

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

14 November 2018

YOUNG PEOPLES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT

Looked after Children Strategy and the Local Offer for Care Leavers

1. Latest government figures show that there are 72,000 children in care in England.
2. A recently published report surveyed 2,263 people that had been taken into local authority care. The responses revealed that for the majority (83%), being in care was a positive experience and had enhanced their wellbeing and improved their lives. Local consultation with our children looked after echoed some of the concerns expressed in this national report, and highlighted the areas they believe could be improved: communicating why the person has been taken into care; frequent changes in social workers; the feeling of not being listened to; and decisions being made without them being consulted.
3. Compared to their counterparts, children in care face so many added issues. This vulnerable group are more likely to suffer abuse, become homeless, be teenage parents, be a young person not in education, employment or training (NEET), have mental health issues and be victims of exploitation. The challenge, regardless of the added risks and possible problems, is that these children and young people are offered the same opportunities to succeed in life as their peers. In essence, this is what the refreshed Looked after Children Strategy and The Local Offer for Care Leavers sets out to achieve. We were pleased to have the opportunity to review both before they are formally adopted.
4. Members agreed that both are excellent documents. In particular the Committee:
 - likes that the strategy and the local offer are ambitious for our Looked After children and Young People;
 - believes we should strive to ensure the values that underpin that strategic ambition are embedded in the way our staff work with looked after young people;
 - acknowledges that such ambition brings challenges in terms of funding pressures;
 - strongly supports the drive to encourage partners - especially district councils in relation to leisure use, for example - to do what they can to assist looked after children and care leavers;
 - welcomed the consultation undertaken already in respect of both proposals and the plans in place for future engagement - notably the local launches;

- commented favourably on the way the Local Offer is being made accessible for young people;
- Recognises that the Voluntary and Community Sector have much to contribute to help secure positive experiences for these young people.

5. The Committee commends the LAC strategy and Local Offer to the Council.
6. The strategy refers to The Children and Social Work Act 2011, which extended Corporate Parenting responsibilities to both County and District Local Authorities. On a personal note, I am so pleased to see some of the work being done with district and borough councils, exploring the practical support that can be made available for our children looked after. It is heartening that a number of members have come forward to take an active part, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder and Young Peoples Champion, in the local launches of the strategy and then, where appropriate, continue to be a point of reference for discussions.

Exclusions

7. 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.
8. When we reviewed this last year, we concluded that the directorate understands the prevalence of exclusions in the county and that appropriate and innovative priority action was planned. When we revisited this issue recently to assess progress, the evidence before us showed that the most important factors are still being addressed with the right level of resources, and in a way that will make a very real difference to people's lives.
9. There are so many initiatives underway, but I want to highlight one which, for me, demonstrates how the challenges the rising number of exclusions brings are being tackled on all fronts. Members were particularly impressed with the Ryedale Pilot where £27,000 was provided to the school in order for them to achieve the goal of becoming a zero exclusion school. This offers specialist Special Educational and mental health supervision from experts for the Restorative lead in the school. Children are supported to restore relationships and to overcome any difficulties and are given opportunity to keep up with their school work with the support of a mentor for the duration of their time out of class. Encouragingly, since the commencement of the pilot there have been no fixed term exclusions.

10. This is just one example of how the current and proposed range of service delivery of improvements has been well thought through.

High Needs Block Funding Consultation: Budget Scrutiny

11. Alongside the work on Exclusions, members reviewed the consultation on the reshaping of the high needs budget, covering three specific proposals for change:

- i) Changing the process for top up funding for children and young people with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) from a resource allocation system to a banding system.
- ii) Changing the way provision for secondary aged pupils who are permanently excluded or at risk of permanent exclusion is commissioned and funded in North Yorkshire.
- iii) Bringing arrangements for provision and funding for young people with EHCPs receiving post 16 education, into line with statutory guidance

12. We were cautiously supportive of these proposals, recognising the worrying financial pressures associated with the spike in high needs demand. Members do believe, though, that proposal ii) is likely to attract strong feelings and responses from schools, parents and the community.

13. Before we reach a definitive position, however, we agreed to wait until our next meeting so that we can gauge how people have responded, and how the portfolio holder and directorate interpret what those responses mean for implementation. The timing on this is good in that we had already decided at our December meeting to scrutinise the reasons for the projected £11m overspend for 2018/19 for CYPS and what corrective action is planned.

JANET JEFFERSON

Chairman, Young Peoples Overview and Scrutiny Committee

County Hall,
NORTHALLERTON

2 November 2018

Background Documents - Nil.