

Meeting	Children, Culture and Communities Scrutiny Committee
Date	1 October 2024
Present	Councillors Nicholls (Chair), Cullwick [until 6:54pm], Cuthbertson, K Taylor, Waller, Mason (Substitute for Cllr Knight) [from 5:56pm-7:05pm], Melly (Substitute for Cllr Wilson), Rose (Substitute for Cllr Crawshaw), and Whitcroft (Substitute for Cllr Clarke)
Apologies	Councillors Clarke, Crawshaw, Knight, Nelson, and Wilson
In attendance	Councillor Webb [from 6:42pm] – Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education
Officers in attendance	Martin Kelly – Director of Children and Education Richard Hartle – Head of Children and Education Finance Dan Bodey – School Inclusion Advisor Barbara Mands – Head of Education Support Service Kerry Lee – Wraparound Project Officer Dawn Wood – Early Years and Childcare Programme Reforms Lead Karron Young – Virtual School Headteacher

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## **15. Declarations of Interest (5:32pm)**

Members were asked to declare at this point in the meeting any disclosable pecuniary interest or other registerable interest they might have in respect of business on the agenda if they had not already done so in advance on the Register of Interests. Councillor Cuthbertson declared an interest in that he was in the process of being appointed to the role of director at a charity for SEND. Councillor Mason declared an interest in relation to item 6, Early Year and Childcare Reforms, regarding his employment and noted that he would not participate in discussion for this item.

## **16. Minutes (5:33pm)**

Resolved: That the minutes of the meetings of the committee held on 5 September 2024 be approved and signed as a correct record subject to the following amendment:

- That minute no. 9 be amended to read: “Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting of the committee held on 2 July 2024 be approved and signed as a correct record.”

## **17. Public Participation (5:33pm)**

It was reported that there had been one registration to speak at the meeting under the Council’s Public Participation Scheme.

Flick Williams spoke on item 5, School Attendance, and stated that an obsession over attendance statistics damaged children’s opportunities for attainment, she continued to say that health and illness can prevent children from attending school, and that long-covid was a big contributor to this. As schools were a big contributor to illness, many children could catch illness several times a year, effecting their attendance. Due to policies in place, Flick mentioned that absences were also resulting in the sourcing of a high number of supply teachers.

## **18. Finance and Performance Q1 (5:37pm)**

The Head of Children and Education Finance presented the report and in response to questions from members, the Head of Children and Education Finance, and the Director of Children and Education confirmed that:

- City of York Council (CYC) had more difficulty than larger Local Authorities (LAs) to react quickly to loss of staff and therefore was required to rely on agency workers short-term to help fill gaps in the workforce. Reliance on agency workers was under control and number of agency workers at CYC had decreased significantly.
- Over years, expenditure for Children Looked After (CLA) had increased over the budget that had been set, and an extra £1.6m of funding, resulted from growth, had been invested to address this issue, along with the issue of inflationary costs. Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) were funded via Government funds, and thus when deducted from the statistics for CLA, expenditure was much closer to the budgeted cost.

- Growth had been invested into the Home to School Transport budget as this had been reduced over years and had therefore demonstrated overspends. Investigations were ongoing into more appropriate, cost effective means of transport to address this. A high amount of investment into this budget was eaten up by inflation.
- The projected overspend for the Home to School Transport budget was £620k, to address this an extra £730k of growth had been invested for 2024-2025.
- A lack of professional child psychologists put pressure on LAs as every Education, Health and Care Plan (EHP) needed an educational psychology assessment.

Resolved: That the committee:

- i. Noted the finance and performance information.
- ii. Noted that work would continue on identifying the savings needed to fully mitigate the forecast overspend.

Reason: To ensure expenditure was kept within the approved budget.

## **19. School Attendance (6:16pm)**

The School Inclusion Advisor presented the report and noted that CYC had an established, permanent attendance team which helped York to have a more improved persistent absence rate than the national average. He acknowledged that there were several barriers to school attendance, and that individual schools had responsibility for understanding this. It was noted that work was ongoing with external partners such as Raise York and the Safeguarding Partnership in building neuro-diverse inclusive schools.

In response to questions from members, the School Inclusion Advisor, and the Director of Children and Education confirmed that:

- Schools were continuing to work with national guidance on attendance and illness. This involved guidance from health professionals and NHS advice regarding illness such as long-covid.
- CYC had seen an increase in elective home education, but CYC's figures were still below the national average.

- From August 2024 CYC were able to draw live comparative data on school figures in order to obtain a clearer view of attendance across the city.
- There was an emphasis of focussing on the individual child, and moving away from the focus on numbers and figures.
- It was at the discretion of individual headteacher to authorise absence.
- Members would receive an invite when a date is confirmed for the launch of the Early Help Strategy, increasing access to early help mental health support.
- There was a need to investigate the metrics for calculating absence to find solutions to account for health and illness.
- Children entering elective home education usually did so due to SEN, mental health burnout, and health and anxiety reasons.
- Due to CYC's small size, percentages were not always a good way of understanding education figures as percentages could distort the real story.

Resolved: That the committee noted the content of this report and would receive further updates about progress on local implementation.

Reason: For members to understand the progress being made so far to prepare for successful local implementation so that families can benefit from the new early education entitlements and extended wraparound care.

## **20. Early Years and Childcare Reforms (6:56pm)**

The Head of Education Support Service, Wraparound Project Officer, and Early Years and Childcare Programme Reforms Lead presented the report. It was noted that the reform national deadlines were tight and that delivery plans had been agreed with the Department for Education (DfE) to receive funding by the end of the summer term 2025. The DfE also had an ambition to open 3000 nursery places and to have a free school meals offer in every primary school.

In response to questions from members, the Head of Education Support Service, Wraparound Project Officer, and Early Years and Childcare Programme Reforms Lead confirmed that:

- The childcare market in York had been very responsive so far, and any capping of places resulted from struggles to recruit. Investigations were ongoing into barriers for offering places with individual childcare providers, and the team were in the process of RAG (Red, Amber, Green) rating providers to demonstrate where efforts of improvement and support could be focused.
- Mapping was ongoing to understand migration into, and out of wards in relation to childcare places.
- A national campaign, 'Do something big', had been setup in order to tackle national issues of staff recruitment and retention in childcare.
- CYC had made a request to the DfE to use funding for training, and CYC were looking to offer SEN training to workforces. CYC were working with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and other partners to improve recruitment to the childcare sector.
- Up to £3k was available per place to be unlocked from the DfE funding, on top of an already secured funding amount of £10k to support the commissioning of specialist after school provision for children with complex needs.

A correction to the report was noted, in that "Hemland Without Ward", on page 46 of the agenda, should have read "Heworth Without Ward".

Resolved: That the committee noted the content of this report and received further updates about progress on local implementation.

Reason: For members to understand the progress being made so far to prepare for successful local implementation so that families can benefit from the new early education entitlements and extended wraparound care.

## **21. Virtual School Annual Report (7:33pm)**

The Virtual School Headteacher presented the report and noted that the number of statutory school age children who were on the roll of the Virtual School had decreased from 187 last year to 165 this year.

The Virtual School Headteacher then highlighted that the Virtual School was seeing children stay more locally with stronger support networks and stable relationships. It was reported that most of York's children were in mainstream education where evidence demonstrated children were better supported, as a result of this more alternative provision was required to promote children staying in mainstream schools.

The Virtual School Headteacher then reported a success in that every school had reported Year 2 data to the Virtual School, of which schools were not obligated to do, and that Key Stage (KS) 4 outcomes were the best seen in recent years.

The Virtual School Headteacher then issued an update to the report, in that 8 young people had now achieved 5 GCSEs or more including English and Maths, an increase from 7 as indicated within the report.

In response to questions from members, the Virtual School Headteacher confirmed that:

- The Virtual School could only award the electronic PEP (Personal Education Plan) contract for three years and it is necessary for a new contract to be retendered during the 2024/25 academic year, the current provider could be re-awarded the contract.
- There were statutory inclusions for a PEP, and then bespoke amendments are then included following feedback.
- No children under the age of 16 were on a complete curriculum of alternate provision, but 29 children were receiving a blended curriculum offer.
- The offer of Skills Based Learning varied from school to school, most schools had access to a day of skills based learning alongside mainstream education, in the form of a BTEC course (Business and Technology Education Council) to take into post-16 education.

Resolved: That the committee received the Virtual School Annual report with view of a further update in the next academic year.

Reason: So that members were updated on the work of the Virtual School and exercising their duties as corporate parents.

## **22. Work Plan (8:02pm)**

Members discussed the committee's workplan and it was;

Resolved:

- i. That the report on Digital Inclusion, originally scheduled for 5 November 2024, be deferred to the meeting scheduled for 14 January 2024.
- ii. That Members considered the committee's work plan for the 2024/25 municipal year.

Reason: To have kept the committee's work plan for the 2024/25 municipal year updated.

Cllr Nicholls, Chair

[The meeting started at 5.32 pm and finished at 8.15 pm].