

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL

18 MARCH 2026

STATEMENT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Children and Families services have continued to work within a challenging environment, characterised by sustained levels of complexity and need. Throughout this period, our focus has remained firmly on quality, timeliness and improving outcomes for children and families. This has been supported by close oversight of performance trends, strong partnership working and a continued commitment to reflective practice.

Leadership and Strategic Capacity

Since our November meeting, there has been a significant strengthening of leadership across the Service. I was pleased to welcome El Mayhew as our new Corporate Director. Alongside this appointment, the directorate has implemented refreshed leadership arrangements, which bring a lengthy period of interim structures to a close.

These arrangements include the creation of a new Assistant Director for Children's Partnerships and Sufficiency, bringing together partnership infrastructure, commissioning responsibilities and sufficiency planning. This integrated approach places the directorate in a strong position to respond to the imminent national reforms across children's services and education.

Performance and Service Activity

Early indicators suggest that enhanced early intervention pathways and strengthened partnership responses are beginning to have a positive effect. Referrals to Children's Social Care have decreased for a third consecutive quarter. The number of children entering care continues to rise but is being monitored closely. Placement stability has improved.

Early Help continues to play a crucial role in providing proportionate and timely support, 96.6% of Initial Assessments were completed within the 20day timescale. Assessment Reviews rose to 98.7%, reflecting robust oversight and effective planning. Quarter 3 saw the first reduction in the number of children subject to Child Protection Plans, with a 7.5% decrease from the previous quarter.

Timeliness of statutory assessments remains a strong indicator of responsiveness. In Q3 2025/26, 93.6% of children and family assessments were completed within 45 working days. The median completion time fell to 29 working days, meaning families are now receiving support more quickly.

Corporate Parenting and the Voice of Young People

A corporate parenting briefing was given at the February members seminar meeting reaffirming our corporate parenting responsibilities and asking members to "bake in" these responsibilities. Following this directive, we spent a Saturday morning baking cakes with a group of enthusiastic care leavers led by the chairman of the Corporate Parent Group. We have continued to work directly with care experienced young people through consultation activities. Together, the young people and I met with the Deputy Mayor of the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority to discuss the Police and Crime Plan and explore how policing can best support children and young people, including those with lived experience of care.

Fostering, Kinship Care and Support for Carers

Foster carers and kinship carers continue to provide essential, life changing stability for children unable to live with their birth families. I am delighted to report that a North Yorkshire foster carer received an MBE in the New Year Honours for more than 30 years of outstanding service.

The Mockingbird programme has continued to expand, with well-established hubs and increasing engagement from carers. Recruitment activity has strengthened further, with more enquiries from

both unrelated foster carers and connected carers, helping ensure more children remain in family-based care within their communities.

SEND Partnership Improvement and National Reforms

The service continues to work closely with regional colleagues through peer support and challenge to strengthen SEND partnership arrangements. The overall volume of plans continues to be extremely high; however, I am pleased to report that in Q3 2025/26, 72.8% of new Education, Health and Care Plans were issued within 20 weeks.

The Government published its schools and SEND White Paper, every child achieving and thriving, on 23 February 2026, alongside a national consultation on SEND reform. The service is currently reviewing the proposals to shape North Yorkshire's response.

The reforms indicate a significant shift in the way children's needs are identified and supported. We welcome the emphasis on inclusion and the strengthening of mainstream support. Further clarity is required regarding detailed expectations, transitional arrangements and the level of resources needed to ensure successful local implementation and smooth experience for children and families.

Virtual School

Training for Designated Teachers has been delivered on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. Further training has been provided on bereavement, PDA and emotion coaching, involving foster carers. Support for schools around Child in Need and Child Protection continues to grow, with upcoming training for secondary headteachers. The NY Virtual School continues to lead the North East Emotion Coaching network.

Financial Context and High Needs

(shared across CYPS portfolios)

High Needs funding remains a considerable national and local issue. Like many authorities, North Yorkshire continues to experience increasing financial pressures across this system.

The Final Local Government Funding Settlement confirmed the Government's intention to introduce a High Needs Stability Grant, which will cover 90% of accumulated high needs related DSG deficits up to the end of March 2026, subject to approval of a local SEND reform plan.

This is a constructive development. Further details are still awaited on how financial pressures arising after March 2026 will be treated and on future funding arrangements.

COUNCILLOR JANET SANDERSON