

North Yorkshire Council

Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday, 18 June 2025 commencing at 10.00 am.

Councillor Caroline Goodrick in the Chair plus Councillors Stephanie Duckett (via Teams), Nathan Hull (via Teams), David Jeffels, Cliff Lunn, John Mann, Andy Paraskos, Yvonne Peacock, Kirsty Poskitt, John Ritchie and Andrew Timothy and Co-optees Stephen Jennings (via Teams), Yvonne Methley (via Teams) and David Sharp.

Officers present: Barbara Merrygold (Head of Early Help), Stuart Carlton (Corporate Director Children and Young People's Service), Alice Fox (Senior Scrutiny Officer).

Other Attendees: Councillor Annabel Wilkinson (via Teams).

Apologies: Councillors Barbara Brodigan (Chair), Alyson Baker, Janet Jefferson and Monika Slater and Co-optee Martin Macaulay

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

72 Welcome by the Vice-Chair

The Vice Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

73 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Barbara Brodigan, Alyson Baker and Monika Slater and from Co-optee Martin Macaulay.

74 Minutes of the meeting held on 19 March 2025

Resolved

That, the Minutes of the meeting held on 19 March 2025 be confirmed and signed by the Vice-Chair as a correct record.

75 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

76 Public questions/statements

No public questions or statements had been received.

77 Chair's remarks

The Vice-Chair read out the Chair's remarks.

The Chair attended Executive on 27 May and asked 3 questions of Councillor Janet Sanderson regarding the Quarter 4 Performance Report data for referrals to Children's Social Care (CSC), the number of Children in Care and Child Protection Plans.

Question 1. Regarding CSC, it was noted that the numbers have plateaued but that the average per quarter is still 15% higher than in 2022/23. What is the forecast for the next 12 months and what plans are being put in place to respond to forecast levels of demand, particularly if they are going to increase.

Response

The numbers have been higher due to improvements in the Multi Agency Screening Team (MAST). Also, it has been noted that nationally there has been a change due to the Family First programme which has led to improvements in social care work. Nationally there has been large increase in child poverty and those deemed "just about managing". Hopefully referrals will continue to plateau or reduce.

Question 2. The number of children in care continues to increase to an exceptional level of 568 in Quarter 4. It was noted that 2023/24 saw rates lower than the regional and national rates. How does the current data for North Yorkshire compare with regional and national rates for Q4?

Response

The national data is down and North Yorkshire rates continue to be lower. A watch will be kept on the next quarterly data to see if this remains so.

Question 3. The number of Child Protection Plans are the highest in 10 years and higher than our statistical neighbours, with a forecast increase that will significantly impact on resources. What plans are in place to cope with this expected impact in resources?

Response

There has been a knock-on effect of social workers increasing the number of child protection visits to 63 per day. NYC doesn't use agency staff and needs to recruit more social workers, although this is a challenge. The authority is confident that the numbers requiring child protection plans will plateau and decrease, in line with statistical neighbours.

78 Progress on issues raised by the Committee

Considered

A report by Alice Fox, Senior Scrutiny Officer.

It was noted that data regarding the number of children at risk of modern day slavery in North Yorkshire will be provided by the next committee meeting.

Resolved

- 1) That, the report is noted.
- 2) That, data on children at risk of modern day slavery is provided by the next committee meeting.

79 Young People's Champion Annual Report 2024/2025

Considered

A report by Councillor Alyson Baker, Chair and Young People's Member Champion.

Members welcomed the report and felt that it provided a detailed account of the meetings and activities that Councillor Baker has attended over the last 12 months. They were pleased to hear that she is involved with the [North Yorkshire Autism all age Strategy 2025-2030](#) and agreed that schools now have a better understanding of autism and special educational needs and disability (SEND) than they did 10 years. It was highlighted that the voluntary sector has recruited volunteers to support young people with autism and SEND. This includes working closely with employers to help them better understand what simple steps they can put in place to support them with basic things, such as getting to work on time. A discussion followed around whether there should be an additional Member Champion to focus solely on neurodiverse / SEND children and young people. It was agreed that this would require further investigation.

The Director of Children and Families clarified the reason that adoption numbers have declined is because a lot of work takes place to help children remain within their family networks.

Resolved

- 1) That, the report is noted.
- 2) That, the Senior Scrutiny Officer to carry out further research regarding proposals to introduce a Neurodivergent/SEND Children and Young People's Member Champion.

80 Information Considered

A report presented by Barbara Merrygold, Head of Early Help.

Barbara gave a brief overview of MIST and how they work in partnership with a wide range of services and organisations. She explained that 75% of the team are people from a black and minority ethnic background with lived experience and have been in post since 2024 on fixed term contracts. Members agreed that it was of huge benefit to recruit staff from the communities that they are supporting.

The social work team carry out age assessments so that they can offer the most appropriate age-related support for individuals.

Funding for MIST is through government grants and there is no indication that the funding will stop.

Young people are supported up to the age of 25, and the care leaving team is on hand to help them move into care leaving accommodation. The transition to one unitary authority has made it easier to find accommodation across the county as the team only have to work with one housing department.

The Vice-Chair asked Barbara to clarify the difference between an asylum seeker and a refugee. Barbara will send a brief summary to Alice Fox to circulate.

Resolved

- 1) That, Barbara provides a brief summary to Alice Fox clarifying the difference between an asylum seeker and a refugee.
- 2) That, an update is provided at a future meeting.

81 Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill - Key Reforms

Considered

A summary presented by Stuart Carlton, Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services.

Stuart explained that the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill is subject to changes as it works its way through Parliament and the final version may look different to the one summarised today. It is expected to be passed sometime this year.

The Bill proposes establishing Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams which aims to strengthen safeguarding arrangements. NYC already have strong safeguarding practices and the resources in place, but other agencies may find this a challenge, especially as they will be expected to increase staffing. The Bill recommends that multi-agency teams should physically sit together. Considering that North Yorkshire is so widespread, this could mean that potentially, several teams would have to be introduced, and there is no reference to how these would be funded.

Unique Child ID's were welcomed, especially as there is a growing number of children moving around local authority areas.

Proposals around removing an automatic right to home educate would offer better protection to children with a child protection plan as there would be a mandate for them to attend school. It was commented that proposals around home education could go further, for example, it doesn't provide a definition of what is considered "suitable education", and home educators are not required to be inspected by Ofsted. The proposal to maintain a register of children not in school will also create financial implications if the Council is expected to fund this.

It was noted that the proposals to support care leavers does not include recognising care leavers as a protected characteristic. Councillor Timothy informed the Committee that letters asking for support to recognise care experienced as a characteristic have been signed by himself and colleagues in the Liberal Democratic and Liberal Group and sent to The Rt. Hon. Baroness Smith of Malvern, Minister of State for Skills and for Women and Equalities; The Rt. Hon. Baroness Stedman-Scott, Shadow Minister for Equalities; The Rt. Hon. Lord Newby, Leader of the Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords; The Most Rev. and Rt. Hon. Lord Archbishop of York; and The Rt. Hon. Earl of Kinnoull, Convener of the Crossbench Peers. The Vice-Chair also explained that she has contacted the Local Government Association on behalf of the Corporate Parenting Members' Group urging a re-evaluation of the Care Review's recommendations to make care experience a protected characteristic.

The Bill's proposals aim to improve co-operation between schools and local authorities and will enable LA's to direct admissions. Academies would be expected to follow the national curriculum.

The Committee acknowledged there whilst they welcomed many of the proposals, there is not enough information provided by the Government at this stage about how these would be funded.

Resolved

- 1) That, the summary is noted.
- 2) That, once the Bill has been passed, the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services updates the Committee.

82 Work programme

Considered

The work programme for 2025/2026.

Resolved

That, the work programme is noted.

83 Any other items

Councillor Hull asked if the Committee could receive more information about the Council's taxi and transport safeguarding procedures for transporting children and young people. The Vice-Chair asked the Senior Scrutiny Officer to contact the relevant teams.

Resolved

- 1) That, the Senior Scrutiny Officer liaises with officers in Taxi Licensing, Transport Services and Children's Services.
- 2) That, an update is brought to the next Committee meeting.

84 Date of next meeting

Wednesday 17 September 2025, County Hall, Northallerton, commencing at 10.00am

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The meeting concluded at 12.10 pm.

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