

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

21 February 2018

YOUNG PEOPLES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT

1. The last ten years have seen significant shifts in the shape and character of the education system in England. In setting itself the task of looking how NYCC is responding to the change in the roles of and relationships between local authorities and schools, the committee has chosen to focus, at different times, on the three main functions of "Education": (i) support for school improvement and intervention, (ii) school place-planning, and (iii) support for vulnerable children. At the forefront of our considerations will be how well partners in the local education system are linking these functions together.
2. It was the turn of school place planning at our last meeting when we also reviewed what might be called its "sister" topic - that of school admissions.
3. Despite the current diversity of the school system, including the more recent addition of non-maintained academies and free schools, the council continues to be responsible for ensuring that every child living in North Yorkshire is able to access a school place. However, this duty sits alongside the increasing number of self-governed academies, multi-academy trusts and free schools and therefore the role of the council is to work in partnership with all education providers. In November 2017 there were 351 mainstream Primary or Secondary schools in North Yorkshire. 38 of our 309 Primary schools and 14 of our 42 Secondary schools are academies. The 52 academies are under the control of 20 different Academy Trusts.

School planning function

4. The overall goal of the school place planning function is to have North Yorkshire schools in the right place relative to where children and families live, providing high quality education and facilities which keep young people safe and inspire them to learn. In a changing education landscape we cannot deliver it alone; we must work well with partners. Our statutory duty remains very clear – this is to ensure a strong supply of high quality school places, in premises that are fit for purpose.
5. Our conclusions, from the evidence given to us were that:
 - The strategy adopted helps us ensure that we meet that duty by commissioning from providers of all kinds the right number of school places in the right locations, at the time they are needed, and having sufficient funding in place to achieve this.

- It is good that negotiating solutions with a diverse range of providers is our preferred approach.
- The LA works closely with the Regional Schools Commissioner to share and shape the issues around school improvement, school organisation and place planning in North Yorkshire. Discussions are regular and ongoing and there is a termly meeting between the RSC and the Corporate Director for CYPS together with their respective senior staff
- A large proportion of North Yorkshire's Schools are faith based covered by the 4 different Diocesan Authorities which cover the County. Good liaison arrangements enables a co-ordinated approach to school improvement, school organisation and school place planning for the Diocesan schools.
- We are working closely with District Councils to understand the infrastructure impacts of proposals for housing to ensure that such developments are sustainable.
- Our systems for forecasting pupil numbers are robust and effective, county and district-wide pupil forecasts are updated annually. Every term pupil forecasts for each planning area and for individual schools are refreshed. Individual school forecasts take account of the actual numbers of pupils in schools as well as the impact of forecast changes to the birth rate and migration. Officers continuously monitor the fluctuating numbers against net capacity within schools in order to identify where shortfalls may be emerging.

Pupil Forecasting

6. The situation on pupil numbers particularly attracted scrutiny members' attention. It is well known that North Yorkshire has historically had a significant level of surplus school places in both primary and secondary schools as pupil numbers have fallen. Approximately 13.9% of primary places and 20% of secondary places are currently surplus. These places are distributed unevenly across individual schools and across areas. Many of them are in small rural schools where the younger population is reducing. In other places there are highly successful and popular schools which are at or above capacity and where numbers are growing.
7. In what is always a sensitive area of provision, we found there were clear, well-though through proposed solutions for meeting the demand in each of the affected areas.

School Admissions

8. In recent legislation and regulation the government has reaffirmed the local authority's duty to ensure fair access to educational provision. The current Admissions code was published on 19 December 2014.
9. We decided to look at the whole process of how school admissions work from formal consultation on the admissions policy, the relationship we have with schools, and the allocations process.

10. The changing and diverse educational governance of school admissions makes ever more complex the role the authority plays. We continue to work with all schools acting as the admission authority for our community and voluntary controlled schools, and advisor and critical friend to our increasing numbers of academies and voluntary aided schools. Through review of own admission authority policies, coordination of "Bulk" admissions and traded services with schools carrying out the administration of the admissions and appeals process, we work hard to ensure that all schools are compliant with the regulations and Codes.
11. Evidence suggests NYCC consults properly and effectively each year on proposed admission arrangements. At the time of our meeting, the authority was consulting on our proposed admission arrangements for the academic year 2019/2020. In short, our key finding was that our admissions arrangements are clear, compliant and effective:
12. Understandably, people are disappointed when the school allocated is not the one they had set their heart on, but as far as procedures go, everything is in place to try and ensure the parental experience of the admissions process is at least a positive one - irrespective of the result. We will test out how far we achieve that ambition when we return to the subject of admissions with a light touch progress review at the conclusion this year's admissions cycle.

Looking ahead

13. Our next meeting promises to be a busy and interesting one, with a small but wide range of topics. We major on Pupil Premium, seeking reassurance that one of the last grants still available for schools is being made best use of. As a follow up to last year's conversation with Nick Frost, Chair of the Children's Safeguarding Board, we'll talk more about local safeguarding arrangements and Child Sexual Exploitation in particular. I'm looking forward to an update on how we support LGBT learners, which was the subject of a member task group a couple of years ago. We will hear more about the excellent "Progression for Success: Evaluating North Yorkshire's innovative careers guidance project". And we will review last year's attainment results of the county.
14. After hearing an in-depth presentation about the proposals for North Yorkshire's Strategic Plan for SEND provision 0-25 - which we supported - we'll need to be nimble in holding a special meeting to review the results of the consultation before they are decided upon by the Executive.

JANET JEFFERSON

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9 February 2018

Background Documents - Nil.