

Report of the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education

I want to start by saying how much of a privilege it is to take on the role of Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education. There are some absolutely fantastic people out there in York working hard and doing their best for children and young people in our City and it is great to be a part of that.

Inspection Results

I am pleased to say that the recent focussed visit by HMI Ofsted looking at arrangements for care leavers (young people who are some of the most vulnerable in society), went exceedingly well and shows the progress that has been made in the short time since the Full Inspection of Children's Services in the last municipal cycle.

Please take the time to read the letter produced by HMI but the key findings were that ***'Care leavers are very well supported by staff, with whom they have stable and trusted relationships'*** and ***'Senior leaders and members are strong and active corporate parents, who are committed to improving the lives of care leavers. Leaders value opportunities to engage with young people and understand their views and perspectives, treating them as experts. This puts young people at the centre of decision-making and service development.'***

I'd like to thank all the staff and young people that were involved with this process. Any inspection is never a pleasant experience but staff and young people have really stepped up to articulate the work that they are doing.

I'd also like to take the opportunity to remind council that each member is a corporate parent and if you haven't received corporate parenting training recently then please feel free to get in touch with staff to arrange an update.

One aspect of this Ofsted report was our real commitment to pushing corporate parenting up the council's agenda. In my opinion this should include all members having knowledge of the Corporate Parenting Board. As such, please find attached this report as an annex and I would happily answer questions about Corporate Parenting at Full Council or at any other point as well; please just get in touch.

Free School Meals

We are making progress with our manifesto pledge to mobilise the City to deliver Free School Meals to primary school children. I am proud that we have invested £100k as a council as seed-funding and I'd like to thank council officers for the work that they have done to prepare the ground for our pilot project.

We have spoken to charities to help us set up a 'York Fund' pot that individuals, organisations and businesses are encouraged to contribute towards, and this will hopefully go live in October.

We have brought different people from across the City together in a steering group to help us deliver this ambition as a City rather than just as a local authority and I'd like to thank those individuals for their time and expertise.

Once the initial funding pot is in place our plan is to start delivering Free School lunches in Westfield Primary School from January. Westfield is home to some of our most deprived communities and it is one of our largest primary schools and so hopefully we will be able to see the biggest benefits and really investigate what works in our delivery model and how we can improve it moving forward.

Subsequent to this, subject to funding we will look to extend the pilot to Burton Green Primary School to look at the delivery of breakfasts instead. Headteachers have reached out to us and have suggested that from an educational point of view this could be better as it is likely to improve attendance, gives those already on FSM two meals rather than one and fuels young people up before learning. Our ambition is to trial both approaches and learn from the pilot to see what works best for young people in York before expanding this over time.

Further to this we are also piloting the use of 'auto-enrolment' onto Free School Meals. This is aimed at anyone who is currently eligible but for whatever reason is not claiming. This auto-enrolment process will increase the money provided by government for FSM but also for 'pupil-premium' funding that is also paid to the school for additional resourcing. This is worth £1385 per primary school child per year, so is definitely a win for the school, the child and this authority.

I'm very excited about what we are trying to do as a City here. This was never going to be easy, but if we can start with our most vulnerable and build from there, I think we can do great things to support York's young children to learn and flourish at school.

York Civic Trust – Public Speaking Competition

I was really pleased to attend the Primary School Public Speaking Competition that is run in the City by York Civic Trust. This event took place at the Merchant Adventurer's Hall and involved primary school children from across York.

I was blown away by the standard of the speaking from all of the contestants and definitely think that the young people could have given a few councillors a run for their money. The children spoke on a number of topics that had been devised by York Civic Trust but one popular question was 'has Harry Potter ruined the shambles?'; certainly a debate that could be running in York for decades to come!

My congratulations go to the young people from Lord Deramore's Primary School for their first place finish; to St. Wilfred's for second place and Hempland Primary for third place.

Raise York – Family Hubs

I am very excited about the launch of Raise York – Family Hubs. The project is slowly finding its feet ahead of a wider launch in the Autumn but this will hopefully form a one stop shop for information for families from our Family Navigators. They will be based in Hob Moor, Clifton Children's Centre and The Avenues Children's Centre in Tang Hall Primary. This is a pilot at the moment but hopefully this additional support for families will be very welcome.

Fostering – Thank You!

It would be remiss of me to not thank all of the excellent people working to support our young people in care across our City. Whether this is staff working in social care or indeed our excellent Foster Carers. Foster Carers are the life-blood of the care system and support hundreds of young people across York every day. As I don't get too many chances to report my thanks I couldn't miss an opportunity to say thank you for everything you do for our City. But also take the opportunity to ask the people of York that if you think you could be a Foster Carer and really make a difference to a young person's life then please get in touch with the council. We would love to hear from you.

Early Talk for York – Finalists for awards

I'm absolutely delighted this innovative programme has won the 'Delivering Better Outcomes' category at this year's prestigious Municipal Journal Awards.

The positive impact the project is already having on children's development is testament to the strong partnership working across the city, with nurseries, childminders, schools, health and CYC teams joining forces to make a tangible difference. Outcomes for disadvantaged children in York involved in the project are already bucking the national trend of declining speech, language and communication attainment post covid, and I hope that Early Talk for York's impact continues to grow as more and more settings get involved.

Many people have been involved in this project for quite some time now and I'd like to thank them for their efforts. This is something that has received cross-party support and is a really great example of what we can do as a council when we are forward-thinking.

The Westfield Project – Chapelfields

One of the first acts of this administration was to approve the use of Sanderson House in Chapelfields for what originally had the working title of the 'Westfield Project'. This project is aimed at bringing the venue to life and supporting adults, families and their children in the Chapelfields area. Whether that is support through food or support with homework; this project represents a real investment in York by the University of York and demonstrates the positive working relationship this administration is developing with partners across the City.

In such challenging financial times for the council, it's fantastic to see investment being made in one of our most deprived communities from an external source. As a council administration we will also do everything we can, with existing limited resources, to support those most in need.

Finances

We have seen a significant turnaround in Children's Social Care towards a stable workforce. This has seen a reduction from 8 to 0 agency managers and 26 to 6 agency social workers. In addition to this, we have seen the return of a number of young people from private high cost placements to the City. A combination of these two issues is indicating a reduced spend of around £2.7 million this year. Further work aims to further reduce the financial risk to the authority at a time when nationally we are seeing increased demand, high inflation and spiralling deficits.

Councillor Webb
Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education
13 September 2023

Annex:

Annex 1 - City of York – Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report