

Councillor Janet Looker, Cabinet Member for Education, Children and Young People

Report to Full Council - July 2013

First of all I would like to register the changes that have happened within the Department since the last Report to Council which must have been well over a year ago. Pete Dwyer, the Director of Children's Services, left the Authority in April 2013 to take up the same post in North Yorkshire County Council. He was much missed but I am pleased to report that work within the Department has continued unabated; and we are delighted that Kevin Hall is making a full contribution as the Interim Head of Children's Services. A little more unexpected was the announcement that Jill Hodges who is the Assistant Director for Education and Skills – and has led the whole School Improvement agenda for the council, is also leaving – at the end of August, to take up the post of Director of Education Services in Lincolnshire. We will really miss Jill and her contribution to the success of York's schools and education service, but I am very pleased that Maxine Squire (who has been the Lead Adviser for Secondary Schools) will take on the overall role of Head of School Improvement going forward. I am very confident that these two posts will be well covered and we will not see any reduction in the level of drive and energy while the interim arrangements are in place.

Education and Skills

Within Education the overall headline figures at key stages 2 and 4 show York schools to be achieving in line or above national averages, with key stage 4 outcomes being in the top quartile. This is good, but gives us no reason to be complacent. National averages have moved ahead in some ways more quickly than York's have – perhaps because it is easier to move up from a low starting point than to improve from an already good position – but we are ambitious for York and are challenging ourselves to improve the position significantly.

The new Ofsted framework – launched in September 2012 is proving to be very rigorous. The "Satisfactory" category has been removed, and a school is either "Good" / "Outstanding", or it moves into a Category "Requiring Improvement" / Special Measures.

As of early July 74% of our primary schools are good or better; 80% of our secondary schools and 76% of all our schools. It is particularly good to see that eight of our schools – previously deemed to be Satisfactory

have achieved a judgement of Good. As these schools serve areas of deprivation these outcomes were particularly welcome.

I am anxious to see school improvement remain high on our council priorities. I am planning that we should have the target that every child in York will be able to attend a Good or Outstanding School. It is achievable, it is what the children of York deserve and we will continue to set a pace for schools to meet these targets. To encourage the issues around school improvement to remain at the forefront of councillors minds, I am initiating briefings around the school improvement agenda, and I have encouraged the wider remit of the Ofsted sub-committee (which has been a longstanding cross party group that meets with schools as they have their Ofsted inspection) which will continue not just to receive a report of the inspection and talk to the individual headteacher and chair of governors about the experience and the next steps to be taken by the school; but will also take on the wider brief of engaging with officers around the whole school improvement agenda and will be monitoring progress towards our ambition.

The York Education Partnership continues to develop and forms the basis of real strategic thinking and direction around school to school support and cluster led school improvement. As the central funds for education continue to be significantly reduced it is essential that we refocus our work around school leadership and skilful use of the resources within the schools themselves. The cluster model which broadly revolves around a secondary school or schools and the feeder primary schools is increasingly taking a firm lead in monitoring the effectiveness of the schools within their cluster and supporting the work of the school improvement service to provide the resource and expertise to strengthen schools within their cluster. This work is ongoing and developing but there is a real willingness within the clusters to embrace this method of working. Examples of such work are where a school “lends” a deputy headteacher to stand in for an absent headteacher in a neighbouring school, or where a cluster pools a budget to enable them to buy in more resource for their cluster schools. I am hugely impressed by the way in which headteachers across the city are embracing this way of working and feeling able not just to work to improve the outcomes for their own school but for those of the whole area. Truly the education of every child in the city is the responsibility of us all. I must make an acknowledgement of the work of the Independent Chair of the Partnership Board (the “real” David Cameron), he brings an outsider’s view to the work of York and its Schools and both encourages and challenges us to achieve the very best.

The skills agenda is increasingly becoming an important part of the work of the education part of the department. It is not only important for our children to be well educated, but we also need to look to the skills they will need to progress on into adulthood. We are also facing the challenge required by new legislation that everyone up to the age of 18 should be either in Education, Employment or Training; our Participation rates are in the top 10% of national averages, but (and it is a big but) there is a long term significant challenge to improve these statistics for our learners with disabilities and learning difficulties. It is a challenge that the 14-19 team are well aware of and we welcome both the strong support from York College who work with to bring some of our most disadvantaged young people back into learning, and the investment being made at Askham Bryan College which has now received capital funding for a new facility that will significantly support our high needs learners and will really enable us to make an improved local offer for them. A Skills Strategy has been written and this is based upon a detailed assessment of need around employment and skills.

Early Years continues to be a significant priority. If you cannot get it right for the child before they are five, there are some things that will be very difficult to correct after they start school. Too many children are still reported to be starting school with very poor language development, and very unready to make any use of their education journey. Our early years settings and childminders reach very high standards from their Ofsted inspections – 89% of the former and 72% of the latter now being judged good or better. Our Childcare Strategy and Business Management Service working with the Family Information Service ensure that there is quality childcare available for parents that is also affordable and accessible for parents wanting to start back into work. But it is not just the quality of the provision that is important, we also need to be sure that our settings are sustainable and financially viable – I know we value the Business Support that CVS is able to offer many of our settings in the voluntary sector to enable them to not only provide the quality child care service, but manage the business side as well.

Children's Centres are a significant part of all this as well. We have so far retained all our Children's Centres and increasingly we are asking them to work to the Universal Healthy Child Programme which we hope will continue to support not only the quality of every child's physical and emotional development, but also look to the whole family's needs as well. Early Intervention which is part of the education and social care remit can so often prevent serious problems and enable us to support a family before the crisis develops. As part of this agenda I am looking forward to the opportunities that will come when first school nursing and

then health visitors become part of the services commissioned by our own public health service. It will increase the opportunities for joined up thinking and working, which are already such a key part of the York service.

School Admissions: without the school places none of this work would happen; and York is not exempt from the current national rise in birth rate, which is now showing up in our primary Schools. This is part of the national demographic trend which shows a steady rise in demand for school places until 2017-18. However, we did manage to see 92% of pupils allocated their first preference primary school; and 96% of secondary school places.

But this is going to be an increasingly challenging problem and we are working with schools to identify ways in which we can increase primary school places. This has included capital build at Knavesmire Primary School which will significantly ease some of the pressures in the South Bank area, and increasing the number of places available at Acomb Primary, Carr Infant and Junior and Fishergate Primary Schools. Schools in clusters which are facing the greatest pressures are already meeting to plan collaboratively how they can meet future demand.

Children's Specialist Services

This year has seen a significant change in the national landscape for all areas of children's services; and locally it has been a year of considerable transformation to ensure our services continue to deliver the best possible outcomes for children in this changing environment.

The Keeping Families Together programme across Children's Specialist Services has seen an overall reduction in our Looked After Children population from a high of 260 in 2012 to 222 at the current time. We always knew this would be a challenging target to meet and I am impressed by the dedication and hard work of the teams that have enabled this to happen.

The achievements of 2012/13 can be described against our twin track approach of reducing the number of children who enter care and improving the outcomes for those who need to be looked after.

In reducing the number of Looked After Children we have produced a comprehensive vision statement for children's social care in York emphasising the preventative role of social work and describing a new professional development offer for all our social workers.

We have developed a new city wide Integrated Family Service. Located on school sites in three localities across the city, this service (which incorporates York's response to the national Troubled Families initiative) ensures that there effective help and support in place for vulnerable families across the city.

To support older children and young people who may be vulnerable we have launched a new youth offer for the city. Described in the recently published Youth Support Services Strategy 2013/15, this strategy describes how the reconfigured service will provided more targeted help to the most vulnerable young people in the city.

Improving the outcomes for our Looked after Children

2013 has seen the launch of our New Deal for Foster Carers. Our locally devised scheme, which is attracting national attention, implements a new remuneration structure for foster carers linked to their training and development achievements.

We have re-provisioned our local children's home to ensure greater placement choice and value when it is necessary for a young person to enter a residential care placement. Our local children's home beds and those required outside of the city are now provided by Northern Care, an independent provider contracted by the city.

We have launched a new Looked After Children's support service to facilitate supervised contact between children (usually Looked After) and their parents. This service also undertakes life story and identity work with children who may be moving on to adoption or other alternative permanent care.

To engage members as fully as possible with this work we have established The Corporate Parenting Board to enable a group of members to familiarise themselves with the agenda and monitor the work of the service in maintaining a high commitment to our Looked After Children and offering an opportunity for members to engage with both professional social workers in the field and the foster carers who are such a fundamental part of or our whole work with our Looked After Children. This year has also seen some careful preparations to ensure the city is well placed to meet the national reforms to services for children and young people with special education needs. At their heart, these reforms are about putting children, young people and their parents at the centre of service design and delivery. Accordingly we have started our change journey in York by first engaging families in the design and piloting of a single education, health and care plan. This

approach ensures that we prioritise people's needs over individual agency systems and procedures. We remain vigilant and watch the horizon carefully to ensure we can meet changing needs across the city. We are also undertaking a comprehensive review of our specialist provision for children with autism and will be making changes to the style and model of service delivery to meet a growing cohort of children with additional needs in the next school year.

Underpinning all the work with children both in education and Children's Centres and the social care is the YorOK Board. This is York's Children's Trust and it works with partners and a wide range of agencies to review across the city how we serve children, young people and their families. It has a remit from birth to 25 so that we can consider not just children and young people as they go through school but from birth with some of our health colleagues, and right through post-16 education into employment. It is a big brief and I am pleased to say that partners are very well engaged with the agenda, and discussions round the table are informed and useful. The YorOK Board reports through to the Health and Wellbeing Board which monitors the work through the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment Plan.

Finally, as a well brought up middle class person, who believes in deferred gratification – I leave the best to last. Play is an integral part of every child's life and I am pleased to report that although the play team are a veritable shadow of their former selves we have still produced a new Strategic Plan for Promoting Play in the City. With an amazing list of partners we still offer a stunning range of play and out of school activities through the summer – and if you have not yet read your copy of Shine – do so and be delighted. Before the end of August I look forward to making a tour of some of the activities that will be offered and available to children and young people this summer, and later in the year we will be offering the Lord Mayor's Shine awards to recognise some of these achievements. Although the team is small I am delighted that Mary Bailey our former play officer is now securely embedded in the neighbourhoods team, and I am confident that she will continue to promote play and its value through all the opportunities that come her way.

The education and children's services brief is a big one but the opportunities of really making a difference to the lives of some many children and their families in the city is a real privilege, and continually offers exciting ways of planning and delivering an excellent service.

Janet