
Meeting	Children, Culture and Communities Scrutiny Committee
Date	3 December 2024
Present	Councillors Nicholls (Chair), Clarke (Vice-Chair), Crawshaw, Cullwick, Cuthbertson, Knight, Nelson, K Taylor, Waller and Wilson
Officers in attendance	Richard Hartle – Head of Finance (Children, Education and Schools) Pauline Stuchfield – Director of Housing and Communities Andrew Laslett – Strategic Services Manager Martin Kelly – Corporate Director of Children and Education Danielle Johnson – Director of Children’s Services Safeguarding Michael Cavan – Head of Children’s Resources Niall McVicar – Head of Innovation and Children’s Champion
Executive Members in attendance	Councillor Kilbane – Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Economy and Culture Councillor Webb – Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education
External visitors in attendance	Jenny Layfield – CEO, York Explore

30. Apologies for Absence (5:32pm)

No apologies were received.

31. Declarations of Interest (5:32pm)

Members were asked to declare, at this point in the meeting, any personal interests not included on the Register of Interests or any prejudicial or disclosable pecuniary interest that they might have in respect of the business on the agenda. None were declared.

32. Minutes (5:33pm)

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2024 be approved and signed as a correct record.

33. Public Participation (5:34pm)

It was reported that there had been no registrations to speak at the meeting under the Council's Public Participation Scheme.

34. Finance and Performance Q2 (5:34pm)

The committee considered a report setting out the projected 2024/25 financial position and the performance position for the period covering 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024.

In response to questions from members it was noted that:

- With reference to a predicted overspend on placement budgets, Children Looked After might be placed out-of-area for a variety of reasons including family arrangements. Where possible support and placements within the local authority area were provided, including through the city's children's home.
- A piece of work to claw back balances of direct payments had been actioned. It would have a one-off impact on the budget and the next phase was reviewing ongoing payments.
- Increases in government SEND funding for 2025/26 were expected to be between 7-10 per cent per pupil nationally; York's increase would likely be at the bottom end of this range in line with trajectory through the national funding formula for High Needs. Part of the latter was based on historic expenditure, and it was expected to take around twelve years for all local authorities to move onto the full national funding formula.
- It was anticipated that there would still be an in-year deficit on the Dedicated Schools Grant for 2025/26, and that it would take a further two or three years to meet the Safety Valve agreement target of eliminating the cumulative deficit. The submission of revised progression plans to the Department for Education should avoid the need for an enhanced monitoring process.

Resolved:

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

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

35. York Explore Annual Update (5:46pm)

The committee considered an annual update from York Explore Libraries and Archives Mutual Limited (Explore), who operate the council's libraries and archives service. The Chief Executive of Explore provided an overview, and in response to members' questions it was noted that:

- In common with similar organisations Explore currently faced a challenging funding environment, including inflationary pressures and access to grants. Energy contracts had been renegotiated, and there would be an impact from upcoming changes to National Insurance contributions. Cafés continued to make a profit despite cost of living challenges and the team were working hard to ensure that prices were appropriate for the locality.
- Work on the project to further develop Acomb Library was on course and would be reported to the Executive early in 2025.
- Family hub funding was part of the upcoming spending review; this money had always been designed as start-up funding to bring partners together. It had helped increase footfall in libraries and it was hoped that the relationship would continue.
- Work was underway to develop staff fundraising skills, with several successes to date including at Bishopthorpe and Strensall Libraries, and for the Summer Reading Challenge. Several projects with partners were in the pipeline for grant funding bids.
- A major project was underway to address legacy issues relating to the management of the archive's collections, with staff and volunteers working through a comprehensive cataloguing exercise which in time would put the service in a very strong position. To assist with conservation challenges, expert advice from professional conservators had been secured through a subscription to the National Conservation Service.

- Several projects were underway to improve the environmental efficiency of library buildings, which was a particular challenge in relation to the eighteenth-century Central Library building.
- The committee offered congratulations on ten years of Explore delivering the library and archives service, as well as on the opening of the new Clifton Library and the sixtieth anniversary of Huntington Library. The Executive Member for Economy and Culture also expressed his appreciation to Explore's staff and volunteers for the work they did for the city.

Resolved: To note the Explore update report.

Reason: To support the council's role in performance management of the library and archives service contract.

36. Placement Sufficiency (6:29pm)

Members considered a report which outlined the Council's Sufficiency Duties to ensure there were enough homes for children in the care of the local authority and presented the Sufficiency Strategy 2024-27. Officers provided an overview and in response to questions it was noted that:

- Placement stability was not always the most useful statistic in measuring outcomes, as for some young people moves might be positive, such as moving closer to York or nearer to family. A piece of work was underway on placement stability but getting a child in the right place was more important.
- In comparison to twelve neighbouring local authorities, York currently paid the second highest weekly payments to experienced carers, but the lowest to new foster carers, which presented a recruitment challenge. An ambitious target had been set to recruit a net gain of fifty new foster carers over the next five years; this was accompanied by an advertising campaign, and a new fairer fee framework was being developed; this would see payments at all levels increasing. A report on this subject would be presented to a future meeting of the committee.
- Kinship care sat at the heart of the Council's practice model, with around 45% of fostered children supported through kinship arrangements. There were concerns around the cost of external provision and the profits made by independent fostering agencies; by contrast the emphasis in York was on support in the community.

- A targeted approach was being taken to encourage residents with empty rooms to consider fostering, with further conversations with Housing colleagues due to take place.
- There had been a small increase in children being placed out-of-area; placement with family was always the first option where possible even if this was out-of-area.
- The service engaged closely with schools as part of its partnership work to support children and young people with complex needs.
- With reference to the 'Together We Can' service, the Wenlock Terrace children's home had been registered and a clinical psychologist recruited; work continued to recruit a specialist speech and language therapist.
- Provision planning was taking place for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, working with interfaith groups and Migration Yorkshire. York would miss out on the next few allocations as it had recently taken four young people, who were doing well.
- The Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education praised the work being done by foster carers, communities and officers to support children and young people in safe, stable, healthy and beneficial placements, and requested that the committee consider a report on the new fostering framework at its next meeting in January.

Resolved: To note this report and accompanying strategy document.

Reason: So that members are updated on the council's responsibilities in accordance with Section 22G of Children Act 1989

37. Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report (7:16pm)

Members considered a report presenting the 2023/24 Annual Report of the Corporate Parenting Board. Officers provided an overview and in response to questions from the committee it was noted that:

- In November the Council's Executive had agreed to treat care experience as if it were a protected characteristic; this decision followed engagement work with care experienced people and other local authorities. An action plan was in place, including updating member training.

- For young people entering the care system, a range of conversations had to be conducted with care and at an appropriate time. While performance in Initial Health Assessments had improved, getting timely parental consent remained a challenge and was discussed regularly by the Board.
- The voucher scheme was due for review in March 2025, but a dedicated fund to support care experienced young people with the cost of living would remain part of the local offer.
- Progress had been made in relation to employability, with several care experienced young people working for the local authority and adding value; options for next steps had been identified and the next annual report would include a more detailed update.
- The move away from a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to a more individualised offer was welcomed, as was the feedback from the National Adviser for Care Leavers.
- A reasonable proportion of the cohort participated in the most recent U Matter Survey. It could be completed in person allowing for exploration of comments and questions were similar to those asked by social workers and pathways workers. The closest comparable data for young people in general locally came from the Public Health Schools Survey.
- All Personal Education Plans were quality-assured by the Virtual School; looked after children had several different statutory plans, and options for combining these to make them work better for young people were being explored.
- The Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education drew attention to the work of Board subgroups on Health, Education and Housing. He noted that there were many care-experienced young people who took corporate parenting very seriously and paid tribute to his co-chairs Lauren and Owen.

Resolved: To note the Corporate Parenting Annual report for 2023/24.

Reason: So that members are updated on the work of the Corporate Parenting Board.

38. Work Plan (7:43pm)

Members discussed the committee's work plan, including suggested items on Fostering Sufficiency and the Locality Model, and it was

Resolved:

- i. That the suggested items on Fostering Sufficiency and the Locality Model be scheduled for the committee's 14 January 2025 meeting.
- ii. That the update on Digital Inclusion previously scheduled for that meeting be moved to the committee's 4 March 2025 meeting.

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

Cllr M Nicholls, Chair

[The meeting started at 5.32 pm and finished at 7.49 pm].