

Report of the Cabinet Member
For Education, Children & Young People's Services
March 2014

They say a week is a long time in politics; it has certainly been a far more eventful year than I anticipated when I gave my last report to Scrutiny in November 2012. And because of some of those events some of the strategic drive I would have been anticipating last year was inevitably if not cancelled probably put on hold.

So although this is a report on my strategic vision for 2014/15, I need to put it in context. In April 2013 Pete Dwyer left us for the DCS post in North Yorkshire; Kevin Hall was given the interim Director's post but seemingly hot on Pete's heels, Jill Hodges, the AD for Education Improvement left us to take up a Director for Education post in East Lincolnshire; and before we could catch our breath Kevin was head hunted for the East Yorkshire Director's post and left us just before Christmas. To misquote Oscar Wilde "To lose one Director may be regarded as a misfortune to lose three looks like carelessness".

However, we did not lose all momentum, Kevin worked tirelessly for the service until he was due in East Yorkshire; and Maxine has stepped into Jill's shoes with brilliance and energy. Sally Rees has been with us for three months while we managed the appointment of a new DCS and Jon Stonehouse will be with us as DCS on the 3rd of March.

So what for the future? One issue that has been concerning us in Education has been that in a number of our Primary Schools we have been flat lining in our school achievement statistics. Where we used to be comfortably above national statistics in our Primary Sats score, we are now only just holding our own at about level pegging with the national scores. This is particularly noticeable in London where across the Greater London area; schools are consistently outperforming national averages even in some "deprived" Inner London boroughs where traditionally education achievement has been low.

A lot of this success has been put down to the huge success of the London Challenge which was launched a few years ago to bring all London Schools into the position of being good or outstanding. This has had a very real effect and I have agreed that we should come up with our York Challenge to raise

standards in our York schools. York has so accustomed itself to having “good” schools that a certain level of complacency seems to have crept in and we hope the challenge will raise the aspirations of our schools. I am also pleased to say that now 83% of our primary schools are good or outstanding. It is our aspiration that by 2015 90% of our schools will be good or outstanding – and obviously it will be 100% in due course.

The next – and perhaps more significant challenge is around the gap between the youngsters at the bottom of the grades and those more average. I am particularly using the FSM criteria (which although not perfect is a regularly used guide to levels of deprivation). Our FSM gap is not only quite large, but it is not changing. Using the device to say “if York was one school” then there are 300 children in this school who we need to be focused on to enable them to make proper progress within their schools. York being the size it is we could probably identify every one of those children, we know where they go to school and we will be challenging our schools to focus on that gap with a view to closing it and certainly bringing ourselves into better comparison with the national figures.

The Yorkshire/Humberside Region is also taking up the “Challenge” Concept and at a Regional Conference last week in Leeds launched the Pathfinder project which will be taking this up in a few schools across the region to explore the possibilities of raising school achievement in the same way as both London and Greater Manchester have done.

One of the keys to not only school improvement but children’s well being is Early Intervention – we have recently had a thematic inspection of our Early Help Strategy which, while finding areas that do need improvement, also found that we had a strategy in place and that the Front Door was providing good quality and sound advice. But one of the areas that was pulled out for improvement was that our plans need to focus on the child rather than the parent. And that leads to a theme that is coming out of a significant number of Ofsted inspections which is how we both have meaningful consultations with children and young people, but also how we can prove that these consultations have contributed to policy making decisions.

It is quite clear that we have a number of mechanisms for consulting with children and young people but what is not always clear is what use we make of these consultations. One of my projects for the coming year is to put in

place clear systems that not only record our consultations, but show how we have acted on them and where we have used them to influence our policy, and how we have reported back to young people on this. It is closing the loop which is so important not just to children and young people but to everyone with whom we consult.

Children's Centres continue to be a key player in recognising where Early Help is needed; the Parenting Track which was launched last year is, for me, a key part of that strategy – working closely with Health Visitors and Midwives Children's Centres are offering the regular check ups for children up to 2 years of age; and our hope is that not only will this encourage more parents to be registered with their local Children's Centres, but that we will be able to more readily spot the families that don't come to their appointment, and who can therefore be targeted for a visit – hopefully to prove that all is well, but if not proper early support can be offered. Early anecdotal evidence is showing that this approach is beginning to have some effect. One of my key plans for the future is to explore ways in which we can make Children's Centres not just centres for families and young children, but become more widely used community hubs. Frequently the Centres are in natural community areas, perhaps linked to a local school and I believe we should be considering how to get even more out of this valuable resource.

Austerity can sometimes be a spur to doing things differently, and this is certainly the case in Youth Services. As funding is withdrawn from this area we are having to look at different ways of providing activity and social opportunities for young people. I am working to blur the barriers between the play providers and the youth provision to build up networks of voluntary and community groups who can fill some of the gaps left by the more traditional youth services. Judging by some of the meetings I have attended which have been bringing people together from all sectors of this lively and enterprising sector there is a lot of enthusiasm to working more closely together.

To sum up my priorities for the coming year are:

An end to complacency in our schools – we need to continually strive to be the best

A real concerted effort to “close the gap” and enable some of our more deprived youngsters to achieve their potential.

A continued emphasis on Early Help and Early Intervention, encouraging and enabling families to give their children the very best start at the beginning of their lives.

A recognition that a lot of what we want to do with and for Children and Young People will be done in new and imaginative ways, and will mean new and exciting partnerships.

Continue to find ways of listening to children and young people, and making sure that not only do we hear their views, but we allow our policies to be guided by these views –and that we never stop trying to make sure our communications with all children and their families are two way affairs – we listen, we do, and we tell you about it afterwards.