

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

5 May 2021

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN

YOUNG PEOPLES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Traded Services Review

1. The committee has gone on record with its view 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 young people's physical and mental health.
2. Therefore, when the Executive looked at potential short-term solutions to address the financial shortfall facing the Outdoor Learning Service due to the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic, the committee reviewed the issue. We were happy to support the Executive's decision that, rather than mothballing, both sites be protected as soon as possible.
3. The Executive also approved a strategic review being undertaken; one with the ambition of ensuring a long-term sustainable operating model is developed and established. Recommendations resulting from the strategic review will be presented to the Executive later in the year, but I am pleased that the committee will have the opportunity as early as its June meeting, to understand the key issues that review must address, and how it will go about its work.

Portfolio Holder Statement

4. 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 all it could to meet everyone's needs.
5. We have been helped in this by receiving presentations from both portfolio holders – Cllrs Janet Sanderson and Patrick Mulligan.
6. Patrick covered general issues around CYPS and schools budget, schools and online learning and the challenges to come around supporting schools to reopen. In particular, he highlighted his views that:
 - Schools had adjusted well to the changed definition of the attendance of vulnerable children.
 - Placing a requirement upon schools to provide remote learning had improved service across the whole county, especially in remote rural areas.
 - It was too early to comment upon the then recently announced £700m package for further elements of the recovery support package so children and young people can catch up on missed learning and development due to the pandemic. In principle, he believed the idea of a Covid recovery grant – one that helps pupils catch up is a welcome approach. The expectation was that funding would go directly through the school route.

7. Getting the testing regime right would be extremely challenging, especially for secondary schools but, overall, he sensed there was high level of confidence that the return to schools had been prepared for well.
8. Janet covered the general impact of the pandemic on children's social care - what has been achieved, what has been learned, how we now understand and manage risk. The key priority had to be maintaining delivery of a service rated outstanding. Janet explained how proud she was that officers, given the opportunity to explore innovative service delivery, had done this – at least in part - by constantly adapting to virtual and remote working.
9. There were many examples of where through innovative and creative working, across boundaries and with partners, we are supporting families and the staff who work with them in a flexible way.
10. Coping with the demands of the pandemic on children's social care has had significant financial implications, but flexibility of service provision has most likely been crucial in mitigating those effects and managing risk.

Looking Ahead

11. At our next meeting, in addition to the Traded Services item mentioned earlier, we will review progress on the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy. On each occasion we have looked at this, we have been pleased with how much has been achieved.
12. Elective Home Education (EHE) is the term used by the Department for Education (DfE) to describe parents' decisions to provide education for their children at home instead of sending them to school. In 2019, the committee concluded that the directorate had a good understanding of the issues associated with EHE, and robust procedures and practices.
13. I therefore took note of the mention within the Executive Monitoring document Best Start in Life, of the increasing numbers of parents who had opted for EHE:
 - At the end of the quarter that there were 806 children in EHE - up from 709 at the end of Q2.
 - There were 30% more children in EHE (187) at the end of December this year compared to last year.
 - 48% indicated that Covid -19 was a factor in their decision to home educate their children.
 - 62 families stated that their child to resume school-based education once the family feel it is safe to do so
14. I shall be inviting the committee to review the circumstances around these figures.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR JANET JEFFERSON

21 April 2021