

Meeting	People Scrutiny Committee
Date	3 December 2025
Present	Councillors J Burton (Chair), Waller (Vice-Chair), Clarke, Cuthbertson [until 7:00pm], Mason [from 6:10pm], Moroney, Nicholls, Runciman [until 7:00pm], and K Taylor (Substitute for Councillor Nelson)
Apologies	Councillor Nelson
Officers in attendance	Maxine Squire - Assistant Director, Education and Skills Barbara Mands - Head of Education Support Service Dawn Wood - Early Years Reforms Programme Lead, Education Support Service Pauline Stuchfield - Director of Housing and Communities Denis Southall - Head of Housing Andrew Bebbington - Housing Policy Officer, Housing Strategy and Development Team James Parker - Scrutiny Officer
In attendance	Councillor Webb – Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education Councillor Pavlovic – Executive Member for Housing, Planning and Safer Communities Representatives from University of York - John Hudson, Rebecca Kerr, Katherine Smith, Aniela Wenham

9. Apologies for Absence (5:33pm)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Nelson, who was substituted by Councillor Taylor.

10. Declarations of Interest (5:33pm)

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 Waller declared an interest in item 5. York Hungry Minds – Free School Meal Pilot Update, in that he was a governor of Westfield Primary Community School.

11. Minutes (5:34pm)

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 8 October 2025 be approved as a correct record.

12. 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.

13. York Hungry Minds - Free School Meal Pilot Update (5:35pm)

The Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education, and the Assistant Director of Education and Skills presented their report and introduced to the meeting the representatives from the University of York.

The report was an update from the initial presentation to the Children, Culture and Communities Scrutiny Committee on 5 November 2025. It was reported that a Fair Admissions Charter had now been adopted through working with the York Schools and Academies Board (YSAB), and the role of the School Poverty Officer was discussed; Amongst other actions, the School Poverty Officer would investigate trauma as a barrier in educational settings through the ARC framework (Attachment, Regulation, Competency).

The Executive Member for Children, Young People, and Education noted that any questions specifically relating to Annex C of the report which could not be answered at the meeting could be brought to members through a briefing.

The representatives from the Universities of York delivered their presentation on the qualitative evaluation findings as seen in Annex D to the report. It was reported that:

- Interviews with staff and children took place between June and August 2024 in which the cost of living came up following analysis; for some children the free school meal was their only meal of the day.
- There were difficulties in conducting comparative analysis between schools in terms of expanding the pilot, as the two schools currently involved were located in two of the most deprived areas of York.
- The pilot led to children eating a more balanced diet with an improved readiness to learn.
- Over 100 pupils were engaged in creative workshops of which analysis showed results echoed views of teachers.
- Findings from both the qualitative and quantitative research supported and echoed each other.

The Assistant Director of Education and Skills noted that the York Hungry Minds Project was an enhancement to the national free school meals programme and the national programme had strict guidelines linked to childcare which York Hungry Minds was not bound by. York Hungry Minds also offered more bespoke arrangements for schools acknowledging that every school was different. The national programme was invitational and not mandatory and so there was a need for City of York Council (CYC) to do the most it can in to make the best use of both schemes available.

In response to questions from members, the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education, Assistant Director of Education and Skills, and representatives from the University of York confirmed that:

- Evidence of stigma was found through comments made on online spaces, but the project was generally seen as being very positive throughout the findings. Children sharing meals together improved inclusivity and children's perceptions of having a shared space was beneficial for everyone.
- The York Hungry Minds Committee had now been set up and would support future applications and funding for expansion of the programme. It was hoped that expansion could be improved in the upcoming year.
- There was a desire to undertake a more longitudinal study in the near future to determine longer-term impacts.

- Both schools included in the pilot had seen an improvement in attendance.
- Funding for the project had historically been static but had recently increased substantially through donations.

Resolved: That the People Scrutiny Committee supported the work of both the York Hungry Minds Project and the School Poverty Framework and noted the benefits of both to tackling child poverty in York.

Reason: The work described would provide valuable support to low income families and ensure that more children are able to have barriers to educational achievement removed so that their long term outcomes are improved.

[The meeting adjourned from 6:46pm-6:48pm].

14. Early Years and Childcare Reforms (6:48pm)

The Head of Education Support Service, and Early Years Reforms Programme Lead, Education Support Service presented the report and noted that the School Based Nursery Programme had resulted so far in one successful applicant in York setting up a nursery in consultation with the Department for Education (DfE). They also reported that summer 2026 would be the key pressure point for childcare providers as it would be the fullest term before children enter school.

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

- The national childcare system was confusing and difficult for parents to follow, the Best Start in Life website had recently been launched aimed at providing parents with information and help. Training for the sector was to happen in 2026 to better understand new government guidance.
- Joint work was ongoing regarding the health visitor service; most disadvantaged families could be reached through Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) data, but many families were harder to reach, and improvements were being investigated.
- CYC worked strongly with DWP on recruitment and retainment; they met termly and held recruitment sessions within the childcare sector.

Resolved: That the People Scrutiny Committee noted the content of the report, including related national policy developments.

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

15. Housing Tenancy Policy (7:20pm)

The Executive Member for Housing, Planning and Safer Communities, the Director of Housing and Communities, the Head of Housing, and the Housing Policy Officer presented the report and informed the Committee that this was a report for pre-decision scrutiny requesting feedback before the Executive Member for Housing, Planning and Safer Communities Decision Session on 20 January 2026. It was a legal requirement for Local Housing Authorities to publish a Tenancy Strategy under the Localism Act 2011; this was not for setting in place a final decision on next year's charges but was instead to do with setting a strategic policy. It was reported that through amendments proposed in the strategy, CYC were still offering more affordable homes than other local or private providers.

In response to questions from members, the Executive Member for Housing, Planning and Safer Communities, the Director of Housing and Communities, the Head of Housing, and the Housing Policy Officer confirmed that:

- There was an Attendance Scrutiny Panel which was due to consider rent setting principles in due course. The Panel had raised concerns regarding anti-social behaviour policy of which there wasn't any divergence of views. Further information regarding the Panel could be shared with members if requested.
- Registered providers had a good chance to engage with CYC on how the strategy would be applied.
- Officers understood there was a need to tell residents what the intention was for expenditure; council housing was there for those most in need and was offered at below market rate. Around £18 million was spent last year on repairs, and properties needed to be maintained to good standard. Many houses reached the end of their lifespan earlier than expected and so it was essential to replace them earlier than first expected. Investment had also been made for upgrading kitchens and bathrooms in the Dringhouses and Woodthorpe Ward, much earlier than originally expected.

- Issues had arisen from joint working between services and work was ongoing to improve this.

Members discussed ways of engagement and collecting feedback through such methods as: tenants' newsletters, tenants satisfaction surveys, and focus groups. There was a need to improve feedback gathering and encourage people to come back with any further issues to make sure jobs were finished and not left undone or forgotten, or to be re-done at more expense in the future.

Resolved: That the People Scrutiny Committee provided feedback on:

- The proposal to ask the Executive Member for Housing, Planning and Safer Communities to approve the Tenancy Policy and Strategy document.
- The proposal to develop a Rent Setting and Service Charges Policy, building on the City of York Living Rent approach, that maximises investment capacity through rental income, where this is manageable or mitigated for tenants, for example through the welfare benefits systems.

Reasons: To achieve legal and regulatory compliance in respect of matters covered by the Tenancy Policy and Strategy, and to achieve the benefits from the proposed document as set out in this paper.

16. Work Plan (8:27pm)

Resolved:

- That an Adult Social Care CQC Report would be requested for the meeting on 10 February 2026.
- To note that the Scrutiny Member Briefing Session scheduled for 4 December 2025 would include a briefing on Healthy Weight.
- That Members considered the Committee's workplan for the current municipal year.

Reason: To keep the committee's work plan for the 2025/26 municipal year updated.

Cllr J Burton, Chair

[The meeting started at 5.30 pm and finished at 8.28 pm].