

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL

21 FEBRUARY 2024

STATEMENT OF EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SERVICE

Focus on Inclusion: Creating a Culture for Change

In January we worked with Headteacher colleagues building on the work that we undertook in the autumn where we developed a shared understanding of our vision for inclusion and how we work together as partners to tackle the significant demand pressures in the system. These sessions were very well attended.

During the sessions there was a focus on what is ordinarily available, what provision could look like and how we work together to develop a shared framework. There was a general consensus that it would be helpful to develop a North Yorkshire set of standards. This will be one of the significant workstreams to be funded through the Delivering Better Value (DBV) Project. It will draw on dedicated support from Local Authority staff, parents and carers and school staff to undertake this project for a year. We aim to develop an agreed set of standards and a system for sharing good practice and in school review.

Further developments include focussing on support for children and young people who are transitioning into full time education after nursery and also into secondary school as we know that parents, carers and school staff can find this a worrying time. The DBV funds will support focussed work with children their families and schools to support this transition.

Performance of Statutory Assessment and Education, Health Care Plans

As noted in previous updates the inclusion service continues to receive high numbers of requests for assessment for an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan. The rise in new EHC plans being issued results from an increasing demand for assessments seen during the year and this upward trend continues. The trends observed in North Yorkshire are similar to those reported nationally.

Educational Psychology

There has been a reduction in the number of EHC plans being issued within a 20-week period as a consequence of a shortfall in availability of Educational Psychologists in the second half of 2023. This is now also starting to impact on the locum market. However, additional services have been procured and we are making progress with the backlog that was generated in 2023.

We are delighted to announce that we have recruited to our Principal Educational Psychologist post and Karen Jessup joined us on the 1st February. Despite a challenging recruitment context the service is slowly starting to rebuild North Yorkshire's own Educational Psychology Team to support early intervention and prevention as well as our statutory duties.

High Needs Block/SEND Funding

The service continues to engage with all stakeholders regarding the activities we are undertaking to support a more sustainable high needs block budget (the funding source from the Department for Education that is passed to the Local Authority). A Members Briefing was held in December 2023 and was well attended.

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.

Children and Family Performance

Children & Families continued to see a high demand throughout Q2, leading to the most referrals we have received in an 8-year period. Despite this, teams continue to deliver high performance. Children and Family assessments completed within 45 days was at (99%), the percentage of early years achieving a good level of development (70.3%), all performing better than the national average. We also saw the timeliness of early help assessments increase in every measure from the same point last year. This improvement is despite the number of households open to early help reaching over 1,500 for the first time ever. Our rate for care leavers in suitable accommodation remains above national average.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

Following significant planning Children and Families are now able to deliver against the National Transfer Scheme. The Council has increased accommodation through its own resource as well as leasing arrangements and this has seen the successful transitions of 16+ children into independent supported accommodation. Children and Families service has also developed a dedicated team to support these young people to ensure a strong core offer.

Fostering

The Fostering Service continues to support a high number of Foster Carers in North Yorkshire. We have seen the return of our Annual Conference for Foster carers which was well received and have this year's conference taking place in April 2024. There has been promotion of a number of in person networking and support events. There continues to be active recruitment activity to try and attract enquires. Foster families have been given a boost by Scarborough Athletic Football Club with fans buying and donating five season tickets for use by Fostering North Yorkshire. Children in care, care leavers and foster carers who are part of Fostering North Yorkshire will now be able to enjoy watching their local team and become part of the fan base, strengthening their sense of community.

Support to foster carers continues, in 2023 we made several changes to offer more to North Yorkshire foster carers:

- All payments were lifted by the rate of December CPI (to even out the way that inflation is calculated over the last 12 months, this uplift was applied to the payment rates pre-October 2022 – so effectively Foster Carers received this in two steps with the first step six months early in October 2022)
- The Accredited Premium was boosted above the rate of inflation
- New 'bridging payments' of up to three weeks were introduced for Accredited Foster Carers (to bring them into line with Advanced and Specialist Foster Carers who already received three weeks bridging payments)
- All mileage was allowed to be claimed (previously Foster Carers had been expected to pay for the first 100 miles out of the child's Allowance)
- All foster Carers were given access to parts of Vivup, the staff benefit scheme
- To help with the recruitment of new Foster Carers a £500 'Golden Hello' incentive was introduced

All of these changes were in the order of £300K of new, additional funding to Foster Carers.

Turnaround Programme – Youth Justice service

In January 2023 additional funding from the Ministry of Justice was provided to our Youth Justice service to deliver a new early intervention scheme 'Turnaround' to connect children and teenagers to targeted, wraparound support to stop them going down a path of criminality. As the funding was to develop a voluntary Youth Early Intervention Programme North Yorkshire Youth are commissioned to deliver the programme, with a target of reaching 177 children over the programme which runs until March 2025.

To date 101 children/young people aged between 11 & 17 years have successfully engaged with the programme receiving both direct one to one interventions and opportunities to engage in positive group activities.

SLIP

After a successful re-procurement exercise NY has been confirmed as a Sector Lead Improvement Partner (SLIP) for the financial year 24/25. This quarter there is work on going with Kirklees, Barnsley, Dorset, and Westmoreland. A smaller piece of work has also been confirmed with Central Bedfordshire.

NY voice Team

The NY voice team facilitated a number of groups for young people including a Christmas party which the young people thoroughly enjoyed held at Sparks community venue in York. There have been a number of new pieces of work started such as the Girls Group at Carlton Lodge and the planning work for the election of the next NY young MP'S has started. The young inspectors have visited NWD, and the voice team completed the garden project at both hubs, using the community funding that was secured.

The service is delighted that a young person has been nominated and short listed in the Coram Voice Competition. This young person has completed a rap all about her experience of foster care.

Medium Term Financial Strategy – Feb 2024

As previously reported to Full Council, the local authority continues to face significant financial pressure from the continued rise in funded Education, Health and Care Plans. There is a stable cost per child that compares closely to national averages, but the key driver has been the increase in the number of children assessed as requiring an Education, Health and Care Plan. We continue to look at, and develop, a range of mitigating actions to alleviate some of the financial pressure including implementation of a £20.5m capital programme in the SEN provision across the county and working with schools and academies to develop inclusive communities that enable children and young people to be educated in their local school.

I am delighted that the Holiday Activities and Food programme will continue into 2024/25 with grant funding of £1.4m. Over 7000 young people attended organised through the funded programme and 5000 paid the provider directly to attend these activities.

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COUNCILLOR JANET SANDERSON