

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

17 February 2021

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN

YOUNG PEOPLES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Covid Winter Grant Scheme

1. In recent meetings, we have looked at the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on vulnerable children and families. In my last statement, I stressed that as a scrutiny committee we would seek reassurance that the county council was doing what it could to meet everyone's needs - especially those who have or will become unemployed and have families.
2. At the time, Free School Meals was headline news. It was timely, therefore, that members could review decisions taken about how to support those most in need with the cost of food energy and water bills and associated costs through the Covid Winter Grant Scheme.
3. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) stated aim is "...to give vulnerable households peace of mind in the run up to Christmas and over the Winter months during the pandemic by helping those who need it to have food on the table and other essentials, so every child will be warm and well-fed this winter."
4. In the autumn, DWP announced funding for local authorities to meet this objective. Prompt action was essential if we were to be ready to deliver the scheme by early December 2020.
5. We reviewed NYCC's agreed proposals.
6. We supported the principle of a scheme of grant payments to schools and academies, early years' providers and post-16 schools and colleges. Funding allocations will also be made to support eligible Care Leavers and through the North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund (NYLAF).
7. One aspect has attracted much debate - the use of food vouchers. The framework sets out very clearly the conditions associated with this. Schools and colleges receiving allocations should organise the purchase and distribution of food vouchers or supermarket vouchers for eligible households and individuals. To enable households and individuals to retain maximum choice in their purchase of food and essential items, those recipients should avoid the purchase and distribution of hampers, without the prior written consent of the Council. To minimise the risk of fraud, recipients should not, under any circumstances disburse the grant as cash payments to households. All these measures had scrutiny members' support.
8. We were satisfied that the eligibility framework agreed would ensure North Yorkshire County Council's allocation of £1,435,400.85 was being deployed wisely and effectively. The grant will undoubtedly provide support to vulnerable households and families with children particularly affected by the pandemic throughout the winter period where alternative sources of assistance may be unavailable.

Opportunity Area Update

9. The opportunity area has achieved so much since the early successes of the Scarborough Pledge - a £750,000 investment by NYCC to raise aspirations and improve prospects for children and young people. In July 2020, the programme was extended for a further year to August 2021 and an additional £1m was allocated.

The scheme's successes include:

- Raised attainment in In Key Stages 1 and 2 across the borough.
- Improved Behaviour and Exclusion rates.
- Recruitment: Filled 200+ teacher and support role vacancies across 43 schools, bringing 38 teachers and support professionals from outside the area.
- Improved access and provision of speech and language support.
- Initiatives to improve and encourage a love of Maths.
- Initiatives to improve Literacy.

10. Challenges remain, however:

- The programme is currently funded only until August 2021.
- Scarborough remains well below the national average in all indicators of attainment in education. Covid-19 is having a further negative impact on attainment in the area and future social mobility.
- There are a small number of bigger primary schools with high levels of disadvantage and lower levels of attainment –some are maintained schools and others are academies. Attempts to improve these schools have had limited successes.
- Attainment in secondary schools has shown limited improvement. But this has been a time of considerable change in secondary schools. Those with weaker performance now have stronger leadership and there are signs of further improvement.

11. Clearly much of the success comes down to having a dedicated and significant resource. This has enabled genuinely good things to be achieved in terms of tackling disadvantage and underachievement. The challenge will be not only to sustain improvements in the medium and longer term but also to spread and share the lessons learned and embed good practice where possible.

Youth Organisations and Covid 19

12. For young people, and especially for vulnerable youth, the COVID-19 crisis poses considerable risks in the fields of education, employment, mental health and disposable income. Evidence shows that young people aged 12–24 years are one of the worst affected groups, particularly in terms of the labour market and mental health outcomes.
13. Lockdown has significantly impacted on young people's wider relationships - at such an important time in their lives - the period between 12 and 24 is a critical time for creating and maintaining relationships with family, friends and the wider community.
14. There are questions about the worsening impact of Covid upon youth activism and upon youth organisations – especially those providers that help vulnerable young people thrive

- creative arts, theatre, music, sports, outward leisure centres and what this means for their future operational sustainability.

15. Our two co-opted members from the Community and Voluntary sector helped the committee understand the seriousness of the challenges.
16. Nationally, youth services have taken a significant hit during the pandemic with an estimated one in five youth centres not expected to reopen after lockdown.
17. Youth work is a massive community asset that builds confidence and boosts self-esteem. It aids personal relationships and helps young people manage personal and social relationships. These organisations tend to rely on volunteer work and already face major challenges in accessing sustained and flexible funding. Many youth organisations have been able to adapt their physical spaces and their operations, with limited resources, but for how long this can continue is in doubt.
18. The committee recognises that reduced access to youth work provision, including outdoor activities, safe spaces and contact with trusted professional youth workers may have a significantly adverse effect on upon young people's physical and mental health.
19. Members intend to maintain an interest in this area.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR JANET JEFFERSON

5 February 2021