

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

21 JULY 2021

STATEMENT OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES PORTFOLIO HOLDER

"Celebrating You" event

A "Celebrating You" event was held on 7 July for Children and Families service staff with over 200 colleagues attending this virtual event, hosted by York University on Zoom. I would like to congratulate the winners on behalf of the Council. Categories included Outstanding Partnership, Team of the Year and the Director's Choice Award.

Recipients of the awards had been nominated by their colleagues for going above and beyond. This event is in recognition of the extraordinary lengths staff and teams have gone to during the last 14 months of the pandemic whilst continuing to provide an outstanding service to children and their families.

Looked After Children Members' Group

I am pleased to report that the [2021 Annual Report of the Group is available for download here](#). The report reflects our work as "corporate parents" over the past two years and I would urge Member colleagues to take time to read the document. A covering statement from the group is attached as an Appendix to this statement.

Children & Families

The Children & Families Service has continued to support our most vulnerable families throughout the latest phase of the pandemic. Across the first quarter of 2021/22 we have seen stable and consistent demand at the front door in terms of the number of contacts received by the Customer Resolution Centre. However, we have seen an increase in the number of referrals to Children's Social Care, with 1,280 received in the quarter. This represents a marked increase in comparison with the long-term quarterly average of 1,025 referrals per quarter. This may suggest an increase in the number of families presenting to services in need of greater levels of support than previously.

Despite the challenges faced by the service, performance remains strong and sector-leading in many respects. Our rate of re-referrals to Children's Social Care remains outstanding, with provisional data for Q1 2021/22 suggesting a rate of 16%. Over 99% of Children & Family assessments were completed within the statutory 45 working day timescale in Q1 2021/22, placing North Yorkshire among the very best performing LA's nationally. On average, the service was completing assessments in 17 working days in this quarter, ensuring families receive the right service and support in a timely manner.

There were 384 children with an open Child Protection Plan at the end of the quarter, up from 344 at the end of Q4 2020/21. Although this is the second successive quarter to see an increase, the number of children with an open Child Protection Plan remains within our expected range. Repeat Child Protection Plan rate fell from 27% in Q4 2020/21 to 14% in the first quarter of 2021/22.

The number of Children in Care reduced for the fourth successive quarter, 433 at the end of Quarter 4 2021/22 to 410 at the end of Q1 2021/22. This is the lowest number of children in care for at least 3 years. 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. Positively, we are starting to see an improvement in the proportion of children with an up to date dental check, which rose from 58% at the end of March to 66% at the end of June.

Finally, I am pleased to report that the service was subject to a Focussed Visit by Ofsted in June, looking specifically at services for children in need of help and protection. Whilst the formal outcome of the visit will not be published until late July, informal feedback from the inspection team was overwhelmingly positive, and the work by staff across the service to support children and families shone through.

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

North Yorkshire's role as part of the DfE's Strengthening Families Protecting Children (SFPC) programme continues to develop. We have been actively working with 5 authorities to implement No Wrong Door hubs and I am pleased to report that a total of 5 hubs are now live across 4 local authorities (Middlesbrough, Norfolk, Rochdale and Warrington) supporting them to implement their own models of our innovative No Wrong Door approach, whilst we are supporting Redcar and Cleveland as they prepare to "go live".

The Central Delivery Team continue to work closely with all 5 'host' authorities to ensure the successful embedding of the innovative No Wrong Door Model and we are already starting to see the positive impact on culture, practice and outcomes for young people, at this early stage, through case studies from our host local authorities.

The Department of Education have launched a revised Sector Led Improvement Programme beginning July 2021. Following a successful year of delivering support, North Yorkshire County Council have secured further funding to continue providing Best Practice support to Local Authorities with an Ofsted rating of Inadequate or Requiring Improvement within Children and Families Services. The demand is particularly high for Fostering Support, along with No Wrong Door and Early Help Services.

Medium Term Financial Strategy & Beyond 2020

The Directorate continues to closely monitor the financial impact in some of the demand-sensitive budgets including high need and SEN transport where costs have risen as a result of increases in the number of children and young people assessed as requiring Education, Health and Care Plans. Demand pressures on placements budgets alongside potential market volatility remain financial risks. In addition, the impact of covid restrictions prevented the Outdoor Learning Service from providing a residential offer throughout 2020-21 and into 2021-22. A strategic review of the long-term options for a financially sustainable operating model for the Outdoor Learning Service is currently being undertaken.

The Directorate continues to implement plans to meet the savings target in 2021-22.

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

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING GROUP

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 There can be no more important responsibility than supporting those children and young people entrusted into our care. The attached report is a detailed account of the work the group has done over the last two years to ensure that NYCC is improving the lived experiences of those young people.
- 1.2 The report was delayed coming to you because of the Covid19 pandemic. Meetings of the group were paused as we all came to terms with the impact of restrictions and lockdown. It was essential that we, as members, gave officers and the wider service the space and time to adapt and maintain the high standards in social care we have seen.
- 1.3 We started to meet again remotely with reduced business, and informally, in September this year. We have continued to meet since, focusing very much on the impact of the pandemic on looked after young people and how we support them. The reassuring and heart-warming examples in the report are just a selection of the innovative ways the service has responded to all the unprecedented challenges.
- 1.4 The group is routinely supplied with a rich data picture about our children in care, which helps us assess performance. Other information sources include the Annual Report of the Virtual Head, quarterly statistics on stability of placements, educational attainment, fostering, missing children, offending, health assessments, the Annual report of the Independent reviewing Officer, and so on. It is a credit to staff that all this robust information has still been made available to us during this testing time.
- 1.5 We believe the detailed report ([can be downloaded here](#)) shows that elected members have access to the necessary tools and information in order to make informed judgements on the quality of care and support the council provides.

2.0 LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN STRATEGY

- 2.1 The Looked after Children Strategy 2018-2021 “We care because you matter” and The Local Offer for Care Leavers is the core of our work. An elected member is lead for each of the seven strategy principles, gathering information by maintaining regular contact with the officer and/or team responsible. This undertaking has been invaluable when assessing what has been achieved.
- 2.2 Some highlights from our work:
 - There is a strong commitment to involve children in discussions about their needs and their future, and help them contribute to care plans and reviews.
 - Support begins with a thorough assessment of their emotional and mental health needs.
 - The priority on local placements is producing better outcomes.
 - The need for a strong integrated approach to sexual exploitation through multi-agency working is well recognised.
 - Kinship care is being properly explored.
 - We can see a clear preference for foster rather than residential care.
 - Support services are designed to increase resilience and reduce problems.

- Young people move to independence only when they are ready. Young people are being prepared in a variety of ways, especially essential life skills - budgeting, loans, benefits, cooking and what to do in an emergency.
 - The third annual CareleaversCan2020 conference went virtual with support from the University of York in October, and was a huge success reaching young people who previously had not attended.
 - We applaud the commitment to hold A Virtual School Graduation
- 2.3 Overall, the group believes council can be pleased with significant progress against all 7 principles.
- 2.4 We look forward to being involved in the intended refresh of the strategy later this year. In the meantime, as we continue to review progress, aspects we will look at closely include:
- The performance or health assessments, data immunisation and dental checks
 - How young people are encouraged to express their views about their experience in care and how they can be engaged in wider council services and issues.

3.0 ELECTED MEMBERS AS CORPORATE PARENTS

- 3.1 Member and officer attendance levels over the last year at group meetings has been good. A positive step of note has been the willingness of individual members to take a lead role on the principles, and a renewed commitment from all members to be involved in inspections of our children's homes and residential establishments.
- 3.2 Councillors supported four care leaver Christmas lunches held across the county from their locality budgets and helped build the sense of community with our care leaver population, linking in with their local areas. During the first lock down members supported the distribution of care packages to our care leavers. These included advice on keeping safe and healthy, some individual treats and a reminder of the support available and website help lines in a card from the team and members.
- 3.3 The council will be greatly encouraged to hear that we believe the concept of corporate parenting - the collective responsibility across services and across local authorities to safeguard and promote the life chances of looked after children - is well established within NYCC. We have asked that the name of our group be changed to not only reflect that, but to make it more in line with current thinking about the terminology we use when referring to the children we care for.
- 3.4 In this context, you might be particularly interested in Paragraph 5 of the Annual Report where we discuss how we ensure that role is promoted across the wider council membership.

ALL MEMBERS OF CORPORATE PARENTING GROUP

County Hall,
NORTHALLERTON

Background documents - Nil