

North Yorkshire Council

Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 8th December 2023 at 10.00 a.m.

Present: Councillor Barbara Brodigan (Chair)

Councillors Alyson Baker, Mark Crane (substitute for Councillor David Jeffels), Stephanie Duckett*, Nathan Hull, George Jabbour, Janet Jefferson*, Heather Phillips (Vice-Chair), Cliff Lunn, Yvonne Peacock, Kirsty Poskitt*, John Ritchie and Monika Slater

Co-opted Members: Tom Cavell-Taylor (Parent Governor Representative), Andrew Smith (Church of England Representative), Ross Strachan (Secondary Teacher Representative) David Sharp (Voluntary Sector Representative) and David Watson (Voluntary Sector Representative)

Officers (Children and Young People's Service, unless stated): Stuart Carlton, Corporate Director, Janet Crawford, Assistant Director, Inclusion, Emma Lonsdale*, Head of Public Health, Gill Kelly, Public Health Consultant, Heather Pearson, Executive Chair and Scrutineer, North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership, Emma Phillips, Safeguarding Unit Manager, Simone Wilkinson*, Group Manager, Early Help and Patrick Duffy, Principal Democratic Services Scrutiny Officer, Legal and Democratic Services

In attendance: Councillor Janet Sanderson* (Executive Member for Children and Families), Councillor Annabel Wilkinson* (Executive Member for Education and Skills) Dianne Chew*, Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust, Zoe Davis, Compass Phoenix, Carly Dodsworth*, Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust, Lorna Galdas*, NHS Humber and North Yorkshire Integrated Care Board and Paul Preston, Principal Democratic Services Officer

***Denotes joined remotely**

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

40. Welcome by the Chair

The Chair welcomed people to the meeting.

41. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors David Jeffels and John Mann.

42. Minutes of the meeting held on 26th September 2023

The Principal Democratic Services Scrutiny Officer referred to Minute No. 36, Annual Report of the Child Death Overview Panel. The Chair of the Panel had said that Members would be welcome to observe a Panel meeting. He asked Members to note that, whilst the invitation had been well intended, it would not be appropriate for Members to attend, because of the confidential nature of the Panel's discussions.

Resolved –

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 26th September 2023 be confirmed and signed by the Chair as a correct record but that the point made in the paragraph immediately preceding this resolution be noted.

43. Any Declarations of Interest

Councillor Janet Jefferson declared an interest in the Road Safety Partnership, which she chairs. The Partnership is referred to in the Minutes of the last meeting.

44. Public Participation

It was confirmed that no public questions or statements had been received.

45. Chair's Remarks

The Chair advised that she had attended the meeting of the Executive on 28th November 2023.

She had asked whether the significant drop in the timeliness of Education Health Care Plans (EHCP) was primarily down to the lack of Educational Psychologists. The Corporate Director had confirmed this is the case. The Directorate has increased the number of assessments it commissions and this will lead to an improved position. In addition, a new Educational Psychologist will commence work with the Directorate in the new year.

A Member welcomed the appointment of an Educational Psychologist but commented that this still leaves a shortage of Speech and Language Therapists. The Corporate Director advised that the Directorate is recruiting.

A Member felt it was disappointing that the Chancellor's Autumn Statement had not included any monies for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

A Member felt that it is important to look at other factors that could limit access to services, such as rurality.

Prior to consideration of the remaining Items on today's Agenda, the Chair advised officers that the level of detail in their presentations/reports is appreciated. However, they should assume that Members have read the information circulated and limit their presentation to 15/20 minutes. This will allow time for any questions that Members may have.

46. Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Provision in the Scarborough and Whitby Area – Report of the Task and Finish Group

Considered –

The report of the afore-mentioned Task and Finish Group.

The report was presented by the Chair of the Task and Finish Group, Councillor Liz Colling. It is available to view [here](#)

Councillor Colling thanked the other Members of the Task and Finish Group, the Assistant Director, Inclusion and the Principal Democratic Services Scrutiny Officer and, in particular, people who had shared their lived experience. This had been very powerful.

She highlighted a number of aspects, including the following:-

- The scope of the Task and Finish Group had been to understand:-
 - How are parents/carers of children and young people with SEND being supported in their children's education? (essentially, their "journey")
 - Are there any areas where more could be done to improve access to information, advice and support for families in the Scarborough and Whitby area?
 - Are there any recommendations for action as a result of this process?
- A three step process had been undertaken:-
 - The Panel familiarised themselves with key information concerning SEND in North Yorkshire
 - It held a face-to-face engagement session at Scarborough Town Hall, on 26th October 2023
 - Survey data and data from two Parent Carer Voice led focus groups was included, as the Panel wanted to include as many families as possible
- The Panel wanted to hear about both challenges and positive experiences.
- All of the responses were considered. Some points were made by many respondents whilst others were specific to a smaller group or individual. A number of key themes emerged, as set out in Section 7 of the report. Uppermost among these was communication, which cuts across all of the themes.
- There is likely to be a similar pattern of strengths and concerns elsewhere in North Yorkshire so it would be helpful for any learning from this scrutiny to be shared more widely.
- It was disturbing for the Task and Finish Group to hear how, for some parents and carers, navigating the system felt like a battle, causing them distress.
- It was evident that not for profit organisations are highly valued.
- The recommendations are in four categories:
 - Schools
 - External communication
 - Internal processes and liaison with partners
 - Wider working with the third sector

Councillor Colling took Members through the Task and Finish Group's suggestions.

She concluded by commending the report to the Committee.

The following comments were made by Members:-

- This has been a good piece of scrutiny work and a good report.
- It is difficult to comprehend how difficult and far reaching some parents find these issues.

- Members need to seek to increase the budget for this area during discussions on the budget for 2024/2025.
- There is a plan to improve the availability of places in Targeted Mainstream Provision (TMP) - where children with SEND can make progress within a mainstream environment with access to enhanced support. However, there is no TMP currently in Scarborough.
- This has demonstrated that there is a Strategy in place. Similar issues will apply in other areas of the county and therefore any lessons learnt need to be applied wider.
- It is vital that a spotlight is maintained on this area and that parents realise that Members are listening.
- The importance of early years provision came through.
- Members should consider getting together with the parents and carers again at some stage – albeit not in a scrutiny forum.
- It would be helpful for Members to have a better comprehension of what is involved in this area of provision.

The Corporate Director for Children and Young People's Service thanked Members of the Task and Finish Group. He was pleased that the range of complex issues had come through. He accepted the findings, which did not contain anything that the Directorate is not aware of, and also commented as follows:-

- The Service is underfunded but this does not mean the Directorate is not striving to improve provision.
- In terms of the point made about raising awareness, the forthcoming Members Seminar on SEND can provide a mechanism for this. In addition, some of the issues raised will be considered as part of a Strategic Review, which he will report back on.
- There are many positive things happening too. For instance, in the last five years there have been three times as many children and young people on an EHCP and the Council is spending twice as much as it was on this provision five years ago. Provision in Special Schools has increased by 50%. The system has grown massively.

In response to a question from a Member, the Corporate Director advised that there are currently 13 Schools with Targeted Mainstream Provision. The aim is to have 30. The Directorate can only encourage Schools, in this respect.

A Member felt that the Information Pack that had been prepared for Members of the Task and Finish Group would be helpful to all Members to help understand the challenges faced by the Directorate. The Principal Democratic Services Scrutiny Officer undertook to circulate it to all Members of the Council.

Resolved –

That the suggestions of the Task and Finish Group, as set out below, be endorsed and considered further by the Scarborough and Whitby Area Constituency Committee and the Executive in the new year:-

Schools

- a) Promote access to training and resources for Schools through SENCO (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators) Networks, Locality Board websites and parent carer forums.
- b) Ensure that Schools are aware of their legal duties in relation to part-time timetabling as part of their duties.
- c) Continue to promote the development of Targeted Mainstream Provision across all areas of the County to ensure an increase in this provision and equity across the localities.

External Communications

- d) Review the information/resources that the Directorate make available with service users and families to make them more visible, user-friendly and accessible, including the Local Offer and the Local Area SEND Strategy.
- e) Review existing documents/website information setting out what children, young people and their families can expect as part of their SEND journeys, in terms of what they can expect from practitioners and Schools, as part of assessment and support planning, and in compliments, complaints and appeals processes.
- f) Regularly publish clear data on the timescales being achieved for SEND processes.
- g) Review SEND communication arrangements, so people are not left waiting for responses and follow-up actions to be made in a timely fashion.

Internal Processes and liaison with Partners

- h) Share the findings of this review with relevant parts of the system in order to promote good practice and promote the benefits of hosting TMPs, including:
 - Scarborough, Whitby and Ryedale Locality Board
 - Scarborough, Whitby and Ryedale SENCO Network
 - Headteacher briefings
 - SEND and Alternative Provision Local Area Partnership Board
 - Local Authority and Parent Carer Communications and Engagement Strategic Group
- i) That County SENCO Networks and Locality Board Events be promoted as a vehicle for sharing good practice.
- j) Share the findings of this review with Commissioners in the Humber and North Yorkshire Integrated Care Board to understand views regarding access to and provision of Speech and Language Therapy.

Wider working with the Third Sector

- k) Explore with Parent Carer Voice how the work of various Parent Carer Charities is promoted and linked.
- l) To continue to support and promote FEAST (Food. Entertainment. Arts. Sport. Together - Holiday Activities and Food Programme for North Yorkshire, funded by the Department for Education) for eligible families for children with disabilities.

47. Children and Young People's Mental Health

Considered –

A report and presentation prepared by Dr. Gill Kelly, Public Health Consultant, and colleagues.

The report and presentation is available [here](#) and covered:-

- The impact of social isolation and disruption to education on children and young people's mental health (particularly around the on-going legacy effect of pandemic isolation and disruption).
- The level of that impact – is it primarily low level anxiety, or more profound?
- An update on demand pressures and unmet need.

Dr. Kelly took Members through the presentation. As mentioned above, her detailed presentation is available to view in full. Among the points she highlighted were:-

- There are a range of sources of information available to measure the impact of disruption on mental health and the level of that impact. These include the Growing up in North Yorkshire Survey; Youth Councils; Healthy School Events; and national research
- Service pressures and unmet need can be gauged by, for example, whole system analysis and performance reviews of individual components.
- A multiplicity of factors make children happy.
- Life is much more complex for children now than it was a generation ago.
- During Covid, just about everything that made people happy was taken away – the legacy from this continues to have an impact.
- Wellbeing and resilience have reduced and this is particularly so among girls. It should be noted that this deterioration commenced pre-Covid.
- There has been a marked increase in children being electively home educated
 - with anxiety and stress being cited as the main reasons.
- So, in terms of complexity, everything has shifted, to some degree, with a concomitant knock-on effect on the whole system.
- Our message to children and young people is: *It is OK not to feel happy all of the time*. Moreover, it is perfectly normal. It is alright to have worries – the key thing is to have people to talk to.
- A key driver is to have all systems interconnected so that we are not pushing people from one part of the system to another.
- We are fortunate to have SEMH (Social Mental and Emotional Health Service). SEMH has five themed priorities as follows:-
 - To ensure a single, connected system at both strategic and provider levels.
 - To use data, insight and knowledge to inform all parts of the system.

- To ensure there is focus on prevention, resilience building and advice.
 - We will concentrate on identifiable, vulnerable groups of children and young people.
 - We will identify and respond to the areas with the greatest system pressures.
- There are several ways of sourcing advice, including The Go-To Website; Kooth, Craven and Compass Phoenix. It is unclear why referrals to Kooth (the online wellbeing service for Bradford and Craven) have reduced. However, those accessing the website are showing massive progress, so it is not just about numbers.
 - There are also several ways in which people can get help. These include Compass Phoenix; Healthy Child Service; Youth in Mind Craven; and SEND Locality Hubs. Compass Phoenix has seen a reduction in waiting times.
 - The issues we are seeing are international. It is not just about helping to improve children and young people's mental health - but for them to learn to help themselves.
 - There are some lengthy waiting times in the system due to demand, but these are reducing.
 - Risk support includes a Single Point of Access; and Specialist Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services.
 - A new all-age Autism Strategy is being consulted upon. This should not change the level of support that people receive. A new triage referral system, to offer support earlier, has received positive feedback.
 - Multiple programmes of work provide support and wellbeing across Schools, including the Healthy Schools Award Programme.
 - Things that would make a difference include increased capacity in all parts of the system and more wellbeing in Schools and communities. With reference to capacity, even if resources were no object, there is a shortage of staff.

Dr. Kelly concluded by reiterating that the whole population has become less resilient. Therefore, the job of professionals is to focus on prevention, resilience, wellbeing and providing additional support, as required. To end on a positive note, Dr. Kelly commented that children are amazing and there is a dedicated and professional workforce.

A number of questions/comments were made by Members. These are set out below, together with, where appropriate, the response of the officers/health colleagues in italics.

- Stress is catching. Children will not necessarily *grow out of it*. Therefore, a good start in life to help build resilience is important.

Yes, agreed. There are systems in place from an early stage. It is not a bad thing that children are accessing services at an early age, as this shows awareness of the support available, should it be required.

- There are some differences in rural areas. Is there any data to suggest that people's sense of wellbeing is different in rural areas and, if not, could this be collected?

Nationally, figures would seem to indicate that rurality does make a difference but this is mild to moderate. We would need to look at the data further. Data is available, broken down by District. Suicide is one of the aspects analysed but it would be difficult to differentiate, given the low numbers. Patterns tend to be similar between rural and urban but we will go back to our Leads and ask them to look at this further.

- With regard to the lower level of resilience among girls, boys are likely to be partly responsible for this because of the comments they make. Is there any advice we can provide to girls?

It is a cumulative effect, comprising many factors. Boys still make comments about girls appearance but this is exacerbated by social media. The key is to have the resilience to cope with that. This can include having conversations to filter out some of the comments. Parents have a role to play here.

- Is there any difference in respect of targeted intervention?

We are not seeing anything significant. The approach is one of early intervention across all Schools.

- Waiting times in Northallerton are between two and three weeks, but thirteen weeks in Selby. Why such a difference?

There are challenges around recruitment and retention of staff across the whole system. Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust (TEWV) are not present today, but we will discuss this with them. There is, however, a more positive picture than may have been painted. The 9-15 months waiting time for treatment for eating disorders is not correct – this refers to time in service. People are seen within seven days if their case is urgent and within four weeks if their issue is moderate.

- This is an excellent report. We need to empower and invest in our communities. The pressure on Schools is immense. In Tadcaster, there is a traditional Youth Club. Young people need community and face-to-face contact. We need to encourage this.

We are working with communities. A lot of work has been undertaken to grow and connect FEAST (Food. Entertainment. Arts. Sport. Together) in order to achieve a rounded offer.

There are some funding opportunities available, via Community Services, but the challenge then is to have dedicated Youth Workers. We make Community Partnerships aware of these potential funding opportunities.

- How do we compare to other countries?

There has been some national comparison undertaken.

The Chair advised that her company work with the Erasmus Project. They report similar issues in other countries.

- Under the slide on autism there is no information about Selby.

This is covered by TEWV. We will obtain the information.

- There is a balance between being reactive and proactive. We all have mental health – mental health is a good thing. How are we being proactive, knowing that not everyone will look at a website? Can we use social media in a more proactive way?

Agreed. The system has, though, to be reactive in some respects – for example, Compass Phoenix receives referrals. Compass Phoenix are trying to be more proactive, via the use of apps, but this investment costs money. The first step is educating parents and carers.

- We need to recognise the pressure on Schools and School Leaders.

We have had discussions about this and are putting measures in place to assist.

- What is being done to address issues at an early stage – to attempt to nip issues in the bud? The School I work with has 25% of students with mental health issues. This is a big burden upon Schools and can impact on teaching time.

We recognise the pressures faced by Schools. National Mental Health Support Teams operate in Schools. In North Yorkshire, this is provided by TEWV.

- Are we seeing an uptake in the number of cases of more severe depression and is there a correlation then with the numbers in later life?

The picture is a complex one as the whole system has shifted towards reduced resilience but, yes, there has been a definite increase in more severe/complex cases.

The Chair thanked Dr. Kelly for her detailed presentation.

48. North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2022/2023

Considered –

A presentation by Heather Pearson, Executive Chair and Independent Scrutineer of the North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (NYSCP).

The presentation, which includes the Annual Report, is available to view [here](#).

The Executive Chair and Independent Scrutineer stated that the relationship between the three statutory partners (North Yorkshire Council, North Yorkshire Police and Humber and North Yorkshire Integrated Care Board) is very strong. They are supported by a strong Executive.

She advised that *Being Young in North Yorkshire, 2021-2024*, is the NYSCP Strategy for children and young people living in North Yorkshire.

The Strategy sets out the Partnership's vision, which is shaped by the feedback from children and young people living in North Yorkshire and sets out its four key themes for children and young people to have:-

- A safe life
- A happy life
- A healthy life
- Achieving in life

There has been good progress against the priorities in each of the Themes. For example, under Theme One: A safe life, more children are accessing help at an

earlier stage, with fewer children requiring Child Protection Plans. The end of the year saw 375 Child Protection Plans - a reduction of 65, compared to last year. Under Theme Three: *A healthy life*, there has been an increase in children visiting a dentist, with 53% of children having been to a dentist in the last year, compared to 42% in 2020 and fewer children have required admission as a result of substance misuse. For 2022/2023, there were 148 admissions, which was 93 fewer than in 2021/2022.

Challenges include the increase (11%) in the number of children being electively home educated and making online activities as safe as possible.

The achievements of the Partnership this year were referred to, as well as the priorities for 2023/2024.

The NYSCP Partnership Achievement Awards were highlighted. These allow the Partners to recognise and showcase the multi-agency work being undertaken.

Safeguarding Week 2022 had been a great success, with 53 sessions held over five days (20 more than in 2021).

Capturing the voice of the child is paramount to partners. There are a number of ways in which this occurs, such as The Youth Commission.

Some questions/comments were made by Members. These are set out below, together with, where appropriate, the response of the Executive Chair and Independent Scrutineer/Corporate Director, in italics.

- The Growing up in North Yorkshire Survey (GUNY) is one of the most significant and credible consultations undertaken by this Council.

Indeed, GUNY is the envy of many authorities due to the comprehensive range of data that it yields.

- Regarding the Child Death Review process, has there been any discussion to extend the age range to 25 to match the age for which the Council is responsible to young people, as corporate parents?

The view of the Child Death Overview Panel is just one part of the discussion/consultation. A range of consultations are taking place about the age range of children to be covered.

- It would be comforting to know that the number of early deaths does not grow. Have we contributed to the consultation?

Yes, we have. When there is a death of a young adult, conversations are held with the Consultant in Public Health to help see the whole picture.

- Still on the Child Death Overview Panel, is there an equivalent report for adults?

No.

- On the four themes referred to, is there a mechanism for asking the Voluntary Sector how it has contributed to these? There is, for instance, a Strategic Leisure Review, where the contribution of the Voluntary Sector is sought.

Yes, of course. We recognise the value of wider organisations. For example, David Sharp, a Co-opted Member of this Committee, is the Voluntary Sector representative on the NYSCP.

The Chair thanked Heather Pearson for her presentation.

49. Work Programme 2023/2024

Considered –

A report by Patrick Duffy, Principal Democratic Services Scrutiny Officer, which contained details of the remainder of the Committee's Work Programme for 2023/2024.

The Principal Democratic Services Scrutiny Officer highlighted that there are currently five substantive Items scheduled for the final meeting of the Committee this Council Year, on 28th February.

He asked Members to consider whether they wanted to consider all of these Items at that meeting. The benefit of taking all of the Items would be that the Committee could then say it had covered everything on its Work Programme that it had intended to. Against that, given that the Committee do justice to all of the matters they consider, it could result in quite a lengthy meeting. Therefore, the Committee might want to push back a couple of Items to its meeting in June 2024.

The consensus from Members was that they wished to consider all of the remaining Items. Members felt that, if necessary, there could be a lunch break, with the meeting being completed following that.

Resolved –

That the remaining Items on the Committee's Work Programme be considered at the meeting on 28th February 2024 and that it be noted the Principal Democratic Services Scrutiny Officer will liaise with the presenters on timings and outline these at the Mid Cycle Briefing (on 26th January 2024).

50. Any other Items

The Chair advised that she had no other Items of business to raise and wished everyone all the best for the Christmas period.

51. Date of Next meeting

This would be held on Wednesday 28th February 2024 at County Hall in Northallerton, commencing at 10.00 a.m.

The meeting concluded at 12.30 p.m.

PD