

North Yorkshire Council

Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 28th February 2024 at 10.00 a.m.

Present: Councillor Barbara Brodigan (Chair)

Councillors Eric Broadbent (substitute for Councillor Stephanie Duckett), George Jabbour, David Jeffels, Tom Jones, Cliff Lunn, John Mann, Heather Moorhouse (substitute for Councillor Yvonne Peacock), Heather Phillips (Vice-Chair), Kirsty Poskitt, John Ritchie and Monika Slater

Co-opted Members: Stephen Jennings (Primary Sector Representative), Andrew Smith (Church of England Representative), Ross Strachan (Secondary Teacher Representative) and David Sharp (Voluntary Sector Representative)

Officers (Children and Young People's Service, unless stated): Stuart Carlton, Corporate Director, Janet Crawford, Assistant Director, Inclusion, Carly Dodsworth, General Manager, 0-19 Service, Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust, Howard Emmett, Assistant Director, Resources, Angela Hall, Public Health Manager, Health and Adult Services, Gill Kelly, Public Health Consultant, Emma Lonsdale, Head of Public Health, Amanda Newbold, Assistant Director, Education and Skills, Louise Wallace, Director of Public Health, Health and Adult Services and Patrick Duffy, Principal Democratic Services Scrutiny Officer, Legal and Democratic Services

In attendance: Councillor Janet Sanderson (Executive Member for Children and Families) and Councillor Annabel Wilkinson (Executive Member for Education and Skills)

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

52. Welcome by the Chair

The Chair welcomed people to the meeting. In particular, she welcomed Stephen Jennings who had been appointed to the Committee as the representative of the Primary Sector.

53. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Alyson Baker, Stephanie Duckett, Nathan Hull, Janet Jefferson and Yvonne Peacock and Co-opted Members Tom Cavell-Taylor and David Watson.

54. Minutes of the meeting held on 8th December 2023

Resolved –

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 8th December 2023 be confirmed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

55. Any Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

56. Public Participation

A question had been received and it had been anticipated that the member of the public who submitted it would be in attendance. As he was not present the question was not be taken in his absence.

57. Chair's Remarks

The Chair advised that she had attended the meeting of the Executive on 20th February 2024.

She had asked Councillor Janet Sanderson, Executive Member for Children and Families, about Children's Social Care referrals, noting that the number of assessments remains high but has reduced since a peak in Quarter 1 of 2020/2021. She asked whether this is related to the increase in referrals or are there other factors in play?

Councillor Sanderson had advised that the factors affecting assessments are in line with other authorities but the timeliness of assessments are the best in the country by a long way.

She had also put the following questions to Councillor Annabel Wilkinson, Executive Member for Education and Skills:-

1. What is behind the increase in suspensions and permanent exclusions?
 - Is behaviour worsening and is it a legacy of pandemic restrictions? Also, is there any research into the reasons?
 - Is it due to School-based factors e.g. decreasing support resulting from staff shortages or a less lenient approach to misbehaviour?
2. What is being done to support Schools to cope with behavioural problems? Is there a North Yorkshire Council Strategy?

Councillor Wilkinson had advised that Schools are working post-pandemic and trying to reset behaviour. There has been no research into this phenomenon. No Schools wants to exclude children. The increase is following a national trend.

She added that there is no evidence that staff shortages are contributing to the increase in suspensions and exclusions. North Yorkshire Council is not out of kilter with other parts of the country and is keeping an eye on the situation.

NOTED.

58. Schools Update

Considered –

A presentation by Amanda Newbold, Assistant Director, Education and Skills and Howard Emmett, Assistant Director, Resources.

The presentation, which is available to view [here](#), comprised three elements:-

- School organisation
- School performance (Ofsted)
- School funding

Amanda Newbold highlighted a number of aspects including:-

- An updated figure is that the percentage of Local Authority Schools is now 60%, compared to 40% Academy Schools.
- 98% of Schools inspected by Ofsted so far this academic year and who had had a report published, remain or became *Good* or *Outstanding*.
- The percentage of Primary and Secondary Schools rated *Good* or *Outstanding* is lower than the national average but the gap is closing.
- The percentage of Special Schools ranked *Good* or *Outstanding* is relatively low but five of these Schools are not within the control of the Local Authority.

Howard Emmett, Assistant Director, Resources, advised that there has been a deterioration in the financial position of Schools – 36 are projecting to be in an accumulated deficit position.

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

- The increases in deficits seem to increase year on year but, by March 2026, the projected deficit jumps to £11.5 million. What is the reason for the big projected jump in 2026?

These are based on Schools' assumptions going forward. However, the further ahead projections are made, the less reliable the predictions are. Some deterioration is still expected but it is not likely to be as severe as that which is projected.

One of the conditions of Schools becoming Academies is that they are financially viable. Therefore, the Local Authority can be left with a number of Schools that are not in a good financial position.

- At what rate are Schools academizing?

Slowly. There were several large Academy Trusts formed but there are less now.

- The deficits are a concern but the high percentage of Schools achieving *Good* or *Outstanding* in their Ofsted Inspection indicates that, despite the deficits, Schools are maintaining high standards. Does funding take into account rurality? Is the financial situation impacting on children in terms of, say, equipment in the classroom? Can we, as Councillors bring any pressure to bear?

Yes, sparsity is recognised, so an element of funding is received to reflect this. A few years ago there was an increase in sparsity funding - £10,000 per School has helped small Primary Schools but the same increase in Secondary Schools Funding Formula does not reflect the rural nature of these Schools and the challenges that they face. We continue to make that point to the Department for Education.

- The Funding Formula is skewed towards deprivation.

- We are losing a second School in Whitby due to falling numbers on roll. Is this taken into account in these figures?

Yes, it is. Declining birth rate is just one issue – others include the availability of leisure facilities; employment opportunities; and affordable housing. For small Schools, the breadth of the curriculum can be affected. Therefore, some amalgamate to protect the quality of education.

- Are there any statistics available on Home Schooling?

The numbers are fairly stable. Home Schooling represents money being lost to the education system – it equates to £3 million in North Yorkshire. There was a large increase in Home Schooling during the Pandemic. This then declined and the position now is stable.

- Can the Local Authority identify the number of children in Private Schools?

Yes, we can see how many in the catchment area are in North Yorkshire and track this with health data and work out the number of pupils in state Schools.

- According to the slide headed *Ofsted Performance – as published 31 Jan 2024*, it looks as if some Schools judged to be *Inadequate* have still not been reinspected after four years.

Most of the Schools concerned, will have become Academies so the Inspection “clock” resets. Two will have had a reinspection. Two are receiving sponsorship from an Academy and two are Local Authority Maintained Schools awaiting Academy status and so will not be reinspected. There are no on-going safeguarding concerns at any of the Schools.

Councillor George Jabbour raised concerns about the future of rural schools in North Yorkshire in light of the recent consultation on a proposal to close St Hilda’s School in Ampleforth. He asked if the trend could be slowed? The Corporate Director stressed that the proposal is subject to consultation. As mentioned in an earlier response, this is all interconnected - with factors such as housing, jobs and the economy playing a role. Parents vote with their feet. Some Schools can manage on small numbers and some cannot. The Directorate is working strategically with small Schools but standards of financial governance can make it impossible, given capacity elsewhere.

NOTED.

59. Transitions/Preparation for Adulthood

Considered –

A presentation prepared by Janet Crawford, Assistant Director, Inclusion and Karen Siennicki, Assistant Director, Adult Social Care and Support.

Janet Crawford took Members through the presentation which can be viewed [here](#) for ease of reference and highlighted a number of points:-

- Traditionally referred to as Transitions, it is now referred to as Preparation for Adulthood (PfA) as this more accurately describes so many parts of a young person’s life.
- The emphasis is on partnership working. For instance, the Local Offer has been developed with feedback from young people.
- A PfA Forum is a multi service meeting to develop and move forward the PfA

Action Plan, every six weeks. It focuses on key areas such as co-production, communication, employment, education and independent living.

- Generic information is available but the PfA Pathway is more focused. It is a pathway in which young people are supported through from Children's Social Care and Adult Social Care.
- Changes over the last twelve months include amending the referral age from 16 to 14, to enable time for building relationships with the practitioners involved, young people, parents and carers.
- Next steps include developing a multi-agency pathway to support Transitional Safeguarding with the Youth Justice Service, the Police, etc., and to promote the new Pathway for practitioners from the end of February 2024.

The Chair requested that an update be provided on the SEND Employment Forum at the next meeting.

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

- The new format is good. The officers deserve congratulations for this.
- What happens in instances where there is no diagnosis?
Officers engage with the individuals concerned.
- Training for the Special Education Needs Team is referred to – what will this involve?
Supporting internships and ensuring that the Annual Review document has a PfA focus (from the age of 14).
- Do we know what the impact of reducing the referral age is yet?
This is a recent development – the impact will become clearer in due course.
- Is promotion of the new Pathway, from the end of this month, on track?
Yes, it is.
- The number of children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) are increasing exponentially. What are the reasons for this and can we, in the context of Schools, do anything to help?
The starting point is that children need additional support but not at an absolute level. We are better at understanding SEND now whereas, in years gone by, it might not have been identified. Because of this, there is no evidence that more children and young people have SEND.
- Head Teachers are referring to the pressure on Schools in relation to SEND. Therefore, to see a clear pathway is a positive development. The increased demand raises the question of whether there will be the resources to cope with this, going forward. What is the relationship like with Parent Carer Voice?
It is a positive one. Parent Carer Voice hold the Local Authority to account but in a respectful way.

NOTED.

Considered –

A presentation by Gill Kelly, Public Health Consultant, together with the draft North Yorkshire Substance Use Strategy, which can be viewed [here](#).

Louise Wallace, Director of Public Health, set the scene, stressing that prevention is better than cure. A lot of work has gone into the draft, led by Angela Hall, Public Health Manager.

Gill Kelly, then highlighted the key aspects to Members:-

- The Strategy is based on the findings and recommendations in the North Yorkshire Drugs Needs Assessment and updated Alcohol Needs Assessment and Joint Alcohol Strategy 2024-2019 Final Report.
- It is an all-age Strategy and covers all substances except for vaping and the smoking of legal nicotine products.
- The Vision of the Strategy is: *We will reduce harms associated with substance use across North Yorkshire – putting people, health and communities at the centre.*
- There are three Priorities:-
 - Break drug supply chains, facilitate responsible retailing of alcohol and reduce drug and alcohol related crime and disorder
 - Deliver effective support for all people who experience harmful patterns of substance use
 - Achieve a generational shift in demand for drugs and alcohol
- The Priorities all contain a number of achievable goals.
- There are a number of specific goals related to young people. These include 5,000 new treatment places for young people and a reduction in young people who perceive it is acceptable to take drugs.
- Operation Choice Prosecution Diversion will enable offenders to avoid a criminal record (and the effect that can have on their future) if they agree to undertake a programme of rehabilitation.

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

- We talk about young people and children but parents have a key role also. How do we address the issue of legal drug use?

This is rooted in the draft Strategy. Additional resources have been earmarked to encourage people into treatment. We are working to scope the use of legal drugs to identify the scale.

- Social Media is sometimes talked down but it can have a positive effect on attitudes. It is disappointing that vapes are not included in the draft Strategy. Plus, we are witnessing in the community the impact of young people having access to alcohol.

Vaping is a key Public Health priority. Just because it is legal does not mean that a lot of work is not being devoted to it. We are developing a Position Statement on vaping and taking resource materials into Schools to educate

children and young people. There are some nicotine naive young people. We will also work with premises on this issue.

- No doubt the education in Schools has a beneficial effect.

Indeed. There are several programmes designed to raise awareness and educate children. These are wide ranging and do not concentrate on substance use e.g. how to lead a healthier life and the importance of diet and activity, are also covered. Children are canny in terms of what they glean from social media. A lot of work is being undertaken on the Healthy Schools Programme.

- There are several ways to dissuade selling but these products need to be priced out of range. We must keep pushing on this.
- In some disadvantaged areas drugs are less expensive than alcohol.
- It is good to hear you are working closely with the NHS because some people are addicted to prescription drugs, such as valium and other anti-depressants. I will be interested to hear what you find.

We can bring this information back.

- How can you ensure you reach as many stakeholders as possible during the consultation?

The list of consultees is broad but we welcome any suggestions that Members may have.

- Where does social prescribing come in?

We will note that this is to be added in.

NOTED

61. **Director of Public Health Annual Report**

Considered –

A report by Louise Wallace, Director of Public Health which introduced her Annual Report - *Our Words: A Child's Life in North Yorkshire*. For ease of reference, it is available to view [here](#).

The Director advised that she produces an Annual Report each year. It can be on any issue that relates to the health of the county.

Her first Annual Report covered the Pandemic, followed by the on-going consequences of this. For this, her third Annual Report, it felt right to put the emphasis on children and young people. Whilst the report is in her name, it has been a collective effort and she acknowledged the work of colleagues and partners.

The document seeks to reflect the voice of children and young people which is so crucial. It contains a range of qualitative and quantitative data to triangulate the feedback we are receiving.

She has publicised the Annual Report in a number of ways, including at the University of Scarborough. This included a brilliant dialogue with students. She hopes that many of them will go on to work with young people.

Gill Kelly commented that, whilst being online is one way of communicating with young people, they can also be exposed to the negative effects of social media. What makes children and young people happy is not technology, but being with friends and being outside.

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

- It is good to see the emphasis on children. Have you thought of working with other partners to help ensure that spaces are not just appropriate for sporty people - which tends to be the case with playgrounds and pitches. Other options could be more attractive.

Girls tend to want to engage in more creative and imaginative ways. The Strategic Leisure Review will be undertaken on an assets-based approach, so we will examine the way different age groups value space. In North Yorkshire we have got the lot - hills, coasts and moors. But can people always get to these? There is more work to do on connecting across the Council.

- The case could be made for more green spaces, rather than cramming houses in. We need spaces where people can meet each other safely.

We are working with colleagues on the Council's Local Plan to ensure that the Public Health perspective achieves due prominence.

- There is an initiative in Leeds where people can *take the streets back*, allowing children to play safely. *David Sharp, Co-opted Member, advised that organisations can request to do this once a year.*

- Mental health issues are massively on the increase. What are the drivers of this and is there anything we are doing specifically in North Yorkshire?

There are several North Yorkshire-specific initiatives. For example, the Healthy Schools Programme, which 80% of Schools have signed up to. This includes wellbeing as one of its modules. Another example is Happy Mums, Scarborough. Gill Kelly presented a detailed presentation on this at the last meeting and will send it on to the Member concerned.

- Children do not want to be inside. Youth venues make the difference, but we have lost these and Youth Workers.

A number of Members commented on the quality and usefulness of this report.

The Director of Public Health advised the Committee that she would be happy to attend again next year to present her Annual Report. As part of that, she will update on progress against the priorities for children and young people.

NOTED.

62. Healthy Child Service

Considered –

A presentation by Emma Lonsdale, Head of Public Health and Carly Dodsworth, General Manager for the 0-19 Service at Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust. You can view the presentation [here](#).

Emma and Carly highlighted the following:-

- The Service is based on four pillars. These cover universal, mandated and targeted services, namely:-

- 0-6;
 - Safeguarding and Children in Care;
 - Emotional Health and Resilience; and
 - Infant Feeding, Family Diet and Nutrition
- The Service is needs-led.
 - There is an excellent level of cover of mandated contacts across North Yorkshire.
 - Breastfeeding levels are good and increasing.
 - The Service promotes smoke free at all contacts and is working in partnership with the NHS to help people stop smoking during maternity. An element to this is identifying the risk factors that lead people to smoke at a particular time.
 - The Ages and Stages Questionnaire is a national initiative that monitors child development across a number of milestones at two-and-a half years of age.
 - The Service also delivers the National Child Measurement Programme for early years and Year 6 measurements. Early years has been identified as a priority group. The gap between the national and local position is widening. Therefore, the Service is prioritising early intervention.
 - There is close liaison with the Social Emotional and Mental Health Service.
 - Oral Health is discussed routinely at mandated contacts and an Oral Health package was delivered to pre-School children in nurseries in the summer of 2023.
 - The Home Environment Assessment Tool (HEAT) is routine for all home contacts and part of a holistic assessment objective. It identifies concerns early and enables development of actions, a programme of support and timescales.

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

- On the slide headed *Good Level of Development*, the figures for Richmond are lower. Why is this?

We cannot be certain of the reasons but it is likely related to the fact that movement in and out of the area is very high, due to Catterick Garrison.

- Does the Service look at things such as families who have an abundance of cats and dogs as this might increase the likelihood of fleas and ticks?

Yes, we identify this and provide support. Information is included in the Service's literature and as part of the HEAT and Healthy Needs Assessment.

- Do you provide help with bills?

This is not within our remit.

- As the Ages and Stages Questionnaire is a national initiative, it would be useful to see how North Yorkshire compares nationally across the metrics.

- What are we doing to help increase vaccination rates?

We are encouraging people to come forwards for the MMR vaccine. It is given over two doses. We are looking to explore the reasons why some people do not choose to receive a second dose. We are not far off achieving “herd immunity”.

- The data states that 39% of children aged 10-11 in Scarborough are overweight. Is this because Schools are not taking up the Healthy Schools Initiative in that area?

Not as far as we are aware. The reason tends to be more related to food choices.

- Is there any correlation between health outcomes and Free School Meals and a packed lunch? Could we offer Free School Meals as a trial?

We are not aware of any trials anywhere else and to introduce this would have an additional cost. We would need to see compelling evidence to consider introducing this and are not in a position to trial this. It is an education issue as much as anything i.e. encouraging people to make healthier food choices.

- Do we liaise with York so that we can learn from their pilot?

Yes, there is regular liaison and we will examine the outcomes from their trial.

- Perhaps we need to become more nuanced and target certain areas, rather than having a universal offer.

NOTED.

63. Comment by the Chair

The Chair thanked all of the officers who had presented the above Items for the quality of their presentations and for having kept to timescale. This had enabled plenty of time for questions from Members.

64. Draft Work Programme 2024/2025

Considered –

A [report](#) by Patrick Duffy, Principal Democratic Services Scrutiny Officer, which sought Members views on a draft Work Programme for 2024/2025.

The Principal Democratic Services Scrutiny Officer highlighted that the topics suggested were based on being a mix of areas that the Committee:-

- a) has tended to consider on an annual basis (such as the North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report);
- b) has considered previously, that have been of particular interest to Members and which Members may want to be updated on (for example, children accessing alternative provision - including health needs); and
- c) has not considered previously at a formal meeting (for instance, criminal exploitation)

He felt that the draft Work Programme, at Appendix A of the report, was a good mix of topics. However, Appendix B contained a number of other Items that Members might wish to consider.

Whatever Members agree today need not be set in *tablets of stone*, as circumstances change. For example, in 2023/2024, the topic *SEND Provision in the Scarborough and Whitby Area*, only arose part way through the year. Nevertheless, earmarking Items for meetings over the next year, at this stage, will enable the Directorate and its partners to plan the work involved.

Finally, he highlighted that the next Agenda, for the meeting on 21st June 2024, is a little light at present.

In relation to the above point, the Chair asked the Corporate Director if Foster Carers Services could be considered at the next meeting. The Corporate Director confirmed this would be possible.

Resolved –

That the draft Work Programme, contained at Appendix A to the report, be approved, subject to Foster Carers Services being added to the Items being considered at the meeting on 21st June 2024, together with the update requested by the Chair on the SEND Employment Forum (see Minute No. 59, above).

65. Any other Items

The Chair mentioned that this would be the last meeting of the Committee attended by Patrick Duffy who is retiring at the end of March. She thanked Patrick for the work he has done and the support he has provided to her and wished him all the best in his retirement.

66. Date of Next meeting

This would be held on Friday 21st June 2024 at County Hall in Northallerton, commencing at 10.00 a.m.

The meeting concluded at 12.35 p.m.

PD