATEMENT OF CHAIR

YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Early Years Sector

The Committee received a briefing from Helen Smith, Early Years Strategy Manager, which outlined how the Directorate has maintained contact with and supported the Sector during the Pandemic. For example:-

- The phone line remained open, providing individual support; advice and interpretation of Guidelines. Communications from the Department for Education were disseminated as soon as they were received.
- Resource Packs; Craft Packs and Book Packs were distributed to vulnerable families and the Inclusion Education Service maintained relationships for children with Special Educational Needs.
- Eleven Early Years Hubs were set up across the county to provide care for 0-5 year old children.
- Termly engagement sessions were held with the Sector to get an on the ground picture of the situation. This was fed into the Department for Education to help them to determine the assistance required.
- Financial support, which included up-front payments to registered providers.

Helen responded to questions from Members, which included: How does the work undertaken by the Rt. Hon. Andrea Leadsom, MP, around family hubs (*The best start for life: a vision for the 1001 critical days*) fit in with the Early Years Programme; and how we access people who may not be in Early Years provision and ensure that they receive the support they need.

One Adoption Agency – North and Humber, Annual Report 2020/2021

Martin Kelly, Assistant Director, updated the Committee on this. North Yorkshire is one of five authorities who comprise this Adoption Agency. Martin highlighted a number of areas:-

- Covid has, of course, impacted on the work of the Agency but it has been more on ways of working than the performance of the Agency, thankfully.
- There has been an increase of 10% in the number of adoptive families approved.
- The number of children placed has increased by 6%.
- There has been a doubling of the number of children who were placed under early permanence arrangements. (Early permanence is where children in care are placed directly with a family that foster them, with a view to adoption, if Court agreement is given). There are several benefits of early permanence including a reduction in the number of moves a child will have and increased opportunity for children to develop an early attachment.)
- There has been an increase of 66% in sibling groups placed. This is very positive news, as it is a good outcome when children from the same family are placed together.

Child Death Overview Panel Annual Report 2020/2021

James Parkes, Children Safeguarding Manager at the North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership, took Members through the Panel's Annual Report. Among the elements he highlighted were the following:-

- Over the last 12-18 months, the Panel were expecting to see an increase in the number of child deaths. Thankfully, this has not been the case - both locally and nationally there has been a reduction during the reporting period.
- There has been an increase in the number of drug related deaths, but there have been no deaths related to Covid itself across York and North Yorkshire.
- The Panel has two priorities – Safe Sleep and Suicide Prevention. Since the beginning of 2020 there have no reported suspected suicides.
- 25 children have died during the reporting period. This is the lowest reported number within the life of the Panel.
- The highest risk age category are children aged under one.
- The job of the Panel is to review all child deaths and ascertain whether there are any modifiable factors to reduce the risk. For example, the Sleep Right Initiative works to give the right messages and support to families so they can be informed how best to care for their children and hopefully avoid any unexpected death.

Members were struck by James concluding comments – this is a sad area of our work but one we take with respect and give each case the respect, care, and dignity it requires.

James responded to questions concerning the higher death rate in males; the Sleep Right Initiative; and how can we get over the message that it is not cool to take drugs and that they can, ultimately, result in people dying.

Looking ahead

The Agenda for our next meeting, on 25th February, will comprise:-

- Children's Mental Health
- Schools Update
- Annual Update from the Young People's Champion
- Reflections and the future

If I can say a little about the Reflections and the future Item... This will look back at the work of the Committee over the last five years and ask Members to provide their views on a *long list* of potential areas from which a future Work Programme could be developed.

This is my final report to Council on the work of the Committee, prior to the elections in May 2022. I am grateful to all Members and Officers from the Council and its Partners – past and present – for their support and contribution to the work of the Committee. Particular thanks to my Vice-Chair, County Councillor Gillian Quinn; the Political Group Spokespersons – County Councillors Stephanie Duckett and Annabel Wilkinson – and the Portfolio Holders, County Councillors Janet Sanderson and Patrick Mulligan, for having given their time to update the Committee on key developments in their respective areas.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR JANET JEFFERSON

4th February 2022