

White Paper News

13 June 2016

Briefing on the government's White Paper "Educational excellence everywhere"

"North Yorkshire here, now and in the future: beyond the White Paper"

As we all assimilate and refine our thinking around the proposals within the white paper and subsequent announcements, it's becoming easier to see and articulate some of the aspects of the local education system post whatever legislation emerges..

As a result, the headline above - for the introductory session for our forthcoming governor conference, came readily to mind. And because what we are hearing most clearly from schools at present is that they want us to clarify whether there will indeed in the future be a North Yorkshire Local Authority with an interest in and responsibilities around education, it's important to take the opportunity to clarify that.

Yes – there will be a local authority. It will have significant responsibilities which will continue to have a bearing on the workings of all schools; local authority supported/maintained or academies. It may also choose to continue to deliver services which will no longer be statutory responsibilities, and trade those with schools. Or it may do something more radical. Let's look at these different things.

The continuing responsibilities of the local authority

The White Paper clearly states that the role of the local authority in the future will be focused on three areas. These actually cover large parts of what we do and have done for decades.

Ensuring every child has a school place:

- This relates to all places: in schools, special schools and alternative provision. It also covers school transport planning and admissions.

- The local authority will also continue to have responsibilities to ensure the delivery of early education in its area, through schools, private and voluntary providers.
- We will have a duty to facilitate schools becoming academies. This will be to a timescale determined by their Ofsted rating. In essence the schools where this will be a pressing requirement will be those which are Inadequate or repeatedly Requiring Improvement.

Ensuring the needs of vulnerable children are met

- This involves identifying, assessing and making provision for children with special educational needs and disability and looked after children. It covers promoting school attendance and tackling persistent absence. The local authority will ensure that alternative provision is available for headteachers to commission for children excluded from school or otherwise unable to attend a mainstream school.
- All the significant local authority responsibilities remain for safeguarding children and young people, including working with schools to understand and discharge their safeguarding responsibilities. The role and responsibilities of the Virtual School Head will remain, which includes working with schools on promoting the educational achievement of vulnerable children.

Acting as champions for all parents and families

- This includes championing high standards locally; where necessary calling for action from the Regional Schools' Commissioner to tackle underperformance. It involves supporting parents and children to navigate what will be an increasingly disparate/diverse school system, and particularly in relation to the needs of vulnerable children. This is particularly relevant to admissions and ensuring children are treated fairly within proper processes.

Wider dimensions of local authority work

The local authority will continue to take the lead in crisis management and emergency planning, including measures to tackle extremism. It will still have responsibilities for local economic growth, and a role in bringing together the skills/employment sector, alongside the Local Enterprise Partnership.

So if all the above is largely the same – what will be different?

As can be seen, reports of the demise of the local authority are very far from the truth.

We will be here, providing essential services around the areas listed above.

We will also be continuing to trade services through SmartSolutions. Already all schools and most academies purchase at least one service through this, and the annual turnover is in excess of £50 million. The LA may look to offer new services to schools on a bespoke basis and we believe schools will welcome this. These will complement those we currently offer and will add to that choice. SmartSolutions is gaining business beyond North Yorkshire boundaries and this will inevitably bring local opportunities for further economies of scale. The past year has also seen significant increase in trading around school improvement itself and if necessary as the new scaffolding develops we would envisage this increasing.

What we won't be doing, in the case of academies (as now) is fulfilling the role of employer.

Nor will we have the absolute responsibility for the educational standards within schools that are academies. That will be for the academy trusts and any interventions will be from the Regional Schools'

Commissioner. So we will not have the statutory duty to monitor, challenge and support school improvement but we will still need to monitor quality in terms of our brokerage of places, and will be required to notify the Regional Schools' Commissioner of any concerns regarding school performance.

There will be changes. We will make them positive.

We believe schools will welcome the ability to choose more services on a bespoke basis. They may choose to purchase from elsewhere; that's fine. But importantly there will be choice.

We might look at how we package up some of the essential statutory services and see whether they might be delivered differently. For instance through a Trust. And we might look at whether such a Trust could in the future sponsor academies, and/or fulfil an "umbrella role" across other smaller school-led multi academy trusts.

We are contacting other authorities to look at what they are doing and inform our own work, and in a later edition of White Paper News we will let you know how the thinking is developing.

We have not ruled anything out at this stage. As ever, we want to find a positive and constructive way forward and one which makes sense for schools in North Yorkshire.

Let's talk.....

What we know is we are currently and collectively making a real difference. North Yorkshire Education Partnership heard the tremendous news the other week that now more than 90% primary school children in North Yorkshire attend a good or outstanding school – that's 10,000 more since we had the work of the Commission some two years ago. And 85.5% of secondary school pupils in North Yorkshire attend a good or outstanding school. These are impressive figures, particularly given the size of North Yorkshire.

One thing is also very clear – there's a lot to think about and we definitely live in "interesting times". Everyone's contribution is welcome and these are just some of the conversations that have been happening.

- With representatives of all the Diocesan authorities covering North Yorkshire
- With the North Yorkshire Education Partnership
- With the North Yorkshire Children's Trust
- With governors at the Governor SINs meetings
- With individual headteachers and leaders of Teaching School Alliances
- With the Early Years, Primary, Secondary and Special School Improvement Partnerships.
- With the Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee

At each and every one of these sessions we've been able to engage in good, constructive and positively challenging conversations.

Some of the key messages emerging are:

- A welcome feeling that following the Secretary of State's announcement there is no longer the sense of needing to rush to find an academy outcome. Whilst the direction of travel is

understood, people are welcoming the ability to think about it in greater detail and examine wider possibilities.

- Headteachers and governors are mostly of the view that they want to ensure that any new arrangements will offer the same high degree of autonomy that they currently have.
- A desire to continue to be able to purchase services and support from the local authority albeit perhaps on a more “bespoke” basis.
- A request for some or guidance on tools for options appraisals. What criteria does an individual school use when judging between a range of developing options? (We are doing this and it will be with the next issue of White Paper News).
- Interest in the possibility of the LA forming a Learning Trust, although lack of clarity about what that would actually mean. Would it really lend more support, or would we be better just trading more?
- Considerable concerns around keeping a sense of geography, particularly where there are a variety of types of school in an area, and a general concern about how all primaries and particularly small primaries and secondaries could be supported within multi-academy trust arrangements.
- Linked to the comment above, concern around the position of church schools when existing partnership/federation with community schools is successful and the schools want to build further on it.
- The capacity of TSAs/schools to fulfil school-led improvement expectations and the timescales involved when they will be expected to lead school improvement
- An anxiety around the future sustainability of small rural schools

We have really appreciated the generosity of headteachers and governors in giving their time to these conversations. Understanding the landscape is so important and we are heartened by the supportive and collaborative discussions between schools that are taking place all across the county.

We will be taking forward a similar number of conversations at the beginning of the Autumn Term. In the meantime, please don't hesitate to be in contact with any of the people listed below.

As ever, if you have any comments or feedback on this communication they would be welcome.

Your Local Authority contacts

Pete Dwyer, Corporate Director – Children and Young People's Service

email: pete.dwyer@northyorks.gov.uk – telephone: 01609 532234

Carolyn Bird, Assistant Director – Strategy and Commissioning

email: Carolyn.bird@northyorks.gov.uk – telephone: 01609 532740

Jill Hodges, Assistant Director – Education and Skills

email: jill.hodges@northyorks.gov.uk – telephone: 01609 532843

Anton Hodge, Assistant Director – Strategic Resources

email: anton.hodge@northyorks.gov.uk – telephone: 01609 532727

Visit: cyps.northyorks.gov.uk/educationwhitepaper

Any comments on this or any suggestions for future issues
please email us at pete.dwyer@northyorks.gov.uk or carolyn.bird@northyorks.gov.uk