

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL

24 JULY 2024

STATEMENT OF CHAIR

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Since the last Full Council, there have been 2 committee meetings, held on 20 May and 21 June.

Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 20 May 2024 – Informal Meeting: Home to School Transport Policy Proposals

This was a meeting to discuss the new Home to School Transport Policy proposals. Due to timescales and availability, it was agreed that this would be an informal meeting held over Teams. The committee received a very detailed presentation from the Assistant Director for Education and Skills that outlined the Department for Education's revised statutory guidance covering travel to school for children of compulsory school age. The Assistant Director explained that the Council is now consulting on the proposed new home to school travel policy for North Yorkshire to ensure compliance with the new statutory guidance. The consultation is also a review of the discretionary areas of the Council's current travel policy, that are above and beyond the statutory requirements of the guidance. Although a petition to "Stop School Bus Cuts" was submitted to NYC as part of the consultation process, it did not meet the required 500 or more signatories to be debated at the local Area Constituency Committee. It has, however, been referred to the Children and Young People's Services for consideration as part of the consultation.

In response to this, questions and comments were raised by committee members including:

- What defines a "suitable school".
- Whether pupils who currently qualify for school travel will still remain eligible and would siblings who have not yet started school also qualify.
- Will home to school transport for 16 to 18 year olds also be considered.
- Concerns around safe walking routes for children, especially in rural areas.

The Committee has welcomed the opportunity to be able to feed into the Home to School consultation and we look forward to receiving an update from Children and Young People's Service in due course.

Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 21 June 2024

<https://edemocracy.northyorks.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1241&MId=7816&Ver=4>

Public Statements

We received 5 public statements: 1 focussed on the process of assigning special school placements; 2 focussed on the adoption system; and 2 focussed on support for foster carers. The Corporate Director and the Assistant Director for Children and Families provided comprehensive responses to them all.

Schools Governance – Roles and Responsibilities of Governing Boards and the Relationship between the Local Authority and Maintained Schools

This agenda item was requested a result of the Call-In meeting held in April 2024, it was agreed that further information about roles and responsibilities would offer a better insight around processes and procedures. We received a presentation by the Assistant Director for Education and Skills, Head of Strategic Planning, Head of School Improvement and Head of Finance.

The key points are summarised below:

- Everyone agreed that school governors and governing bodies do an outstanding job.
- It isn't always the closure of a school that impacts the community, rather, it's often other factors that occur before a school closes that creates the impact. These include elements such as not enough affordable housing or jobs, and low pupil numbers.
- Extensive consultation and procedures are followed which is a lengthy and thorough process, and it will be at least 2 years before a governing body will contact a local authority to explore closing a school.
- Whilst some schools are closing, new ones are opening or merging with others, and NYC is always available to support governing boards and local Councillors throughout the process.

FEAST (Food, Entertainment, Arts and Sport Together)

We considered the FEAST Impact Report for 2023, which outlined the range of free holiday activities being provided to the most disadvantaged children and young people across the county, including young carers, refugees and asylum seekers and children with SEND. Some Councillors have funded FEAST activities and meals by allocating some of their locality budget.

The key points are summarised below:

- The DfE have funded FEAST through their Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) grant since 2021/22 and 2024/25 is the final year of that funding period.
- Children receive free healthy food that meets the School Food Standard, and FEAST supports families through promoting healthy lifestyles and signposting to services.
- They work in partnership with a consortium of local voluntary and community-based providers and the team is encouraging them to look for additional funding so that they can continue the work after 2025.
- FEAST are always mindful to provide activities in the more rural parts of the county.

Fostering North Yorkshire Update

We received an update from the Assistant Director for Children and Families. Whilst the Committee heard from personal experience the growing pressures of being a foster carer, they also heard that many carers are happy and pleased with the level of support they receive, which offers reassurance. The Assistant Director urged foster carers to contact the service with any concerns.

The key points are summarised below:

- There have been 17 Golden Hello's of £500 since January 2023.
- Over 75% of children living in foster homes are in stable long-term arrangements.
- There has been an increase in children under 5 and 5-9 living in foster care, whilst the largest cohort of carers is 55-59yrs.

Annual Report of the Young People's Champion

We considered Councillor Baker's annual report which highlighted the range of activities, engagement and networking she has participated in on behalf of the council. She pointed out that she has also supported and signposted a lot of families to council services.

Treating Care Experience as a Protected Characteristic

This item is in response to the Notice of Motion at Full Council in May 2024 which called to treat care experience as a protected characteristic. We considered a report from the Corporate Director. The Committee agreed the first step would be to consult with care leavers to hear their views, as engaging with them is paramount. They asked the Corporate Parenting Members' Group to lead on this and report back at the next CFOSC in October.

COUNCILLOR BARBARA BRODIGAN

11 July 2024