

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL

12 NOVEMBER 2025

STATEMENT OF EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Over the past year, North Yorkshire's Children and Families Service has faced its most challenging period in recent memory. The number of children and young people presenting with complex needs has risen sharply, placing significant pressure on services. Yet, through our front-line practice and strong partnership working, we continue to deliver positive outcomes and make meaningful improvements to the lives of children and families across the county.

Initial contacts to children's social care have remained exceptionally high. Thresholds continue to be robustly applied, with the proportion of contacts to children's social care progressing to referral reducing by 11% over the first half of this year. The rate of repeat referrals remains significantly below national levels.

Despite this high demand, standards have been maintained with 91.4% of assessments completed on time - well above the national average of 84.4%. Early Help remains a vital part of our offer, with 96.4% of assessments completed within 20 working days.

Nevertheless, high demand is leading to more children on child protection plans, with a third more children open to service at this level of need than a year ago. While 93 children have ceased to be looked after by North Yorkshire Council during this reporting year, 592 children continued to be in our care at the end of quarter 2. Pleasingly, educational attainment for children in our care continues to exceed national averages in key areas.

Foster carers continue to make a vital and valued contribution to keeping vulnerable children safe, within area and in loving homes. We were proud to launch our fourth Mockingbird Hub in Selby this year, building on the success of our existing hubs. These hubs provide wraparound support to foster families, enabling placement stability and improved outcomes for children. The model has been warmly received by carers and professionals alike.

Kinship care continues to grow, enabling more children to remain within their extended families. This reinforces the importance of belonging and continuity, reflecting our commitment to keeping children connected to their families and communities wherever possible.

North Yorkshire Council has agreed ambitious targets for early years development in response to the government's Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life programme. By 2028 we are working hard to ensure that at least 80.2% of children in North Yorkshire achieve a good level of development by the end of reception and at least 56.7% of children eligible for Free School Meals meet this benchmark.

We are working across the Children and Young People's Directorate and with partners to develop a delivery plan that prioritises children aged 0–5, especially those in our most deprived communities. This work will ensure that every child has the opportunity to thrive from the earliest stage.

Our Youth Voice and Creative Engagement team has delivered impactful work with refugee and asylum-seeking young people, including music sessions and outdoor activities. These initiatives promote inclusion, build confidence, and help young people feel valued.

The Care Champions group has led the “Understanding Fostering” project, presenting their findings to senior leaders and hosting events that amplify the voices of care-experienced young people. A new voice group for young carers in Harrogate is thriving, ensuring their experiences inform service development.

The Virtual School celebrated its annual graduation event, recognising the achievements of children in care alongside their families and schools. We are revising our Personal Education Plan guidance to better support previously looked-after children and their carers.

We are consulting on changes to how we support primary-aged children who are permanently excluded, ensuring continuity in education in keeping with national guidance. We are also launching a nationally pioneering interactive framework to help schools support children with SEND without the need for an EHCP. Developed with health colleagues and parent/carers, this tool helps schools evaluate and improve their provision and aligns with the new Ofsted framework’s emphasis on inclusion.

EHCP timeliness has improved significantly, with 80% delivered on time despite rising demand. In Q2 this year, 299 EHCPs were issued - up from 224 last year.

We have developed our Inclusion Practice Model, which will drive child-centred, strengths-based and solution focused practice across schools and other education settings. This model was launched at our September Service Day and will guide our work moving forward. Practice Champions across services will support its implementation, helping us become a learning organisation that continuously improves.

Like many councils, we face significant financial pressures in high needs funding. The Government’s SEND reform announcement has been delayed to 2026, and we continue to actively lobby for fair funding and reform. We continue to see a rise in children with complex needs requiring high-cost placements.

Despite these challenges, our focus remains on delivering the right support at the right time, in the right place. We are taking proportionate measures to manage costs while maintaining quality and impact.

COUNCILLOR JANET SANDERSON