

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL

26 FEBRUARY 2025

STATEMENT OF EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SERVICE

Children and Families

North Yorkshire have had a JTAI – Joint Targeted Area Inspection. JTAIs are completed by Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) The criteria was children aged 0 - 7 years old with a focus of Domestic Abuse. Children and Families collaborated with our partners across NYSCP. The JTAI is not a graded outcome, we will receive the letter outlining their findings which will be published on 27th March 2025. Whilst we cannot share the feedback until published, we can confirm that partnership work across a large geographical area was exceptional, there was a real sense of coming together and working collaboratively to show case the delivery of support to children and their families living in North Yorkshire.

Performance

The Children and Families Service has seen in Q2 the rate of contacts into the service beginning to plateau with only a 1% increase at the year to date, which is encouraging. There is evidence of a shift in the nature of demand, resulting in an increasing number of referrals (particularly safeguarding concerns) to Children's Social care and a significant increase in the number of children at risk of significant harm necessitating a new statutory Child Protection Plan.

This is evidenced by a 6% increase (n=186) in the overall number of referrals and a 45% increase (n=105) in the number of new Child Protection Plans in the first 6 months of 2024/25. This increase is reflective of the additional complexities families are dealing with on a day-to-day basis. The number of children in care have increased by 5% (n=23) children.

Despite the significant rise in referrals, performance remains strong. Both children and families assessments and early help assessments maintaining at a comparatively very strong 95%.

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

Fostering Service

The Fostering Service continues to assess increasing numbers of kinship carers which is positive for those children being able to remain within their family network and often continuing to live locally and within North Yorkshire. The fostering service has launched a targeted recruitment campaign aimed at short break carers. This enables foster carers to take a break when needed as well as support children in shared care arrangements. We continue to promote fostering at every opportunity as we know children thrive in these arrangements.

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 alongside their ongoing work providing support to families within the homes for Ukraine scheme. Since October 2024 MIST have supported 79 families in Temporary Dispersal Accommodation and 11 families on settlement into Catterick Garrison. Members of the team continue to attend weekly/fortnightly Refugee Council drop-in sessions offering ongoing support and advice related to education and Living in the UK.

Educational Psychology

The backlog of EHC needs assessments has been cleared and EPs are now working on current requests. Timeliness of advice from EPs has improved considerably in recent months. Whilst it is 33% for the full calendar year, in December 2024 timeliness was at 80% within the statutory 6 week period.

The remaining international new recruits (EPs) will have started by Easter. The EPs will continue to contribute to the ongoing service work (beyond statutory assessment) and will develop their offer to schools further for the 2025-26 academic year.

Virtual School

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill has expanded the statutory duties of North Yorkshire Virtual School regarding the promotion of the educational achievement of all children with a social worker and those in kinship care. In the past, Virtual School focused primarily on looked-after and previously looked-after children. This extension acknowledges the unique challenges faced by these groups and aims to ensure they receive appropriate educational support.

Under the new legislation, Virtual School are responsible for:

- Raising Awareness
- Enhancing Partnerships
- Promoting Engagement
- Improving Outcomes

It's important to note that while Virtual School provide strategic leadership and support, they are not expected to work directly with individual children or their families. The role is to guide and influence systemic changes that benefit these groups collectively.

This statutory extension builds upon the non-statutory responsibilities introduced in 2021, reinforcing the commitment to support vulnerable children in achieving better educational outcomes. North Yorkshire Virtual School has staffing and processes in place to respond well to the new statutory duty.

Medium Term Financial Strategy – Feb 2025

As previously reported to Full Council, the local authority continues to face significant financial pressure from the continued rise in funded Education, Health and Care Plans. Funding from the Department for Education is simply insufficient to address the sustained increase in demand. We continue to look at, and develop, a range of mitigating actions to alleviate some of the financial pressure. The Directorate has also faced rapidly emerging demand to support young people with multiple vulnerabilities and intensive support needs. Reflecting a trend nationally, this has resulted in a significant cost pressure and a mitigating response will take time to develop and implement.

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