

North Yorkshire County Council

Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Friday 9th December 2022 at 10.00 a.m.

Present: County Councillor Barbara Brodigan (Chair)

County Councillors: Alyson Baker, Stephanie Duckett, Bridget Fortune, George Jabbour (substituting for Councillor Peter Wilkinson), Nathan Hull, David Jeffels, Janet Jefferson, Cliff Lunn, Andy Paraskos (substitute for Councillor John Mann), Heather Phillips (Vice-Chair), Kirsty Poskitt, John Ritchie, Mike Schofield, Tom Jones and Dave Whitfield.

NOTE: Councillor Janet Jefferson joined the meeting remotely.

Co-opted Members: Tom Cavell-Taylor (Parent Governor Representative), David Sharp and David Watson (Voluntary Sector)

Officers: Professor Maggie Atkinson, Independent Scrutineer and Chair of the North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership Executive, Stuart Carlton, Corporate Director - Children and Young People's Service, Patrick Duffy, Principal Democratic Services Scrutiny Officer, Hannah Ellingworth, Safeguarding Partnership Manager, Howard Emmett, Assistant Director, Strategic Resources, Mel Hutchinson, Assistant Director, Education and Skills, Sue Peckitt, Chief Nurse, Humber and North Yorkshire Integrated Care Partnership, Judith Russ, Head of Placement Support, Assistant Chief Constable Mike Walker, North Yorkshire Police

NOTE: Professor Maggie Atkinson and Hannah Ellingworth joined the meeting remotely

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors John Mann and Peter Wilkinson and Co-opted Members Stephen Maltby, Ross Strachan and Andrew Smith and Portfolio Holders, County Councillor Janet Sanderson (Executive Member for Children and Young People) and County Councillor Annabel Wilkinson (Executive Member for Education and Skills)

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

21. Welcome and apologies

Councillor Barbara Brodigan welcomed everyone to the meeting.

The apologies are as stated at the start of these Minutes.

22. Minutes of the meeting held on 2nd September 2022

Resolved –

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 2nd September 2022, be confirmed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

23. Any Declarations of Interest

There were none.

24. Public Questions

There were no public questions or statements.

25. Chair's Remarks

The Chair reported that she had attended the Executive (Performance Monitoring) Committee on 29th November 2022 and had raised two questions.

The first related to the Multi-Agency Screening Team and why there has been an increase in referrals and repeat referrals. Also, what actions are being taken to address this. The Executive Member for Children and Young People had responded that there were two levels of concern – firstly, why more young children and young people are suffering mental health issues and, secondly, the resultant staffing implications. The Corporate Director had advised that there has always been a level of repeat referrals. He is keeping a close eye on the situation and monitoring caseloads.

The second matter the Chair had raised concerned School Attendance – how is it monitored and followed up when children are not attending School? Councillor Annabel Wilkinson, the Executive Member for Education and Skills, had responded that attendance is monitored and patterns of absence are identified. The Corporate Director had added that data is not received from all Schools. The Government has issued Guidance on attendance, but the proposals are not funded. The issue of attendance will be taken through scrutiny in due course.

NOTED.

26 North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership Annual Report 2021/2022

Considered -

A presentation by Stuart Carlton, Corporate Director, Children and Young People's Service, which summarised the Annual Report of the North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (NYSCP), 2021/2022. The Annual Report was also included with the papers circulated. The presentation and the Annual Report are available [here](#)

Being Young in North Yorkshire is the North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership Strategy for Children and Young People. The Corporate Director pulled out some of the headline performance from its four themes, including the following:-

Theme 1: A Safe Life

- There has been a reduction in the number of children in care.
- There has been just one custodial sentence for a young person (compared to 27 the previous year).

Theme 2: A Happy Life

- Most children in care live with the Council's foster carers (72%).
- Over 2,000 children had benefited from the Holidays Activities and Food Programme over the Christmas break.

Theme 3: A Healthy Life

- There has been a good take up (64%) of Schools in the Healthy Schools Award.
- The proportion of five year olds with tooth decay in North Yorkshire is, at 20%, lower than the national and regional averages (23.4% and 28.7%, respectively).

Theme 4: Achieving in Life

- There has been a return to a more expected trend in children being electively home educated.
- The number of suspensions has reduced – over 1,000 fewer than for the same period last year. We are, though, seeing an increase now in the reported figures.
- The number of young people who are not in education, employment or training, or unknown, has reduced from 8.1% to 4.7%.
- 64.4% of care leavers are in employment, education or training.

The Corporate Director also drew Members attention to some of the other key highlights. These included relaunching the Self Harm and Suicide Ideation Pathway and a Child Exploitation Awareness Campaign.

He referred to the NYSCP Achievement Awards. The work involved can be difficult. Therefore, it is nice to be able to celebrate.

The work of the various Sub-Groups was also outlined, together with the Multi-Agency Training and Learning that occurs. Masterclasses are a popular feature among professionals. Holding these virtually, makes it easier for people to attend.

The presentation also included a summary of the following:-

- Framework for decision making;
- Communications and engagement;
- Safeguarding Week 2021;
- The Child Death Review Process;
- Local Safeguarding Partnerships; and
- Financial position and priorities of the NYSCP

The Chair then introduced Professor Maggie Atkinson, Independent Scrutineer and Chair of the NYSCP Executive. The Chair was sorry that this would be Maggie's last meeting and thanked her for all the work that she had undertaken.

Professor Atkinson made several points, including:-

- The Sub-Groups are the *engine room*, where the majority of the work is undertaken.
- The NYSCP is strong because of the enormous commitment of partner bodies.
- Not all Safeguarding Partnerships are as assured or professionally trusting as the NYSCP.
- The Community Safety Partnership is aware of the key issues – County Lines, for example.
- North Yorkshire Youth have played an excellent role.
- People are doing a fine job despite how tired they are and the workload they face. Development Days are useful – people value the face-to-face opportunities to meet.
- A hallmark of the NYSCP is that it never stops learning.

The following questions/comments were made by Members:-

- Councillor Cliff Lunn enquired if the Partnership is keeping on top of elective home education. The Corporate Director confirmed this is the case. Before a final decision is taken, a meeting is held which seeks assurance as to why it is felt to be in the best interests of the child to be home educated.
- Councillor David Jeffels commended those involved in the Report and referred to the tragic death of a young child recently, from mould. He also referred to the drugs problem in Tyneside and asked if we are satisfied with the arrangements in place in North Yorkshire. The Corporate Director advised that he was sure the situation that had led to the sad death of the child will be discussed nationally. The issue of drugs is always a concern. Staff engage with young people and monitor the situation. Professor Atkinson added that elected Members have a key role to play by virtue of their community ties and should draw the attention of services to any issues.
- Regarding the aspect of the above point in relation to mould, Sue Peckitt, Chief Nurse, Humber and North Yorkshire Integrated Care Partnership (ICP), advised the Committee that, if the situation occurred locally, she would expect there to be calls to the GP and, even, Hospital. There is very strong safeguarding in Primary Care and in Hospitals. Good links are maintained with Housing Associations and she would expect they would contact the ICP.
- Councillor Nathan Hull referred to the figure of 64.4% of care leavers being in, employment, education, or training. Whilst he appreciated these young people may have difficult circumstances, that does mean there are 35.6% who have not found employment, education, or training. The Corporate Director advised that the figure of 64.4% is well above the national average. A lot of innovative solutions are found and funding is provided to help with aspirations, wherever possible. The Corporate Director added that if your child asked for money to help them follow a particular career/training path you would help – the Directorate aims to do the same for those children that it is responsible for.
- In response to a follow up question from Councillor Nathan Hull, it was confirmed that there are approximately 450 care leavers in the County.
- Councillor Heather Phillips asked when, in the eyes of the Directorate, do young people stop being young people and how do we avoid a cliff edge effect when this occurs. The Corporate Director advised that it is a statutory requirement to provide this service but when it ends the Directorate will always attempt to continue to help, as this is the right thing to do – even if it is no longer a statutory requirement to do so.
- Councillor Bridget Fortune said she had been involved in child care for many years and is still in contact with some of the children. Therefore, she is pleased to hear that the system is not fragmented and that such big efforts are being made to protect our children. She thanked everyone involved in this area of work. The Corporate Director said that the Directorate's entire practice model is based on it being connected and lifelong.
- Councillor Stephanie Duckett advised the Committee that she had attended a lunch for care leavers in Selby. The carers that she had talked to had all said they could not fault the support received.

- Councillor Alyson Baker, advised that, as Young People's Champion, she had attended three events recently. It was good to see that carers are learning about healthy living and it had been moving to hear what some young people had gone through.
- Councillor Kirsty Poskitt, said that, in her professional role, she found the Partnership's website very useful and that young careers feel supported.
- The Chair referred to the priorities stated for 2022/2023 and asked if there is any progress to report against these. The Corporate Director responded that there is nothing specifically to share with the Committee at this stage but stressed that he and partners are constantly working on achieving these.

Professor Atkinson thanked Members for all they do for young people and their communities.

27. Children and Young People's Service: Financial Position

Considered:-

A joint report by the Corporate Director, Children and Young People's Service and the Assistant Director, Strategic Resources, which highlighted the areas presenting with the most significant financial pressures facing the Children and Young People's Service as at Quarter 2, 2022 and the management action that has been taken in response to the pressures.

In addition, the report provided an update on school funding pressures.

The report was presented by the Assistant Director, who advised that the Directorate is projecting an overspend of £5.2 million in 2022/2023. This is due to several sustained financial pressures.

The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities budget, within the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant, represents the most significant pressure.

The Assistant Director highlighted the following:-

- The Local Authority continue to work to bring high needs expenditure to levels that can be sustained within anticipated future high needs funding levels. These measures were outlined in the report.
- The funding gap in respect of high needs expenditure represents a significant unfunded pressure from the Department for Education. A financially sustainable, inclusive, and effective system is a high priority for the Local Authority, who will continue to work to address the gap.
- The outlook remains challenging - in part, because the Directorate receives one of the lowest funding per head settlements for high needs.

Councillor Alyson Baker sought clarification as to what happens when a *Notice of Financial Concern* is issued by the Local Authority. The Assistant Director advised that a School in this situation is subject to increased monitoring of their spending limit and, anything above that, requires the approval of the Local Authority, who can also appoint Independent Observers to sit on the School's Governing Body. Where sufficient progress is not made, a *Withdrawal of Delegation* can be issued but this has not been necessary so far.

Councillor John Ritchie asked whether Schools would be allowed to fail, as constraints are often not of their own making. The Corporate Director stressed that his Directorate work constructively with Schools to both support and challenge them. However, the Local Authority has a duty to ensure that Schools do not have large deficits that become out of control.

In response to a question from Councillor Cliff Lunn, concerning the Outdoor Learning Service, the Corporate Director said that a restructure had been undertaken, but there are still discussions required as to their sustainability.

Nathan Hull referred to Special Educational Needs Transport and asked if there is a problem sourcing taxi firms. The Corporate Director said this would have been undertaken via a best value process.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Assistant Director said it was anticipated that further information concerning the allocation of additional funding to Schools, referred to in the Autumn Statement 2022, would be received just prior to Christmas.

NOTED.

28. Adoptions in North Yorkshire 2021/2022

Considered –

A presentation by Judith Russ, Head of Placement Support, together with a report which provided a detailed summary of North Yorkshire's performance and where it sits with the One Adoption Agency, Yorkshire and Humber.

You can view the presentation and the report [here](#)

Judith Russ highlighted the following, in particular.

- The Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) is a shared service between five Local Authorities, hosted by the City of York.
- 102 children had a plan for adoption – 19 of these had been reversed. This can happen for several reasons – a family member may step forward to look after the child, for instance, or a foster carer may wish to care for the child long term.
- North Yorkshire's performance is generally strong in terms of the timeliness of placing children in need of adoption with a family. For example, in North Yorkshire the average number of days between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family is 269, compared to averages of 398 across the RAA and 412 nationally.
- It has taken the number of new applications to adopt, a while to recover from the Pandemic – new applications have reduced.
- A wide range of adoption support is offered, ranging from assessment of need; annual events and bespoke training courses. A rise in adoption support needs is being seen, especially for children aged 8 to 14.
- The Peer Mentor Service is valued and several adopters have trained as mentors.

- A challenge for the service, in respect of post-adoption support, is when a child is placed in North Yorkshire from another local authority within the RAA, we become responsible for post-adoption support after three years. North Yorkshire is also an attractive place for adopters from outside the RAA to relocate to, which also increases the need for post-adoption support.

The following questions/comments were made by Members:-

Councillor Heather Phillips was pleased to see that there is now a more modern attitude to adoption. She asked how the rights of the children and parents are reconciled with those of the adoptive parents. Judith Russ advised that dialogue at the earliest stage is the key, with an emphasis on face-to-face discussions between the adopters and the birth parents. This helps reduce any fear factor regarding birth parents.

The Chair wanted to know what the main benefits are of being part of the RAA. Judith Russ said that sharing good practice is a big plus point. North Yorkshire can offer its expertise to others. This leads to indirect benefits if others work to the same standards when receiving a child. Streamlining practice is also an advantage.

The Chair also asked whether the Additional Screening Process for step-parent adoption, referred to in the papers, had gone live in November 2022 as intended. Judith Russ confirmed that this had occurred.

Councillor Mike Schofield enquired what the effect is on a child when a plan for adoption is reversed. Judith Russ advised that this would usually occur well before a child is expecting to be placed and certainly before they met adopters. Most children are very young if they have a plan for adoption and so would be less aware of changes in their plan.

30.. Work Programme

Considered:-

A report by the Principal Democratic Services Scrutiny Officer, which invited Members to consider the Committee's Work Programme for 2022/2023, taking into account the outcome of discussions on previous Agenda Items and any other developments taking place across the county.

He highlighted the following:-

- The next meeting is scheduled to receive a report on School Performance. There will also be an item on Exclusions, as this is an area that Members had said they would wish to be considered. This would contain information on the number of children excluded and how their educational needs are accommodated. The Item will also look at the Pupil Referral Service and Locality Boards.
- The Work Programme just goes up to the next meeting. Therefore, he suggested that the next Mid Cycle Briefing, on 27th January, consider an outline of the Work Programme for 2023/2024. That would then be considered at the subsequent Committee meeting.
- The next Committee meeting on 24th February will need to be moved as the Council has decided to utilise its reserve date on that day. He will liaise with the Chair and Vice-Chair about a new date.

Councillor Heather Phillips requested that the following be added to the Work Programme:-

- Why a School is closed i.e. the process and how Academies work within this.
- Whether School closures and a lack of Governors is related. How Governors are recruited; trained; and retained.

Resolved –

That the Work Programme, as it currently stands, be noted.

31. Other business which the Chair agrees should be considered as a matter of urgency because of special circumstances – Hovingham Primary School

The Chair agreed that this matter be considered as a matter of urgency.

Councillor George Jabbour advised that many residents had contacted him about Hovingham Primary School. The consultation is progressing. There are no pupils currently. There will be a meeting on Monday 12th December. This will be an important opportunity to share views. There is a desire to secure the School's future.

Councillor Jabbour added that it has been announced that the School may become part of the Ryedale Learning Trust. There will be an open meeting on 12th December, in order that that people can hear from the School and the Trust Management.

Parents have queried whether there is any risk to their children's education if they put Hovingham as their first choice and the School were to close. He requested that a document be produced to ensure there is adequate information about this aspect.

The Corporate Director advised that the Local Authority is consulting with the School and the public and that no decisions have been taken. The School has no pupils and so will not be funded from the Department for Education, moving forward. It is encouraging that the Trust is working with the School. However, this could raise expectations and it should be noted that they are not the decision makers. The Local Authority is open to consultation, but a School that does not have any pupils cannot receive funding.

The Corporate Director also confirmed that if parents put Hovingham as their first choice School and the School was subsequently closed, this would not be prejudicial to them i.e. it would not impact on their child attending the School that is their second choice. He will aim to put something in writing to this effect before the meeting referred to by Councillor Jabbour on Monday.

The Chair said she understood that the parents of seven children have indicated they would like their children to attend the Nursery School from September and enquired if there is a possibility of transitional funding. The Corporate Director stressed that Schools are funded through the Schools Block. It is not possible for him to step outside of those rules and regulations. Ryedale Learning Trust would need agreement to do so and it is not clear how that agreement would occur. Hovingham is not the only small School in the county. Therefore, it is important that the Local Authority does not set a precedent.

Councillor Jabbour thanked the Corporate Director for his response and added that he had met the Chief Executive of the Trust and expectations had not been raised.

The meeting concluded at 11.55 a.m.

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