

North Yorkshire County Council

Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Friday 10th December 2021 at 10.00 a.m.

Present: County Councillor Janet Jefferson in the Chair.

County Councillors: Cliff Lunn, John Mann, Stuart Martin, MBE, Richard Musgrave, Joe Plant and Annabel Wilkinson.

Portfolio Holder: County Councillor Janet Sanderson, Executive Member for Children's Services.

Officers: Patrick Duffy, Principal Democratic Services Scrutiny Officer, Martin Kelly, Assistant Director, Children and Families, James Parkes, North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership – Partnership Manager and Helen Smith, Early Years Strategy Manager

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Val Arnold and Gillian Quinn, Tom Cavell-Taylor (Governor Representative), Stephen Maltby (Primary Teacher Representative) and Ross Strachan (Secondary Teacher Representative), David Sharp (Voluntary Sector), David Watson (Voluntary Sector) and Portfolio Holder, County Councillor Patrick Mulligan, Executive Member for Education and Skills

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

234. Welcome and introductions

The Chair welcomed people to the meeting and Members introduced themselves.

The Chair made the following statement:

You will have seen the statement on the Agenda frontsheet about current decision-making arrangements within the Council, following the expiry of the legislation permitting remote committee meetings. I just want to remind everyone, for absolute clarity, that this is an informal meeting of the Committee Members. Any formal decisions required will be taken by the Chief Executive Officer under his emergency delegated decision-making powers after taking into account any of the views of the relevant Committee Members and all relevant information. This approach has been agreed by full Council and will be reviewed in February 2022.

235. Minutes

Resolved –

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 3rd September 2021, be confirmed and signed by the Chair as a correct record subject to it being noted that, under Minute No. 228, Portfolio Holder's Statement, the Review led by Josh MacAlister (The Case for Change – The Independent Review of Children's Social Care) is a National – not a Local Authority – Review.

236 Any Declarations of Interest

There were none.

237. Public Questions

There were no public questions or statements.

238. Chair's Remarks

The Chair advised that she had attended an interesting Members Seminar and that at a recent Executive Meeting, Councillor Annabel Wilkinson had raised an issue on Ofsted.

The Chair further reported that she had raised a matter under the Opportunity Area Programme concerning the *Glasses for Classes* initiative. Not having vision issues correctly diagnosed, can affect people's lives. Sixteen Schools in the county have registered for the initiative so far. It is important that this is taken forward.

The Chair added that it is encouraging to see that the number of children being electively home educated is reducing, together with exclusions, as a result of the ladders of intervention. It is good that the Policy on Elective Home Education is now in place.

She has received a report on Emotional Wellbeing, which she will arrange to be forwarded to the Committee.

NOTED.

239. Early Years Sector

Considered –

A briefing by Helen Smith, Early Years Strategy Manager, on the Early Years Sector.

Helen presented a number of slides, which outlined how the Directorate had supported Early Years settings during the Pandemic and what is being done, moving forward.

Her presentation is available via this link:-

[Early Years Briefing](#)

Helen highlighted a number of matters, including the following:

- The quote that *Society is what happens when babies grow up* underpins Early Years. People tend to think of early years as when, say, children start in reception or begin their education, but it begins from the antenatal stage with families. This is where the greatest opportunity is.
- From March to July 2020, when Providers had to close, the Directorate kept in contact with the children and maintained relationships.
- A lot of communications work and support for the Sector and families was provided. The Directorate has statutory duties to ensure that it improves outcomes

for children and that sufficient childcare places are available to enable families to work or take up training and share information with families and Providers. The phone line remained open throughout the Pandemic, providing individual support and advice and interpretation of Guidelines by the Families Information Services Assistant. Communications from the Department for Education were disseminated as soon as they were received.

- Another statutory duty is that every child must have a Key Worker – this was a vital link during lockdown.
- 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.
- Where Early Years Providers had to close, we asked that they notify the Local Authority and we kept in touch with the vulnerable 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.
- Monitoring took place via a twice-weekly Department for Education data collection process with Local Authorities, to ascertain aspects such as:-
 - How many Providers were open/closed?
 - How many children were attending?
 - How many of the children had a Social Worker or Education Health Plan in place?
- The results of the Annual Coram Childcare Survey are being analysed. This asks settings what impact the Pandemic has had on them and how they are coping.
- The Authority's "Grow and Learn" and Early Help pages on Facebook were utilised throughout the Pandemic to provide reassurance to people that Early Years is a safe place to take their children.
- Financial support has been available nationally and locally. In North Yorkshire financial support included:-
 - Up-front payment to Registered Providers of 80% of the Summer 2020 Term funding payment made in April 2020, with the balance paid in August 2020; replacing monthly payments.
 - Payments to Registered Providers open over the Easter and May half term for key workers' children and vulnerable children, when early years funding would normally stop.
 - Double funding for key workers' children and vulnerable children unable to access their normal funded place and accessing a funded place at alternative provision from 23rd March 2020 to 31st May 2020.

- During the Autumn Term, support included resuming the Early Years Leaders Forum on Microsoft Teams and distribution of £140,000 to families of 3 and 4 year old children in receipt of Early Years Pupil Premium.
- From January 2021, the instruction from Government was that Early Years should remain open and continue to all children to attend full time or their usual timetable hours.
- As part of the School Readiness “Grow and Learn” Pilot, the Behavioural Insights Team identified that two-year old funding was an area where a Behavioural Insights approach could be used to increase take up of funding by auto-enrolment. Families on the DWP were issued with “Golden Ticket” letters to enable them to access a Government-funded two-year old place from January 2021, without the need for them to apply.
- The number of Providers has dropped but as a county we are stable; some have retired; and some changed direction - but into another part of the Sector.
- Support for the Sector continues. For example, two new Early Years Advisors posts were established from September 2021, whose main task is to improve standards across the Sector.
- The impact of the Grow and Learn Pilot, from January 2020 to June 2021, includes an Integrated Review Pilot in Craven for two-year-old checks with Early Years Providers, the Healthy Visiting Service and Early Help.
- Small Grants are available from the Grow and Learn Pilot and through the Opportunity Area and Stronger Communities, who are still funding applications in the Scarborough, Ryedale and Whitby areas.
- Support has been secured from the Local Government Association to help develop an Early Years and Childcare Strategy, building on the critical first 1001 days of a child’s life and we are working with Public Health on a range of matters such as the launch, in November, of a Healthy Early Years Award.

The Chair thanked Helen for her informative presentation and for explaining the situation with regard to the two-year funding, as this was a subject that the Committee has been interested in and concerned about – particularly in the vulnerable areas of the county. It is interesting to see what so many Providers have been able to do during the Pandemic.

Councillor Janet Sanderson referred to 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* and asked how this fits in with the Early Years Programme. Helen Smith responded that if a child has a poor start in life this is overcomeable if measures can be put in place to mitigate this. Babies can experience trauma, which may not become clear until they reach an Early Years setting or start School and present challenging behaviour. A lot of work is being undertaken on parent and infant mental health ties and this links in with the Early Years Strategy. We have to get it right for parents so that we can get it right for the children. If we can get it right for children aged 0-5, this is where we can make the greatest impact.

Councillor Joe Plant expressed his thanks to everyone involved in this work – particularly over the last year or so. He referred to the possible roll out across the County of the Integrated Review Pilot in Craven. Will it be possible or not? Helen Smith advised that the Well Comm Assessment and Early Talk Boost Intervention Pathway had been trialled as part of the Grow and Learn Pilot. It is an assessment tool to assess speech and language development. The Report from the Pilot will be

considered by Senior Leaders in the Directorate, who will make the decision. Councillor Plant added that the sooner the decision is known the better.

Councillor Plant also referred to the £153 million funding for training and asked what sort of training this will cover. In response, Helen Smith stated that this was part of the Early Years Recovery package by the Department for Education, which was announced to support the Early Language Programme. It would include:-

- £17 million to support the Nuffield Early Language Programme; and
- £10 million into the Professional Development Programme

Funding will also be used for:-

- Reforming the Level 3 Qualification;
- A Level 3 SENCO Qualification; and
- A National Professional Qualification for Early Years Leadership, from Autumn 2022

Expressions of Interest have been sought from Early Years settings to become experts, mentors, and Area Leads, with the aim that they will be able to provide support for others in the Sector.

Councillor Annabel Wilkinson asked how we access people who may not be in Early Years provision and ensure that they receive the support they may require. In addition, deaf children between the ages of 3 and 5 are three times more likely to have mental health problems if they are language deprived. In addition, how many deaf children are there in the county and what support do they receive? Helen Smith said she would find out the numbers from colleagues. For children not in an Early Years setting, the Healthy Child Programme is key, as it links to Health Visitors and Assistant Child Practitioners. Multi-Agency working is vital.

Councillor Annabel Wilkinson said it was reassuring to know that monitoring of all our young people occurs – not just those who are in Early Years settings.

Councillor John Mann commented on the eleven Early Years Hubs that had been introduced at the start of lockdown. He considered it imperative for there to be a safe, secure place of learning and asked if plans are in place for these to continue if there is a further lockdown. He added that mental health episodes and obesity rates had increased during lockdown. Therefore, it is vital to have these hubs.

Helen Smith responded that the hubs were set up as a temporary measure, when the situation was at its worst. It would be a decision for Senior Management as to whether they would need to be reintroduced though, clearly, everyone is hoping that there will be no further lockdown.

In reiterating her thanks to Helen Smith, the Chair asked that she convey the appreciation of the Committee to staff and Providers for their work.

240 Annual Report – One Adoption North and Humber – 1st April 2020 – 31st March 2021

Considered -

A briefing by Martin Kelly, Assistant Director, Education and Skills, which summarised the afore-mentioned Annual Report.

He highlighted the following, in particular:-

- In 2018, a Government decision was taken to bring Regional Authorities together to make the best use of adopters assessed nationally and locally, alongside the needs of the children to be matched and to bring that together in a regional approach.
- The five Authorities that comprise the North and Humber Agency are:-
 - Hull
 - East Riding
 - York
 - North Yorkshire
 - North East Lincolnshire
- 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, for example, been a move towards virtual meetings but, for the final Adoption Order, it is important that people come together face to face. This has been a challenge. The impact has been less in North Yorkshire as a lot of work has been done to keep children amongst their families. Therefore, our adoption rates are relatively low which, in the Pandemic, has been a positive thing.
- The Pandemic has also impacted on adoption support staff, who have worked to find innovative ways to continue to support families.
- In terms of data:-
 - there has been an increase of 10% in number of adoptive families approved;
 - the number of children placed has increased by 6%;
 - 91% of the five Local Authorities children were placed with the Regional Agency adopters. This allows Social Workers the scope to offer greater support than where placements occur further afield;
 - only two children in North Yorkshire are currently awaiting adoption;
 - 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; and
 - 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.
- Where possible, placements are made locally and regionally but, occasionally, it is appropriate for external placements to be made.
- Adoption support remains a key priority for the Agency's Adoption Teams, who have capacity to support prompt assessment.
- The Peer Mentoring Service has been an excellent development, with 16 trained peer mentors providing support to 37 adult families.
- Adoption support tends to be regional. We need to do some work to understand why this is the case.

The Chair thanked Martin Kelly for his presentation and noted the recent decision to extend the contract with the Independent Adoption Service for a further two years.

NOTED.

241 Child Death Overview Panel

Considered:-

The Annual Report of the Child Death Overview Panel for 2020/2021.

James Parkes, North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership, Partnership Manager, took Members through the report. James highlighted the following aspects:-

- 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 this 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. This is the lowest reported number within the life of the Panel.
- The highest risk age category are children aged under one.
- Expected deaths are where a child has a life-limiting condition. Unexpected deaths are, generally, those not expected within 24 hours of their death; or a sudden collapse, or a road traffic accident, or a suicide.
- Due to on-going investigations, reporting of deaths may be in a different year to when they occur.
- A table in the report outlines the categories of death over the last five years.
- 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, utilising the Sleep Right work to give the right messages and support to families so that they can be informed how best to care for their children and hopefully avoid any unexpected death.

James concluded by thanking partners. It is a sad area of our work but one we take with respect and give each case the respect and care and dignity it requires. We are seeing an increase in the number of parents and carers willing to speak to us, which we welcome.

He also thanked Alison Firby, Child Death Review Officer, for the work she does on a day-to-day basis on the Child Death Agenda.

The Chair referred to the increase in the number of drug related deaths and enquired if this is more prevalent in the teenager range. James Parkes advised that it is within the older teenage population where we have seen these deaths – the top end of childhood.

The Chair also wondered why the number of deaths is higher among males. James Parkes responded that this is a question that has been posed by the Panel. Evidential research into this nationally is awaited.

Councillor Annabel Wilkinson commented on the Sleep Right Initiative and asked if we have enough staff to deliver those difficult conversations and are we providing the necessary support to those staff. James Parkes advised that the primary focus is to upskill all professionals across Multi-Agency Partnerships. Generally, we would look to Health Visitors and Midwives to convey the messaging about Sleep Right. We know that conversations take place and it is about ensuring that these are embedded in daily practice and assessments. This is everyone's responsibility, with the aim of making every contact count. A raft of training is being rolled out.

Martin Kelly added that there is an expectation on health colleagues to convey these messages and we ensure health and social care staff have a good understanding of the issues.

Councillor John Mann commented on drug related deaths and felt that we needed to look at the demand side, as well as the supply. What can we do to get over the message that it is not cool and that drugs can, ultimately, result in people passing away. In response, James Parkes advised that substance misuse services are commissioned through Public Health. In terms of education, there has been a lot of work with children and young people and with parents and carers to help them understand the risks. It is about getting support early so that people do not need to rely on substance misuse for dealing with anxiety.

He added that there are many drug prevention opportunities that Schools and organisations are delivering. We need to ensure that people can access that support.

The Chair thanked James for his update.

242 Work Programme

Considered:-

A report by the Principal Democratic Services Scrutiny Officer, which invited Members to consider the Committee's Work Programme for 2021/22, taking into account the outcome of discussions on previous Agenda Items and any other developments taking place across the county.

He highlighted that there is just one formal meeting of the Committee remaining prior to the elections in May 2022. The Agenda for that meeting is shaping up to be a fairly full one.

He added that Members are welcome to contact him at any stage to suggest Items to be considered.

The Chair referred to the recently formed Locality Board. She would be interested to see how that is developing our interaction with Academies. She will liaise with Patrick Duffy, as there are a number of Items that we can bring back and look at.

243. Other business which the Chair agrees should be considered as a matter of urgency because of special circumstances

There was no urgent business. The Chair wished people all the best for Christmas and the New Year.

The meeting concluded at 11.35 a.m.

PD