

## **NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL**

**13 NOVEMBER 2024**

### **STATEMENT OF EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SERVICE**

#### **Children and Family Performance**

The Children and Families Service has seen in Q1 the rate of contacts into the service starting to slow, which is encouraging. However, this is the 3rd successive quarter in which the service has received more than 1,500 referrals and therefore challenges to the services remain.

Q1 has also seen the highest number of open child protection plans in 3 years (469). An increase of +49 in Q1. This increase is reflective of the additional complexities families are dealing with on a day-to-day basis. The number of children in care remained stable, but high, increasing by +3 to 503 on Q1. There has been sustained demand at Early Help with caseloads continuing to sit at over 1,500 at the end of Q1.

Despite the significant rise in referrals, performance remains strong. Children and Family Assessments completed within 45 days was at 96.6%, a slight improvement on the previous quarter. 97.8% of Early Help Initial Assessments were completed within 20 working days, this is higher than corresponding figures in 2022/23 and 2023/24. and 97.8% of Early Help Assessments were reviewed within 6 weeks.

Senior leaders are monitoring the increased volume closely to ensure that the teams continue to provide an exemplary service to our vulnerable children.

#### **Foster Service**

The Foster Service has continued to see an increase in families being assessed to care for family members as kinship carers. This option reflects the national strategy and the practice model within North Yorkshire. Fostering is continuously promoted to recruiting carers across the County with events and activity planned over the coming months ensuring assessments and approvals of carers continues to be high priority. The service recognises the need for sufficiency of placements for those children in North Yorkshire's care. The service links in with providers and events across the County to maximise its visibility and to continually promote fostering as an option across the community. There is a robust level of support and training for foster carers and the service is seeking to ensure that the training provided supports carers to meet the needs of the children and young people that they will be caring for.

There have been a number of recent events bringing staff members and foster carers together. This October saw 250 staff members and foster carer come together to celebrate success and share good practice. The event focused on the Voice of the Child and had input from a young person talking about her experience and work she completed for the North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (NYSCP). Guest speaker, Mike from Lads like us, reminded participants that all young people need is one person to listen to them and try to help and support them through the difficulties they experience growing up, whatever that looks like. The event saw foster carers and staff win awards for their enduring support and commitment. A number of Foster Carers attended the annual event of Celebrate You, giving an opportunity for practitioners across all the service areas to come together, to celebrate practice and acknowledge the work that goes on. Various awards were given in recognition of their contribution over several categories. Feedback from foster carers in attendance has been very positive.

#### **Minority Inclusion Support Team**

The MIST Team continues to work closely with the Refugee Council and the NYC School Admissions team. They support refugee families who have arrived through resettlement schemes, and asylum-

seeking families arriving across the county to access education placements for their children. Members of the team also attend weekly/fortnightly Refugee Council drop-in sessions offering ongoing support and advice related to education and Living in the UK. In the coming weeks, MIST workers we will be welcoming 14 new Afghan families who are resettling in Catterick. In addition, the team will be supporting access to education for Afghan children living in the 50 temporary homes in the area. MIST also provide a Key Worker role for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) living in supported accommodation around the county. The MIST team took an active part in supporting the boys to attend the annual care leaver conference held on the 26th October at York University.

### **Educational Psychology**

There has been a focus on performance and improvement and the locum workforce has continued the reduction in waiting times for psychological assessments. There are currently only a small number of cases outstanding for EP assessment in the backlog.

We have increased the EPT workforce by a Senior EP, two assistant EPs and two international recruits since July 2024 and the team are now delivering service in the DBV project, in all TMPs and SEND statutory work.

### **Developing Inclusive Communities and Developing Better Value**

Following the successful grant application in March 2024 which the council received £1m, workstreams have been underway to support the development of Inclusive Communities, promoting inclusion in our schools and academies.

The transitions project designed to support 60 children with autism or complex needs transitioning from Nursery to Reception or Year 6 to Year 7 is making positive progress and all children successfully transitioned to their new mainstream school. Feedback from schools is very positive, the project has developed their skills and ability to meet the needs of these pupils.

Families are positive with some now feeling mainstream schools can meet their child's needs well. The year 7s are increasing in confidence, with some asking to not have further visits as they now feel well supported and able to advocate for themselves. Evaluation of this project is ongoing and will inform the future working model of the SEND Hubs.

An Inclusive Practice Framework and Self-Evaluation toolkit is being developed, which will start to be piloted in schools this term, offering them a self-evaluation and review of their SEND provision as part of this, aiming to further increase successful inclusion in mainstream schools, reducing pressure on specialist places and ensuring children who can be, are educated in their local community.

### **Medium Term Financial Strategy – Nov 2024**

The Children and Young People's Service have experienced increasing demand to support young people with multiple vulnerabilities and intensive support needs. This has resulted in rapidly increasing costs as the service has responded to meet operational requirements. This reflects the sustained level of high demand in supporting families, increases in referrals to Children's Social Care and the numbers of children in care. Work is underway to develop a strategic response to increased demand through reshaping provision for high-cost placements, and developing a resilient workforce model.

In addition, there continue to be significant cost pressures arising from increasing numbers of children and young people assessed as requiring an Education, Health and Care Plan. This increasing trend has been sustained for a number of years and a wide range of mitigating actions have been identified to reduce the projected financial pressure. Nationally, £1bn has been allocated for High Needs and SEND from the Autumn Budget 2024 and we will continue to lobby the Department for Education for a fairer funding deal for North Yorkshire.

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.

COUNCILLOR JANET SANDERSON