

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

8 November 2017

YOUNG PEOPLES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT

"How do we keep children and young people in North Yorkshire Safe?"

1. The welfare of all children and young people in the local community must be a top priority for any local authority. Over the last five years overview and scrutiny committees have become increasingly aware of the need to consider the effectiveness of local safeguarding arrangements.
2. This was highlighted by Professor Jay's 2014 Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham and the response by the Communities and Local Government Select Committee. These reports describe the essential role of overview and scrutiny in the safeguarding process.
3. We addressed the question "How do we keep children and young people in North Yorkshire safe". Our objective was to gain:
 - An underpinning knowledge of the principles and practice of safeguarding and child protection.
 - An understanding of how local safeguarding arrangements are managed and structured.
4. Nick Frost, Chairman of the Children's Safeguarding Board, talked us through the high level, high profile cases currently under consideration by the board. His account told us much about how local safeguarding arrangements work effectively to protect children and young people, and how well local agencies are working together to identify and meet the needs of the most vulnerable children and young people. At the time of talking to us, the Board's Annual report had not been fully completed - although I now understand it is to be signed off very soon. I intend to take up Nick's offer to come back to present it. In part, our focus then will be on the level of challenge in local safeguarding arrangements, how those in leadership roles for local safeguarding arrangements are held to account by the wider system, and how aware are different organisations and practitioners about their roles in the local safeguarding process.
5. Judith Hay, Assistant Director Children and Families, responded to our specific enquiries around Child Protection measures with a thorough and data rich presentation, highlighting some key, strategic factors such as:

- We are a high performing authority.
 - Unlike many others we engage no agency staff.
 - Our sickness rate is low.
 - Budget control is robust: nationally there is a 75% budget overspend, but not in North Yorkshire.
 - Procedures are clear.
 - Caseloads in three crucial areas: Looked After Children; Child Protection; and Children in need, are all at sensible levels. This is then bolstered by effective workload management and good human resources practices for training and supervision.
6. The development of a high quality and effective workforce is essential to good safeguarding. A recognised method of assessing this is to conduct staff surveys covering satisfaction levels and engagement. Locally, the results speak for themselves:
- 93% of respondents would recommend North Yorkshire as a good place to be a social worker.
 - 94.3% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that North Yorkshire is learning organisation and has a positive learning culture.
7. We were pleased to see clear evidence of good quality assurance practices such as effective monitoring and checking of performance levels with live, relevant data, and timely, meaningful supervision audits.
8. Further (independent) evidence that North Yorkshire's position on child protection is sound can be seen by the positive findings arrived at, and the supportive comments made, by OFSTED in recent inspections.
9. Our conclusions, after reviewing all this information, were that:
- Child protection assessments and plans are well thought through and delivered.
 - Services show a thorough awareness of the potential risks that children face both at home and in the local community.
 - There is a manifest determination to achieve the best outcomes for children who experience abuse or neglect is securing strong performance levels.
 - This is an organisation that reflects honestly on what it does; it identifies and learns from experience and from reviews such as Serious Case Reviews and other forms of monitoring; and it implements wisely.
 - North Yorkshire's practices enable it to identify the most vulnerable children in the local area. Good use is put to data and information to help assess how and whether needs are being met.
 - Services are geared towards ensuring local children and their families receive early help to reduce the need for child protection interventions.
 - We support frontline social workers and other practitioners to make sure they have the skills, resources and support to offer effective early help.

10. I gather that my colleague, Cllr John Ennis, Chair of Care and Independence Overview and Scrutiny Committee, is also to report to you on his committee's assessment of the Adults Safeguarding Board's Annual Report following a meeting with Colin Morris, that Board's Chair. I believe it is to our credit as an authority that our scrutiny function takes this level of interest in the whole safeguarding agenda, and, furthermore, that members set time aside not just to engage with its leadership but also to challenge.
11. Scrutiny work on safeguarding, however, can never be complete; it's not a one-off task we carry out once a year. Safeguarding permeates many aspects of local services and duties, so it so important that scrutiny members - indeed all councillors for that matter - are always vigilant of the impact on children's safeguarding of decision-making across diverse policy areas.

Exclusions of Pupils from Schools

12. Permanent exclusion from school is a very critical event in a young person's life; it can also be a distressing experience for a parent. And the decision to exclude permanently is always a very serious one for a head teacher. Whilst the percentage of pupils excluded from North Yorkshire's schools represents a very small percentage of the county's school population, for many permanently excluded children, getting back into mainstream education will be a major challenge and some will stay in alternative provision for the remainder of their school years.
13. Prior to the formal meeting members held group sessions with a number of young people who had been excluded and the PRU staff accompanying them. These sessions covered what those pupils had been excluded for; their reaction to the exclusion; the impact on their family; how and what had changed for them; and how things might be different. We were impressed at the way pupils had responded to their experiences and with the support they had received from the staff concerned.
14. Exclusions is clearly a national, regional and local issue - highlighted by the figures shown in the performance monitoring report to Executive and by the information presented to the meeting. The directorate is right to afford the issue a high priority.
15. From the information presented to it, the committee believes the directorate understands the prevalence of exclusions in the county, and that priority action is needed. It was appropriate, and reassuring for members, that the reasons for exclusions, and their rise in number, was being properly unpicked and analysed.
16. The evidence showed that the most important factors were being addressed with the right level of resources, and in a way that will make a very real difference to people's lives.

17. The current and proposed range of service delivery of improvements had been well thought through; it was especially reassuring that the issue of exclusions was being tackled on all fronts
18. Taking all the above into account, and recognising that work undertaken is something of a pilot, the committee decided there was no need for more detailed group work whilst the directorate has set a clear agenda of improvement. But the committee looks forward to receiving an update on progress and developments at a future meeting.

Alcohol Strategy

19. In January 2015 North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC) published a joint alcohol strategy, the aim being to galvanise partners to collectively reduce the harms from alcohol. At our last meeting we reviewed progress. The key achievements since then are too many for me to list here, but some examples we especially liked are:
- Commissioning by the Public Health Team to deliver free Identification and Brief Intervention (IBA) training to target professional (but non-alcohol specialist) groups across North Yorkshire. To date over 900 people have been trained.
 - The increased provision of IBA in GP settings and pharmacies.
 - As a response to the change in licensing legislation Public Health has been working with colleagues to influence reviews of districts Statement of Licensing Policy and also developing local profiles which include health and police data to support the licensing process and provide alcohol related data for districts.
 - The successful work by Trading Standards to combat the sales of alcohol to under age young people.
20. From what we saw of the published annual report, experience appears to bear out the decision to identify three outcome areas: establish responsible and sensible drinking as the norm; identify and support those who need help into treatment through recovery and to reduce alcohol related crime and disorder. By selecting these, the strategy strikes a realistic and prudent balance between promotion, awareness raising, and intervention and treatment.

Looking ahead

21. In December we turn to the often controversial, but always topical issue of Admissions. The objective of this piece of work is to:
- Assess the extent to which our admissions arrangements are compliant and effective.
 - Assess how the local authority meets its obligations in a diverse educational governance landscape.

- Evaluate the parental experience of the admission arrangements, the admissions process.
- Explore the challenges, to the authority and its partners, both current and for the future.

22. Alongside this, we'll look at the connected topic, "Place Planning - shaping future education provision". Here, we will be briefed on strategic planning concerns, our projections about need/demand, how the LEA shapes/influences provision, and so on.

23. Early next year we'll need to be nimble in holding a special meeting to review the results of the consultation on strategic plan proposals affecting advice and specialist support for a child or young person with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) before they are decided upon by the Executive.

JANET JEFFERSON

Chairman, Young Peoples Overview and Scrutiny Committee
County Hall,
NORTHALLERTON

18 October 2017

Background Documents - Nil.