

# NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

5 MAY 2021

## STATEMENT OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES PORTFOLIO HOLDER

### Children & Families

The Children and Families Service has continued to provide robust support to families, with the majority being done face to face throughout the pandemic. As with previous lockdowns we had initially seen a drop in contacts at our front door during this most recent period. However, this has returned to numbers which we would normally expect. We have seen some indications of increased poverty and anxiety within communities in regard to issues which are being presented.

Performance remains strong. Despite the obvious challenges presented over the past 12 months due to Covid-19 and the frequently changing restrictions, the service continues to ensure that families receive the right service at the right time. Despite the wide-scale closure of schools during a majority of Quarter 4, Children's Social Care continues to receive a relatively stable volume of referrals, at 1,088 in Quarter 4 compared to 1,074 in Quarter 3. Reflective of the Service's commitment to ensure that children and families receive the right service at the right time, 2020/21 has seen sustained low rates of repeat referral, at 15.7% - down from the already low (good) 16.1% seen in 2019/20.

Whilst the number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan has increased this Quarter, from 325 at the end of Quarter 3 to 344 at the end of Quarter 4, this remains within our expected range. Repeat Child Protection Plan rate remains high at 27.1% in 2020/21 but the proportion of repeat Child Protection Plans within 12 months of a previous plan has reduced from 30.9% in 2019/20 to 26.4% in 2020/21. This indicates that repeat plans are more likely to be due to changes in circumstances outside of the service's control than the premature cessation of previous plans.

The number of Children in Care continues to reduce, down from 439 at the end of Quarter 3 to 433 at the end of Quarter 4. Whilst the number of children in care is reducing, it is worth noting that Immunisations and Dental Checks are still proving a challenge due to Covid-19 restrictions. The service continues to work closely with health partners to ensure that young people are able to access dentists and receive their appropriate immunisations.

### Government Programmes - Partners in Practice/Strengthening Families, Protecting Children

During 2020/21 we have delivered 180 days of Sector Led Improvement work to authorities rated as inadequate or requiring improvement under the **Partners in Practice programme**, meeting the target agreed with the Department for Education and allowing us to draw down the full grant agreed. There has been a particular surge in support in regard to Fostering including help with service reviews, restructuring and child placements. We have secured a further grant to provide an additional 180 days Sector Led Improvement work during 2021/22 and will focus support in a variety of areas such as Ofsted Preparation, Data Quality and Leaving Care as well as continuing to provide support in regard to No Wrong Door, Fostering, Early Help, MAST, Virtual Schools and Youth Justice.

In relation to the Covid-19 Extension of the PIP programme, we have, this quarter, successfully delivered on a research project about family time. This has been conducted in partnerships with the University of East Anglia using an additional grant secured from DfE. The research has been piloting an early icebreaker conversation between birth family and foster carers to facilitate more positive relationships and communication about the children. The work has included gaining feedback from children, young people and their families and carers about family time, what works for them and how we can carry on using digital methods post Covid-19. The final report will be produced at the end of April and the work to facilitate better quality family time will continue focusing on discrete areas including family engagement.

North Yorkshire's role within the Strengthening Families Protecting Children Project continues. We are actively working with Middlesbrough, Rochdale, Warrington, Norfolk, Redcar & Cleveland, supporting them to implement their own models of our innovative No Wrong Door approach. Although Covid-19 has prevented face-to-face work, North Yorkshire's Central Delivery Team continue to provide effective support for implementation and training through creative use of virtual approaches. Three local authorities have successfully been supported to launch their own No Wrong Door model, with the rest to follow by the end of 2021.

### **Medium Term Financial Strategy & Beyond 2020**

The Children and Young People's Service has continued to meet its saving target. Delivery of robust performance, whilst maintaining service levels throughout the covid pandemic, has been a significant challenge. Restructures across some of the main areas of the Directorate prior to covid will enable the Directorate to operate effectively across universal, preventative, targeted and acute service responsibilities, with a locality focus. The Directorate continues to face financial pressures in high needs budget including support for children with special education needs and disabilities and SEN Transport costs.

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.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR JANET SANDERSON