



Northumberland County Council

Your ref:

Our ref:

Enquiries to: Lesley Little

Email: Lesley.Little@northumberland.gov.uk

Tel direct: 01670 622614

Date: Wednesday, 28 February 2024

Dear Sir or Madam,

Your attendance is requested at a meeting of the **FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** to be held in **CONFERENCE ROOM 2 - COUNTY HALL** on **THURSDAY, 7 MARCH 2024** at **10.00 AM**.

Yours faithfully

Dr Helen Paterson
Chief Executive

To Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee members as follows:-

C Ball, E Chicken (Vice-Chair), W Daley (Chair), S Fairless-Aitken, A Scott, C Seymour, M Swinburn, T Thorne, H Waddell and A Watson

Co-opted Members: A Hodgson, L Houghton, D Lennox and P Rickeard



Dr Helen Paterson, Chief Executive
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AGENDA

PART I

It is expected that the matters included in this part of the agenda will be dealt with in public.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2. MINUTES

(Pages 1
- 4)

The minutes of the Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Meeting held on Tuesday 7 December 2023, as circulated, to be agreed as a true record and be signed by the Chair.

3. DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Unless already entered in the Council's Register of Members' interests, members are required where a matter arises at a meeting;

- a. Which **directly relates to** Disclosable Pecuniary Interest ('DPI') as set out in Appendix B, Table 1 of the Code of Conduct, to disclose the interest, not participate in any discussion or vote and not to remain in room. Where members have a DPI or if the matter concerns an executive function and is being considered by a Cabinet Member with a DPI they must notify the Monitoring Officer and arrange for somebody else to deal with the matter.
- b. Which **directly relates to** the financial interest or well being of a Other Registrable Interest as set out in Appendix B, Table 2 of the Code of Conduct to disclose the interest and only speak on the matter if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting but otherwise must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain the room.
- c. Which **directly relates to** their financial interest or well-being (and is not DPI) or the financial well being of a relative or close associate, to declare the interest and members may only speak on the matter if members of the public are also allowed to speak. Otherwise, the member must not take part in discussion or vote on the matter and must leave the room.
- d. Which **affects** the financial well-being of the member, a relative or close associate or a body included under the Other Registrable Interests column in Table 2, to disclose the interest and apply the test set out at paragraph 9 of Appendix B before deciding whether they may remain in the meeting.
- e. Where Members have or a Cabinet Member has an Other Registerable Interest or Non Registerable Interest in a matter being considered in exercise of their executive function, they must notify the Monitoring Officer and arrange for somebody else to deal with it.

NB Any member needing clarification must

contact monitoringofficer@northumberland.gov.uk. Members are referred to the Code of Conduct which contains the matters above in full. Please refer to the guidance on disclosures at the rear of this agenda letter.

- 4. ANNUAL REPRESENTATIONS REPORT 2022/23** (Pages 5 - 26)

The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 require the submission of an Annual Report by every local authority which “provides a mechanism by which the local authority can be kept informed of the operation of its complaints procedure.”
- 5. VIRTUAL SCHOOL HEADTEACHER ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23** (Pages 27 - 54)

This report is to publish to members the Virtual School Headteacher’s Annual Report for 2022-23 regarding the education of Northumberland’s cared for children and care experienced young people.
- 6. INEQUALITIES, POVERTY AND HARDSHIP PLAN** (Pages 55 - 64)

To update on the progress of the Poverty and Hardship plan, with a focus on children and young people.
- 7. REPORTS OF THE SCRUTINY OFFICER** (Pages 65 - 84)

(a) Forward Plan

To note the latest Forward Plan of key decisions. Any further changes to the Forward Plan will be reported at the meeting.

(b) Family and Children's Services OSC Work Programme

To consider the work programme/monitoring report for the Family and Children's Services OSC for 2023/24.
- 8. URGENT BUSINESS**

IF YOU HAVE AN INTEREST AT THIS MEETING, PLEASE:

- Declare it and give details of its nature before the matter is discussed or as soon as it becomes apparent to you.
- Complete this sheet and pass it to the Democratic Services Officer.

Name:		Date of meeting:	
Meeting:			
Item to which your interest relates:			
Nature of Interest i.e. either disclosable pecuniary interest (as defined by Table 1 of Appendix B to the Code of Conduct, Other Registerable Interest or Non-Registerable Interest (as defined by Appendix B to Code of Conduct) (please give details):			
Are you intending to withdraw from the meeting?		Yes - <input type="checkbox"/>	No - <input type="checkbox"/>

Registering Interests

Within 28 days of becoming a member or your re-election or re-appointment to office you must register with the Monitoring Officer the interests which fall within the categories set out in **Table 1 (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests)** which are as described in "The Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012". You should also register details of your other personal interests which fall within the categories set out in **Table 2 (Other Registerable Interests)**.

"Disclosable Pecuniary Interest" means an interest of yourself, or of your partner if you are aware of your partner's interest, within the descriptions set out in Table 1 below.

"Partner" means a spouse or civil partner, or a person with whom you are living as husband or wife, or a person with whom you are living as if you are civil partners.

1. You must ensure that your register of interests is kept up-to-date and within 28 days of becoming aware of any new interest, or of any change to a registered interest, notify the Monitoring Officer.
2. A 'sensitive interest' is as an interest which, if disclosed, could lead to the councillor, or a person connected with the councillor, being subject to violence or intimidation.
3. Where you have a 'sensitive interest' you must notify the Monitoring Officer with the reasons why you believe it is a sensitive interest. If the Monitoring Officer agrees they will withhold the interest from the public register.

Non participation in case of disclosable pecuniary interest

4. Where a matter arises at a meeting which directly relates to one of your Disclosable Pecuniary Interests as set out in **Table 1**, you must disclose the interest, not participate in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation. If it is a 'sensitive interest', you do not have to disclose the nature of the interest, just that you have an interest.

Dispensation may be granted in limited circumstances, to enable you to participate and vote on a matter in which you have a disclosable pecuniary interest.

5. Where you have a disclosable pecuniary interest on a matter to be considered or is being considered by you as a Cabinet member in exercise of your executive function, you must notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest and must not take any steps or further steps in the matter apart from arranging for someone else to deal with it.

Disclosure of Other Registerable Interests

6. Where a matter arises at a meeting which **directly relates** to the financial interest or wellbeing of one of your Other Registerable Interests (as set out in **Table 2**), you must disclose the interest. You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting but otherwise must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation. If it is a 'sensitive interest', you do not have to disclose the nature of the interest.

Disclosure of Non-Registerable Interests

7. Where a matter arises at a meeting which **directly relates** to your financial interest or well-being (and is not a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest set out in **Table 1**) or a financial interest or well-being of a relative or close associate, you must disclose the interest. You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting. Otherwise you must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation. If it is a 'sensitive interest', you do not have to disclose the nature of the interest.
8. Where a matter arises at a meeting which **affects** –
- a. your own financial interest or well-being;
 - b. a financial interest or well-being of a relative or close associate; or
 - c. a financial interest or wellbeing of a body included under Other Registrable Interests as set out in **Table 2** you must disclose the interest. In order to determine whether you can remain in the meeting after disclosing your interest the following test should be applied
9. Where a matter (referred to in paragraph 8 above) **affects** the financial interest or well- being:
- a. to a greater extent than it affects the financial interests of the majority of inhabitants of the ward affected by the decision and;
 - b. a reasonable member of the public knowing all the facts would believe that it would affect your view of the wider public interest

You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting. Otherwise, you must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation.

If it is a 'sensitive interest', you do not have to disclose the nature of the interest.

Where you have an Other Registerable Interest or Non-Registerable Interest on a matter to be considered or is being considered by you as a Cabinet member in exercise of your executive function, you must notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest and must not take any steps or further steps in the matter apart from arranging for someone else to deal with it.

Table 1: Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

This table sets out the explanation of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests as set out in the [Relevant Authorities \(Disclosable Pecuniary Interests\) Regulations 2012](#).

Subject	Description
Employment, office, trade, profession or vocation	Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain. [Any unpaid directorship.]
Sponsorship	Any payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than from the council) made to the councillor during the previous 12-month period for expenses incurred by him/her in carrying out his/her duties as a councillor, or towards his/her election expenses. This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.
Contracts	Any contract made between the councillor or his/her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/civil partners (or a firm in which such person is a partner, or an incorporated body of which such person is a director* or a body that such person has a beneficial interest in the securities of*) and the council — (a) under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed; and (b) which has not been fully discharged.
Land and Property	Any beneficial interest in land which is within the area of the council. ‘Land’ excludes an easement, servitude, interest or right in or over land which does not give the councillor or his/her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/ civil partners (alone or jointly with another) a right to occupy or to receive income.
Licenses	Any licence (alone or jointly with others) to occupy land in the area of the council for a month or longer
Corporate tenancies	Any tenancy where (to the councillor’s knowledge)— (a) the landlord is the council; and (b) the tenant is a body that the councillor, or his/her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/ civil partners is a partner of or a director* of or has a beneficial interest in the securities* of.
Securities	Any beneficial interest in securities* of a body

	<p>where—</p> <p>(a) that body (to the councillor’s knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of the council; and</p> <p>(b) either—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. the total nominal value of the securities* exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or ii. if the share capital of that body is of more than one class, the total nominal value of the shares of any one class in which the councillor, or his/ her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/civil partners has a beneficial interest exceeds one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class.
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* ‘director’ includes a member of the committee of management of an industrial and provident society.

* ‘securities’ means shares, debentures, debenture stock, loan stock, bonds, units of a collective investment scheme within the meaning of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 and other securities of any description, other than money deposited with a building society.

Table 2: Other Registrable Interests

You have a personal interest in any business of your authority where it relates to or is likely to affect:

- a) any body of which you are in general control or management and to which you are nominated or appointed by your authority
- b) any body
 - i. exercising functions of a public nature
 - ii. any body directed to charitable purposes or
 - iii. one of whose principal purposes includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union)

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At the meeting of the **Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held at Council Chamber - County Hall on Thursday, 7 December 2023 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

W Daley (Chair) (in the Chair)

COUNCILLORS

C Ball
A Scott
M Swinburn

E Chicken
C Seymour
A Watson

CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES

A Hodgson
P Rickeard

D Lennox

OFFICERS

C Angus
L Little
D Street

Scrutiny Officer
Senior Democratic Services Officer
Director of Education, SEND and Skills

ALSO PRESENT

G Renner-Thompson

Cabinet Member

There was one member of the press and public present.

23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Councillors Fairless-Aitken, Thorne and Waddell.

24 MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday 2 November 2023, as circulated, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a true record.

A comprehensive introduction to the Annual Report 2022-23 which highlighted actions and progress against the six key priorities for Education, SEND and Skills 22-24 was provided by D Street, Director of Education, SEND and Skills. Councillor Renner-Thompson, Cabinet Member for Inspiring Young People advised that it he was proud of the report, and it had been a privilege to present it at Cabinet and to work with the Officers involved in its production. The report linked to the Corporate Plan helping to address inequalities and driving economic growth by getting more people into well paid employment by improving education and skills.

Members welcomed the excellent report and the following information was provided in response to questions:-

- There was a shared desire and need to support the welfare of all staff within schools with guidance produced on this following thoughts and suggested solutions being shared by the staff themselves. Headteachers were encouraged to set good examples of work/life balance. Paperwork had been changed, but this had been done in order to reduce the workload for staff and Members were asked to report to Officers any instances where they thought that this had not been the case.
- Early Years education had always had successful and strong relationships between the Local Authority, schools and private, voluntary and independent (PVI) settings. The amount of funding for each pupil in an age group was the same no matter what the setting with recommendations being made to Cabinet by the Schools' Forum on this. Whilst independent childminders did not have the back up support of nationally based PVIs, they did an excellent job and received direct support from the Early Years Team in relation to their quality, business and financial management. Childminders generally had strong relationships with schools, as often children attended different settings i.e. school am and childminder pm.
- In relation to SEN provision in the private sector, the use of private provision had been reduced in terms of those leaving the area to go to an out-of-county placement, with additional places being developed in Special Schools in the County to reduce travel time for pupils. However there were examples of excellent private provision and these would continue to be used if appropriate.
- The Skills and Employability Service had strong successes in providing employability skills and there had been hundreds of residents of all ages who had returned to full and long term employment. Details of these figures would be shared to Members.
- Government in an attempt to make childcare more sustainable and affordable had increased the ratio of two year olds from four to one to five to one, but the general feedback from Northumberland provision had been that the majority of providers had not increased their ratios. It was noted that the rates for children for the forthcoming years would increase.
- Campaigns were being launched to seek more staff and in relation to the education sector and it was clarified that an element of this was around the opportunity for careers encouraging people to bring in skills and stay in the that sector with an appropriate rate of pay, work/life balance and welfare at work and was not around short term employment opportunities.

- In respect of alternative provision following the closure of some PVIs it was confirmed that the needs of a high proportion of those affected had been met, however this would sometimes impact on families. There had been some disruption, but the majority had found alternative provision within four weeks.
- The need to recruit across the Early Years sector was known and there were currently 55 people engaged in the Early Years Development Programme with job opportunities available in this sector once they had qualified. It was recognised that the new level of entitlement for two year olds would be a challenge for the sector.
- In relation to falling school rolls and the effect of this on finances, Members were advised that whilst this was challenging, schools of all shapes and sizes did manage to deliver a good education and balance their budgets. This might be achieved by creating federations or working in partnership with other schools to pool resources. The 5% increase in pension payments was highlighted as a further potential problem for schools.
- In relation to the income to the Council in respect the academisation of schools, it was thought that these costs were to cover the legal expenses of the Council in relation to the process with schools receiving additional funding specifically for the academisation process and this was not taken from the normal school budget.
- The growth in the number of temporary and permanent exclusions, higher demand for alternative provision and the increase in pupils who struggled to access the traditional school model and growth in the SEND numbers were the metrics that gave rise to the statement that more young people were struggling with education. The management and growth of SEND, including those without a EHCP was a key priority for the Council with teachers being given the skills and knowledge to identify pupils who needed additional support with the resources provided to assist with this. The SEND Place Planning Strategy provided more detailed information on figures geographically and could be shared with the Committee. The figures in relation to the growth in temporary and permanent exclusions was worrying and it might be that additional work be undertaken by the Committee on this.
- The gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged learners in all key stages had not closed and if this gap could be closed then this Local Authority would be among the highest achieving in the Country.
- It was clarified that there were many large employers within Northumberland with whom the Council worked closely in order to provide apprenticeships and provide pupils with the skills which were required in order to gain well paid employment within these industries. Good schools were also an important factor in attracting workers to come from other areas of the Country and indeed other Countries to work within these organisations.
- The balances of all maintained schools were discussed at a monthly internal finance meetings and any school which was found to be struggling with finances now or was thought they might be within the next three years received an in person visit with discussions held with both the Headteacher and Governors on the problems being encountered. Support could be provided in various ways including how they could increase income and very close monitoring undertaken. Whilst very challenging, it was clarified that there were schools within Northumberland who were expected to be able to balance their accounts without using any carry forward and this information would be forwarded to P. Rickeard.

- In respect of an inclusive education for pupils with SEND and the possible use of non-skilled staff to support children it was stated that the Local Authority continued to develop its training programme for staff. There were some very skilled and experienced people across Northumberland who could be seconded to provide specific support to a school if required.
- In respect of the transfer of pupils with SEND between First and Middle schools it was acknowledged that both schools were required to be aware of the needs of individual pupils and work should start on these three to four years before a phased change was undertaken to ensure that both the pupil and school were prepared. Good examples of this had been seen in the Berwick partnership with work undertaken to provide advice and training with the likely timescale of support needed going forward identified.
- Low attendance figures and exclusions along with the reasons for these were monitored in all schools and any school, whether it be a Local Authority maintained or an Academy would be challenged on figures out of the norm. The Education Welfare Service monitored individual pupils where there was an identified issue and would discuss plans to re-engage pupils with schools in ways to prevent any anxiety triggers and in some instances provide a different curriculum or a non-classroom based education.

The Chair thanked all the staff within the Council, the schools themselves and support organisations for their work in support the children and young people of Northumberland.

RESOLVED that the Committee had received and reviewed the annual report recognising the performance and challenges; recognised the education achievements of children, young people and residents in 2022/23; and acknowledged the valuable support provided to all learners with all settings.

26 REPORTS OF THE SCRUTINY OFFICER

The Forward Plan of Cabinet decisions that had already been taken and future items was circulated for information along with the work programme for this Committee. Members were advised that there was to be a joint meeting with Health and Wellbeing OSC on Tuesday 9th January 2024 to consider the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Adults and Children’s Safeguarding Board Annual Report. Following this the next meeting was scheduled for 7 March 2024.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....



Northumberland County Council

Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 7 March 2024

Annual Representations Report 2022/23

Report of Councillor(s) Guy Renner-Thompson, Cabinet Member for Inspiring Young People

Responsible Officer(s): Audrey Kingham, Executive Director for Children, Young People & Education

1. Link to Key Priorities of the Corporate Plan

This report is relevant to the "Achieving Value for Money" priority in the NCC Corporate Plan 2023-26.

2. Purpose of report

The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 require the submission of an Annual Report by every local authority which "provides a mechanism by which the local authority can be kept informed of the operation of its complaints procedure."

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 Committee are recommended to note and agree the content of the report and identify any additional areas for scrutiny relating to complaint handling.

4. Forward plan date and reason for urgency if applicable

November/December 2023

5. Background

- 5.1 This report will cover all representations and complaints made in relation to Children's Services including both social care services and education/skills. The report has been prepared in conjunction with the regulatory requirements and provides data and analysis of information in relation to feedback from complaints, compliments and other enquiries, submitted to Children's Services and those referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

5.2 The data used for this report was received during the period 01 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

5.3 This report will inform members of the Committee of:

- How feedback from complaints, compliments and other enquiries in relation to Children’s Services are managed;
- Statistical information for 2022/23;
- Learning arising out of the complaints received and how this is used to improve service provision;
- Decisions made by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman in respect of complaints they have received about Children’s Services.

6. Options open to the Council and reasons for the recommendations

6.1 In accordance with The Regulations, it is important that elected members are informed of and understand how representations, complaints and other feedback are handled and managed within Children’s Services and that they provide effective scrutiny, challenge and oversight of that work to ensure that it is as effective as possible.

7. Implications

Policy	Complaints contribute to monitoring the impact of the Council's policies and the effectiveness with which they are being implemented.
Finance and value for money	There are no direct implications.
Legal	There are no direct legal implications
Procurement	There are no direct implications, however, Stage 2 and Stage 3 of the statutory children’s social care complaint process, requires the commissioning of independent officers to undertake the required works. This is currently done through a regional NEPO arrangement.
Human resources	There are no direct implications.
Property	There are no direct implications.
The Equalities Act: is a full impact assessment	No - no equalities issues identified

required and attached?	
Risk assessment	Individual complainants are risk-assessed on receipt, and appropriate actions are taken if required.
Crime and disorder	Arrangements are in place to ensure that if complaints suggest that someone is being abused, or a crime may have been committed, there is an appropriate response.
Customer considerations	Complaints are one of a range of methods by which we received feedback on the quality and consistency of our services. They are also invaluable for learning lessons and quality improvement.
Carbon reduction	There are no direct carbon reduction implications.
Health and wellbeing	There are no direct Health and Wellbeing implications.
Wards	(All Wards);

8. **Background papers**

Annual Representations document

9. **Links to other key reports already published**

Not applicable

10. **Author and Contact Details**

Karen Willis, Complaints Manager - Children and Education
 Email: karen.willis@northumberland.gov.uk

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Northumberland

County Council

CHILDREN'S SERVICES ANNUAL REPRESENTATIONS 2022-23

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Children's Services continue to demonstrate their engagement with service users across the County and promote them having a strong voice in helping to monitor, develop and improve the way the department works. Feedback from customers helps us understand how our involvement affects the lives of people who use our services, their carers and families and in turn this helps inform our service development.
- 1.2 Feedback is obtained in many forms and people who use our services are encouraged to get in touch to provide feedback, both positive and negative, in the form of enquiries, comments, compliments and service improvement suggestions as well as representations or complaints.
- 1.3 Formal representations or complaints relating to statutory social services functions, as set out in The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006, and submitted by a child or young person or a person deemed to have sufficient interest in the child of young person, must follow the statutory three stage process as set out in the aforementioned Regulations.
- 1.4 Complaints submitted in relation to Children's Services functions that do not fall within the remit of The Regulations, will be considered using the Council's own two stage Corporate Complaints procedure, details of which are available on the Council's website.

2.0 Making a complaint or compliment

- 2.1 Full information on how to provide feedback in relation to Children's Services is available on the Council website.

<https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Children/Family/Compliments.aspx>

- 2.2 Written information, such as leaflets, regarding feedback processes is also available and provided to children and young people via officers involved as part of their care team.
- 2.3 Northumberland County Council have a dedicated team managing all representations received called Client Relations (CRT). The Client Relations Team

sits within the Public Health, Inequalities and Stronger Communities Directorate to provide a level of independence from front line service providers in Children's Services.

- 2.4 There are a number of ways to submit feedback in relation to Children's Services. From November 2023, a new casework management system was introduced across the council to record and manage all such cases. Relevant e-forms to submit contacts direct to the department via the new i-casework system are available on the Council website and can be found at <https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/About/Contact/compliments.aspx>.
- 2.5 Alternatively, a service user or their representative can continue to
- Email the clientrelations@northumberland.gov.uk team
 - Write to the Complaints Manager for Children's Services at County Hall, Morpeth, Northumberland, NE61 2EF
 - Telephone the Client Relations Team on 01670 628888
 - Use the Mind of My Own app.

3.0 Numbers and Analysis

- 3.1 CRT recorded and co-ordinated responses to 233 enquiries during the period 01/04/2022 and 31/03/2023. Enquiries are matters where the issue does not necessarily meet the requirements of formal complaint, for example, the service user has not raised the issue with the individual team previously; or the matter may be outside the jurisdiction of the Council's own complaint process, such as a school complaint, but still require a response, advice or guidance.
- 3.2 The individual teams within Children's Services are encouraged to make sure compliments made to their officers/teams are also recorded to enable services to reflect on examples of good practice. Compliments can be received from young people, parents/carers, other involved professionals and, on occasion, Court Judges. 96 compliments were recorded across the service during the period 01/04/2022 and 31/03/2023 and examples of these compliments can be found at Appendix 1.
- 3.3 With regard to formal recorded complaints, the table below shows how many complaints have been recorded in relation to Children's Services (both social care and education) and under which process (social care or corporate), broken down into individual financial years. The figures indicate a significant increase in the number of complaints recorded for this year. An increase in number should not be seen as a negative. Instead, it demonstrates that the Council continue to be open and encourage all feedback and will consider this fairly and through appropriate process. A considerable amount of work has been undertaken over the last year to promote the various feedback processes open to our service users along with engagement

with staff in the various teams within children’s social care and education to recognise formal complaints and have them recorded and dealt with appropriately.

Year	Social Care	Corporate	Total
2019/20	46	4	50
2020/21	33	14	47
2021/22	29	7	36
2022/23	38	33	71

- 3.4 The table confirms that 38 complaints were recorded and progressed under the statutory children’s social care representations process. In addition, 33 formal corporate complaints were recorded; 12 relating to children’s social care services and 21 related to education complaints. The majority of complaints received in relation to children’s social care services are from parents/carers or other involved persons deemed relevant to the child. Where it is clear the adult complaining is not doing so on behalf of or in relation to the child specifically and there is no apparent injustice to the child, complaints can be considered under the corporate process. [Getting the Best from Complaints statutory guidance; Sections 2.7 and 2.8]
- 1.5 Of the 38 social care complaints received, there were only 5 from young people themselves. Any complaints received from the young people themselves or where the complaint links to alleged injustice to the child, the statutory social care process is used.
- 1.6 It is generally understood that Cared For children and young people tend to raise concerns through the many other routes available to them. This includes their allocated social worker, IRO, through care team meetings or advocates. Concerns raised through these routes are generally dealt with either by the Care Home Managers or by working with the individual child/young person to ensure matters are fully resolved promptly and effectively.
- 3.9 Individual residential units record any concerns raised directly with them, how they are managed, and the outcome achieved. If the Unit cannot resolve the issue for the young person, it can be escalated to a formal complaint for consideration. During 2022/23, no complaints were escalated from the residential units.

- 1.7 Another route our young people can raise concerns is through the Mind of My Own facility, which contains several categories under which young people can provide feedback. One of these is “Sort a Problem”. These are not necessarily formal complaints but are issues that our young people have identified that are shared via the internal advocacy team to try and resolve.
- 1.8 In terms of “problems” received during this period, 9 were received with 7 coming direct from young people and 2 through a worker’s account.

4.0 Formal Complaints recorded

- 4.1 During 2022/23; 36 complaints were refused. Reasons for not progressing or refusing a social care complaint include the relevant child/young person being the subject of a concurrent investigation such as court proceedings (Regulation 8) or being outside the 12 month timescale for making a complaint (Regulation 9). Complaints have also been refused for other reasons such as there being a more appropriate, alternate process such as a statutory appeal or Tribunal; or in accordance with the Local Government Act 1974, the person has not suffered any personal injustice, is not a representative of a community or organisation or the reason for their complaint has been considered as Unreasonable under the terms of the Unreasonable and Vexatious Complainant policy.
- 4.2 Many complaints contain multiple elements to investigate. For example, a complainant may claim that communications with a service have been poor but also believe relevant process has not been followed correctly. All individual elements of complaint are investigated; and the Investigating Officer is asked to provide an overall outcome. They can decide to UPHOLD where all elements of complaint are proven and fault is found; PARTIALLY UPHOLD, where only certain elements are proven and NOT UPHELD where no fault is found.

Of the 71 complaints that were accepted and progressed to Stage 1;

8 were fully UPHELD;

24 of these complaints were NOT UPHELD;

31 were PARTIALLY UPHELD;

1 response was not issued within timescale and therefore escalated direct to Stage 2 at the complainant’s request; and

Overall, 13 complaints were progressed to Stage 2;

- 4.3 Where elements are Upheld or Partially Upheld, Officers look at what fault was found, whether corrective action needs to be taken to ensure there is no injustice and if lessons need to be learned from the fault found to improve service provision.

5.0 Complaint response timescales

- 5.1 Stage 1 children's social care complaints, in accordance with statutory requirements, should be responded to within 10 working days, with an extension to 20 working days in certain circumstances. For the 2022/23 year, 66% of complaints were responded to within the statutory timeframes. Further extensions are not accounted for within The Regulations, however, on a number of occasions this has been necessary due to delays in being able to meet with complainants or waiting for decisions regarding ongoing social work impact. It can be confirmed that all complaints were formally responded to.
- 5.2 Stage 1 corporate complaint process should be responded to within 15 working days, but this can be extended with the complainants agreement.
- 5.3. For the 2022/23 year where 31 corporate complaints were accepted and taken forward, 48% were responded to within the initial 15 working days. The average response time for corporate complaint response completion was 22 working days.
- 5.4 For all Stage 1 investigations both social care and corporate, officers from the closest point of, but have not been involved in the actual service delivery, are asked to act as Investigating Officer. This is often the Team Managers who undertake the investigations alongside their regular daily duties.
- 5.5 All extensions to the stipulated timeframes are discussed and agreed with the complainants. However, further work is being undertaken to ensure timeframes are met wherever possible

6.0 Complaints at Stage 2

- 6.1 At Stage 2 of the children's complaint process, statutory legislation states that an independent investigation should be undertaken. The Council commission the services of an independent investigation officer (IIO) and independent person (IP) who look into the complaint, review records, interview involved officers and consider council policies/procedures. They then analyse their findings and provide outcomes to the Council in a report advising whether the complaints are UPHELD, NOT UPHELD, PARTIALLY UPHELD and include recommendations and lessons learned for the Council to consider.

- 6.2 The Council then consider the reports and provide an adjudication letter to the complainant advising whether the findings and recommendations are accepted by the Council and whether there is any remedy to be put in place to resolve the complaint issues. This can include consideration of apology, financial remedy, change of policy/procedure etc.
- 6.2 Legislation states that complaints at this stage should be responded to within 25 working days or 65 working days depending on complexity. All complaints at stage 2 within Northumberland have been extended to the maximum 65 working day timeframe due to various issues including complexity of the complaint, the number and availability of staff to be interviewed, contact having to be made with former employees, availability of complainants and the investigating officers.
- 6.3 9 complaints recorded in 2022/23 were escalated to Stage 2. Investigations by the IIO and IP were completed within statutory timeframes, however, there were delays in the adjudication part of the process due to the long term sickness of the Complaints Manager who co-ordinates the work around this.
- 6.4 5 of the complaints escalated to Stage 2 in the children's social care process, were resolved to the complainants' satisfaction and were not progressed further.
- 6.5 At Stage 2 of the corporate complaint process, a review is undertaken by a Senior Manager. These should be responded to within 20 working days.
- 6.6 4 complaints were escalated to Stage 2 of the corporate process during the 2022/23 period. 2 were responded to within 20 working days and 2 were extended with agreement of the complainant. Following Stage 2 of the corporate process, complainant's who remain dissatisfied can escalate their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

7.0 Complaints escalated to Stage 3 - Review Panels

- 7.1 Stage 3 of the statutory social care complaint process is a Review Panel hearing, involving the appointment of 3 independent Panel Members, one of whom will act as Chair.
- 7.2 The purpose of the Review Panel is to consider the standard and quality of investigation undertaken at Stage 2, highlight any problems in that investigation and to provide the complainant with an opportunity for further reconsideration of their complaint points. The Review Panel can offer further suggestion on remedy for the Council to consider.

- 7.3 Review Panels should be held within 30 working days of request from the complainant; but this can prove difficult to achieve due to conflicting diary availability of all those involved, ie 3 independent panel members, the IIO, IP, Adjudicating Officer, Complaints Manager and the complainants themselves. Dates for Review Panels are always negotiated and agreed with the complainant.
- 7.4 During 2022/23, a total of 5 Review Panel hearings were held; 4 were complaints escalated through the process during 2022/23 with the other, being from a complaint carried over from 2021/22.
- 7.4 Following the Review Panel being held, formal agreed notes must be provided within 5 working days of the Panel meeting. A final letter from the Council must then be provided by the Executive Director of Children's Services within 15 working days to respond to the Panel findings and recommendations. On all 5 occasions, these statutory timeframes have been met.

8.0 External review

- 8.1 The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) look at complaints about Local Authorities once a complaint has completed all stages of the Local Authority complaint process. If a complaint has not been considered by a Local Authority, the LGSCO will usually refer it back to the Authority to look into and class this as a "premature" complaint. They are independent of all Government departments and have the same powers as the High Court to obtain information and documents. If they find the Authority is at fault, they will make recommendations to put things right.
- 8.2 The LGSCO produce an Annual Letter in relation to every Local Authority to indicate how many complaints have been received during the year, with the outcome of each complaint and an indication of how each Local Authority has performed. All statistical information for Northumberland County Council can be found via [Northumberland County Council - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](#)
- 8.3 The 2022/23 Annual Letter provides general feedback to every Council which covers all departmental complaints they have looked at. In relation to Children's Services the LGSCO received 11 complaint enquiries. Of those 11; 5 were not investigated and closed by the LGSCO; 1 was referred back to NCC for consideration (known as a premature referral); and 5 complaints were Upheld. Links to all cases are provided below.
- 8.4 Of the 5 complaints that were Upheld; the LGSCO were satisfied that NCC had accepted their findings, recommendations and issued appropriate remedy.

- 3.5 In relation to one of the 5 complaints Upheld, the LGSCO decided that it was in the wider public interest to issue a Public Report. The LGSCO reports:
- 3.6 The LGSCO found fault in the Council “decision not to provide free school transport to a young person with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan who was starting college. Our investigation found the Council’s post-16 transport policy was not clear enough to enable parents and young people to make informed choices. The policy recommended applicants check their eligibility before applying for a course and transport, but the policy’s wording made it difficult for families to do that. We recommended the Council apologise and make a payment to the young person’s mother and reassess the application for transport. We also asked the Council to revise its policy to make it clearer, remind staff of their role to provide timely and accurate information, and to review the decisions it made for the school year starting in 2021 where it refused transport to young people with EHC plans under the flawed policy.”
- 3.7 When a Public Report is received, the Council must take certain actions to publish this within the community and ensure this is placed before the appropriate Council Committee for consideration. This was considered by Cabinet on 09 May 2023. The report and notes of that meeting can be found on the Council website via the following link: [Public Report consideration](#)

[3.8 The LGSCO decisions for this year can be found below:](#)

<p>https://www.lgo.org.uk/decisions/children-s-care-services/other/21-018-332</p> <p>Final decision: We cannot investigate Miss X’s complaint concerning the Council’s involvement in a report considered in the Family Court. This is because the issues Miss X raises cannot be separated from the matters decided in court.</p>	Not investigated
<p>https://www.lgo.org.uk/decisions/children-s-care-services/disabled-children/21-009-137</p> <p>Final decision: Mrs X complains the Council failed to provide adequate support to her daughter during the transition to new services, which meant she did not receive support. Mrs X also complained about how the Council communicated about the timeframe for the transition. The Ombudsman intends to find fault with the Council for how it managed the transition to the new provider. The Ombudsman does not intend to find fault with the Council for how it decided the timeline for the transition. The Ombudsman recommends a financial remedy and service improvements.</p>	Upheld

<p>https://www.lgo.org.uk/decisions/education/school-transport/21-004-235</p> <p>Public Report decision: School transport Miss X complained about the Council's decision not to provide her son, Y, with transport to college. Miss X said the Council failed to properly consider Y's circumstances and her appeal, and its communication was poor. Finding Fault found causing injustice and recommendations made.</p>	Upheld
<p>https://www.lgo.org.uk/decisions/children-s-care-services/child-protection/21-015-998</p> <p>Final decision: Miss X complained about the way the Council handled the child protection process for her child, S, about delays in the statutory children's complaints procedure and about the Council's refusal to accept one element of the stage 3 panel's findings. The Council was at fault for not actively engaging with Miss X's domestic abuse support worker and for delays in the complaints process. It should apologise and pay Miss X a further £150, making a total payment of £250, to remedy the frustration and distress caused.</p>	Upheld
<p>https://www.lgo.org.uk/decisions/children-s-care-services/other/22-009-991</p> <p>Final Decision: We have upheld this complaint that the Council failed to adhere to the timescale set out in the statutory procedure for children's services. The Council has agreed to resolve the matter by providing a suitable remedy.</p>	Upheld
<p>https://www.lgo.org.uk/decisions/education/school-transport/22-010-947</p> <p>Final decision: We will not investigate this complaint about the Council's home to school transport policy. This is because the complaint does not meet the tests in our Assessment Code on how we decide which complaints to investigate. There is not enough evidence of fault by the Council.</p>	Not investigated
<p>https://www.lgo.org.uk/decisions/children-s-care-services/other/22-012-112</p> <p>Final Decision: We will not investigate this complaint that the Council has delayed consideration of a complaint under the statutory procedure for complaints about children's services. This is because the Council has upheld the complaint and offered a suitable remedy for the injustice caused by the delay.</p>	Not investigated

<p>https://www.lgo.org.uk/decisions/children-s-care-services/child-protection/22-013-113</p> <p>Final Decision: We cannot investigate this complaint about the Council’s involvement in contact arrangements between the complaint and his child. This is because the matter has been considered in court. Other matters are premature as they have not been through the Council’s complaints process.</p>	Not investigated
<p>https://www.lgo.org.uk/decisions/children-s-care-services/other/21-017-287</p> <p>Final Decision: Miss X complains the Council hindered Child Y being referred for a diagnosis and failed to provide support. Miss Y says instead the Council focused on fabricated mental health concerns. This meant Child Y was unnecessarily without support and medication, and caused significant distress to Miss X. The Ombudsman finds fault with the Council for its handling of some areas of the child and family assessment, however the Council has identified and remedied the fault through the statutory complaints process.</p>	Upheld
<p>https://www.lgo.org.uk/decisions/education/school-transport/22-016-234</p> <p>Final Decision: We will not investigate the Council’s alleged removal of a local school from its catchment area by postcode dataset. This is because we would be unlikely to find fault with the Council’s actions. In addition, Mrs X has not suffered a personal injustice due to this matter.</p>	Not investigated

4.0 Categorisation of Complaints

4.1 When complaints are recorded, the Client Relations Team assess and determine the nature of the complaint and what the content relates to. On the system previously used, the complaints could only be allocated one category, however, a number of the complaints involve more categories, and the new i-casework system provides improved intelligence gathering in regards to what is being complained about.

4.2 The following table indicates how the complaints were categorised according to the content and nature of the complaint being made.

Category	Number
----------	--------

Communications/Information	20
Delay in Service	4
Failure to follow policy/procedure	15
Standard of service	8
Staff manner/attitude	6
Breach of confidentiality	2
Policy	0
Issue with social worker	5
Disagree with officer decision	11

4.3 Communication/Information has been the biggest categorisation of complaints;. Many of these complaints relate to the timeliness of calls/contacts being returned. Due to changes in technology public expectations in terms of almost instant response to any contacts has increased. Work is being done with staff regarding managing expectations of customers which will include timeframes for responses.

5.0 Lessons learned

5.1 Children's Services embrace the opportunities provided by the collation of feedback from service users whether positive or negative and use it to feed into continual service improvement. Complaints are very much part of that and any learning identified from the investigation of a complaint is considered and taken forward in the most appropriate way.

5.2 To make sure required learning is embedded into practice, a quarterly report is now provided to the Children's Service leadership team who consider the identified points of learning and decide on the best way for this to be taken forward. This could be in the form of team training or amendments to policy/practice.

5.3 The issue of complaints/feedback is now a standard item on team meeting agendas to make sure there is discussion and learning taken from not only the outcomes of complaints but the complaint management, handling and investigation also.

5.4 From consideration of complaints, the following actions were to be considered in relation to service improvements.

- Continue to improve quality of investigation and timeliness of response for complaints.
- Workers to manage parental expectations from the outset, particularly around communications.
- Explore the need for a policy or agreement in relation to the virtual or audio recording of meetings.
- Explore written information given to parents to ensure that they are clear about understanding and expectations regarding whichever process their child is involved in, ie Child in Need, Child Protection, etc.
- Strengthen record keeping particularly in relation to discussions with parents with a focus on decision making and rationale.
- Reminder to officers of Data Protection breach process and complaint.

5.5 Specific complaint examples and lessons are as below:

Complaint and learning suggested	Outcome/lesson learned
<p>Complaint re inappropriate SGO allowance being paid in relation to historic SGO situation.</p>	<p>Conclusion: Council accepted that the SGO allowance policy in place historically was incorrect in that no annual reviews had taken place as set out in relevant legislation. Policy change was made; historic remedy position agreed.</p>
<p>Complaint from parent that they were inappropriately excluded from meetings in relation to their child without warning.</p> <p>Recommendation - For the local authority to ensure clear recording of any concerns relating to parental behaviour within</p>	<p>Council have an Unreasonably Persistent and Vexatious Contact Policy which should be referred to when putting contact restrictions in place with parents when their behaviour gives cause for concern. Risk to Staff meetings can also be convened in consultation with managers and Council Health and Safety Team. All outcomes</p>

meetings, especially where their exclusion is being considered.	should be recorded on case files and clear communications with parents to advise of action to be taken and their rights in amongst this. Any queries re use of policy should be directed to Complaints Manager
<p>Complaint re Adoption allowance assessments</p> <p>Recommendation 1: NCC to ensure that all relevant sources/professionals are contacted in relation to an assessment.</p>	It was acknowledged that due to the age of the child in this case and the fact they were no longer in a school environment that the appropriate health professional would have been the health visitor and not the school nurse. Although in this case, any information from the health visitor would not have changed the outcome of the assessment; workers must ensure views from the most relevant professionals is included in any assessment.

6.0 Summary

- 6.1 There has been a significant increase in the numbers of complaints recorded under both processes. Over this year, the Client Relations Team became more involved with recording and managing complaints in relation to Education Services which may account for some of the increase. More work has been done with officers across the department to help them recognise and refer on complaints to be recorded. Although the number of complaints has increased, the number remains comparatively small when considering the thousands of contacts the department has with all their service users over the year.
- 6.2 The 2023/24 year will focus on improvement of complaint handling in terms of improving attempts at early resolution, ensuring response timeframes are met; and better recording and data collection via the introduction of the new i-casework complaint management system.
- 6.3 The department will be encouraged to recognise and record more compliments received to capture and promote examples of good practice.
- 6.4 Lessons learned will remain the focus of Children's Services to make sure service provision is continually reviewed and improved moving forward. This supports the ethos and focus of both OFSTED and the LGSCO.
- 6.5 Should further information be required in relation to any aspect of this report or the handling of Children's Services complaints, please do not hesitate to contact the

Complaints Manager for Children's Services on 01670 628888 or via email clientrelations@northumberland.gov.uk

- 6.6 Information can also be found on the Council website <https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/About/Contact/compliments.aspx>



Northumberland County Council

Appendix 1

Examples of compliments received – 01/04/2022 – 31/03/2023

The compliments have been anonymised so no family or child/young person can be identified. YP has been used where a child or young person's name was identified.

Stephen has been out on 3 occasions already since becoming involved, communicating with YP effectively, seeking out support for them and responding without delay. Social worker has made quite an impression in the household and more importantly, to YP who is opening up to them already. Stephen supported YP to tell parents what they had discussed - something else we have never experienced which helped us to feel involved and have further open discussions with our child

About the Inclusion Support Team: I just wanted to take this opportunity to contact you to say a big thank you for all the help and support Sarah Chalmers has given YP when they were sadly expelled from school just before GCSE's. Sarah has offered and given fantastic support not just to our YP but to us as a family. Sarah has worked tirelessly and can I say it has been an uphill struggle with to get YP able to sit his GCSEs. You can imagine it was an extremely stressful time and Sarah did an amazing job for us, with us and helped us. I just wanted to extend my thanks and please do pass this on to her as well. I feel officers should be thanked and get the recognition they deserve as it doesn't happen very often. So can I just say a huge big thank you to Sarah, her professionalism and how she has helped us is second to none and we as a family cannot thank you all enough.

I would just like to express my upmost appreciation and thanks from the bottom of my heart for the work and support from an absolute star and a credit to your service. Jill started working with us in October, we had been and still were going through a really bad time. At first i was a little reluctant having a new worker but she made me feel so at ease with my problems, she said she wasnt leaving until we got through all this mess, you kept your promise.

YP wouldn't engage at first but came around eventually. Jill is a complete asset to your service and needs recognised for her work, without her i would not be the person i am today. She has helped me overcome so much i have grown so much in confidence and self esteem, What i love about jill is there's no messing she's straight to the point is very helpful caring trusting understanding non-judgemental very honest and a very hardworking lady and makes you feel so proud of how far i have come with all her praises and work.

Jill you are an insperation a breath of fresh air a shining star you have put up with me crying swearing laughing and you always brightened my day and showed me and learnt me how to turn all negatives to positives , my confidence has sorn and feel much more good about myself.

Received from a Young Person: I know you will be really busy but I would like to request a pay rise to Carol, Helen, Emma and Carrie. They have worked really hard throughout the year. They

take me horse riding, scouts, lessons, gives me food. Throughout the year these people have been my heroes so please I am begging you to give these people the pay rise they deserve. Thank you, Yours sincerely. PS I know I'm only a kid but they do deserve it.

Received from carer: YP had a visit from Holly today. YP was given a book full of photos and memories from mum. They had a lovely chat and I have never seen YP like this, it is amazing! They have been talking about things they enjoy and memories, YP is smiling and laughing and it is so lovely to see!

Parents to social worker: "We will really miss you in our lives. People advised us continually not to get social services involved in our lives but you have made it a very positive move for us. Your reassurances on the care we provide and will continue to provide for the children gave us immeasurable support through a very difficult time. The meetings we had as a family were often tense and threateningly volatile on more than one occasion and you managed things calmly and professionally. I am sure you will continue to be a valuable, significant member of the social services and hope you will not completely disappear from our lives as we would love to hear from you.

From YP: "Hi Natasha, I couldn't let you go without thanking you one more time. I really can't express into words what you have done for me. You were the only person that actually took the time to listen to me and that restored some faith in your system. Without your support and intervention I wouldn't have seen Mum on my birthday and that meant so much to both of us."

Mam told me today 'melissa has changed my life'. She feels she can now challenge the children and her partner, that she has more control in her life and feels 'empowered to be me and be a mam'. She said that Melissa has helped her find her voice again and she's never felt more confident in using her voice and authority in the community that she is part of. Mam explained that the children have changed so much, in a positive way, because of Melissa's support and although there is a way to go, she feels strong enough to continue with the plan and enforce the changes.

Hi, I just wanted to send a quick email to say how grateful I am to Tracey for being so helpful in making the school application. Tracey was really supportive in trying to resolve the issues and when we eventually still couldn't submit the form she went the extra mile and completed the form for me by phone. Applying for your child's school place is stressful and we were really anxious that we were not going to get it done properly. We are so grateful for Tracey's help.

Brittany received high praise from the advocates regarding the work she has completed with the family and how promptly the assessments were completed and an excellent care plan created.

From YP: I feel very comfortable and reassured after getting to know Elly and Dawn. The communication is good as you are kept up to date with everything going on and I love that. Also Elly and Dawn are really down to earth and not judgemental.

From Child Protection Advisor: Steph is the allocated social worker. The Review Child Protection Conference agreed unanimously this afternoon to end the plan and proceed to a child in need plan. Steph has completed excellent work with the young person and her Mother throughout her involvement. She has effectively empowered both mother and daughter who were at risk of being exploited by others. This has been done by conscientious direct work and engaging other professionals in the plan. The young person's confidence has also improved to the point where she can now engage in conferences and core groups, able to speak for herself. I know that Steph was a little lacking in confidence at the outset of the child protection process but has performed really well and with confidence at all the conferences I have chaired. She has always provided thorough and analytical reports well ahead of the meetings which is to be applauded.

I just wanted to contact you with regard to Gina our EWO. We have worked closely with her for a number of years to develop a robust system of monitoring our attendance which was identified as a key area for improvement in our June 2019 ofsted inspection. We were reinspected two weeks ago and thankfully Gina was on site meeting parents for a prearranged meeting so agreed to discuss attendance with the lead inspector. It was commented during the meeting with Gina and my Admin Manager how thorough our processes are and that 'there is nothing more you can do' to address the attendance issues we, like all schools, encounter. A huge credit for this change in working practices and developing our systems must go to Gina and the amazing support she gives schools when requested.

From Northumberland Families First: I have had the pleasure of working alongside Glen recently on an incredibly complex and emotionally draining case. The case involved two very vulnerable young people who had suffered the most harrowing experiences. Throughout the whole process Glen displayed empathy, by listening to their views, needs and made sure their voices were heard by family members and other professionals. He was honest with them at all times while being understanding of their fear and gave them both time and space to have their say even if it was hard because they wanted what they could not have. Glen had to have some very difficult conversations and he was always kind and courteous and went above and beyond to support the YP to understand why Children's Services had made the decision they did. He was at all times professional, approachable and communicated openly at every step of the process with the young people, their family and all other professionals including myself. He conducted himself at all times in a professional manner. Thank you Glen for being an amazing work colleague.

The Schools' Safeguarding Team go above and beyond to ensure all schools and settings in Northumberland receive the very best support. This is through their regular contact with schools, answering queries or in the excellent training they deliver.

Frankie and the schools HR team have supported a Headteacher in challenging circumstances. The Headteacher is very grateful to Frankie and the team for their advice, guidance and support. Frankie helped navigate some very tricky issues and handled situations with professionalism and great aplomb.

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Northumberland County Council

FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 07 March 2024

Virtual School Headteacher Annual Report 2022-23

Report of Councillor(s) Guy Renner-Thompson, Cabinet Member for Inspiring Young People

Responsible Officer(s): Audrey Kingham, Executive Director for Children, Young People & Education

1. Link to Key Priorities of the Corporate Plan

This report is relevant to the Tackling Inequalities priority of the NCC Corporate Plan 2023-26 in particular that children and young people have the best start in life and grow up well and that we deliver our statutory functions including being an effective Corporate Parent.

2. Purpose of report

This report is to publish to members the Virtual School Headteacher's Annual Report for 2022-23 regarding the education of Northumberland's cared for children and care experienced young people.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 1. Members note the education achievements of our cared for children and care experienced young people.
- 3.2 2. Members discuss and understand the continued challenges for our cared for children and care experienced young people caused by the disruption to education during the pandemic.

4. Forward plan date and reason for urgency if applicable

The report does not require a decision as it is informing members about the experience of our cared for children and care experienced young people during the academic year 2022-23.

5. Background

- 5.1 The Virtual School's approach this year to supporting individual cared for children and care experienced young people was to intervene as early as possible to prevent the escalation of already complex needs, and by doing so achieve better stability at school. What we are 'shouting about' in the Annual Report demonstrates that this approach was successful, acknowledging that there is still work to be done to continue to improve stability year after year. Stand out examples of this are the impressive record of no permanent exclusions of cared for children for 15 years (having prevented at least 29 during the year), much better achievement for 11 year olds, and more pupils achieving stronger passes at GCSE in English and maths.
- 5.2 Although the data does not yet show an improvement in attendance, our strategy to identify and address the underlying reasons for absence is starting to have an impact. Northumberland's Education Welfare Service is also part of the Virtual School and we used this to the advantage of our cared for children. During the year we developed an attendance strategy for Northumberland, and this identifies the main underlying reasons for poor attendance. In turn this led to our Educational Psychologists and Education Welfare Officers delivering support and training on Emotion Based School Avoidance (EBSA). Improving attendance will continue to be a priority next year.
- 5.3 Academic progress is getting back on track and the proportion of pupils following their age-related curriculum has been sustained since last year. This means that a higher number of pupils are making very good progress from their own starting points, and more are starting to achieve in line with their non-cared for peers. Focussing on improving the quality of Personal Education Plans and effective use of Pupil Premium Plus by schools and the Virtual School have achieved this positive outcome.
- 5.4 We want the education of children with a social worker to be part of every day practice for education providers and social workers. To achieve this a multi-agency approach is crucial, and this is exemplified by the collaboration between the Virtual School, Be You and NEWST to embed relational and trauma informed practice across Northumberland. The extent of the positive impact of this work is evaluated in the Annual Report, and although work needs to be done on developing a meaningful data set to inform future work, there is already evidence that education outcomes are starting to improve for this large group of children.
- 5.5 The Virtual School participated in Year 2 of the national Pupil Premium Post 16 Pilot that aims to improve the engagement of care experienced young people in education, training and employment after they leave school. The grant funding from the pilot was used to develop an electronic Post 16 Personal Education Plan and the new post of Post 16 Education Intervention Worker. The impact has been encouraging, and the latest national data shows considerably more young people from Northumberland are still in education, training and employment at ages 17-18 than the rest of England. The Post 16 PEP and intervention worker are now both permanent features of the Virtual School.
- 5.6 The Virtual School's contribution to the corporate parenting strategy focuses on improving outcomes for cared for children with SEND. The impact of the role of the SEND Lead Officer and local authority reviews of SEND processes have been positive, but there is still work to be done to ensure that needs are identified early and placement in appropriate education provision is swift. As an increasing number

of our children are placed in specialist provisions out of county, these challenges relate to SEND arrangements in other local authorities. This improvement work is on-going.

6. Options open to the Council and reasons for the recommendations

Not applicable

7. Implications

Policy	The Virtual School fulfils the council's statutory duties in relation to the education of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cared for children and care experienced young people • previously cared for children and care experienced young people • and children who have or have had a social worker
Finance and value for money	The current service is delivered within existing budgets and additional DfE grant funding to support Covid recovery and raise academic achievement. Grant funding is allocated on a year by year basis and is intended to cover the academic year. Impact of the grant funding is evaluated in this Annual Report.
Legal	None have been identified
Procurement	None have been identified
Human resources	The wellbeing of all staff is a priority as they cope with the additional pressures of staff absence and vacant posts, and continued high demand for support from schools.
Property	None have been identified
The Equalities Act: is a full impact assessment required and attached?	No - not required at this point Children who are care experienced have been subject to court processes, many of whom will come from disadvantaged backgrounds
Risk assessment	None have been identified
Crime and disorder	None have been identified
Customer considerations	Personal risk assessments are in place for all staff; all education providers have risk assessments in place that are monitored by NCC

Carbon reduction	None have been identified
Health and wellbeing	The emotional and mental health and wellbeing of cared for children is a priority. Improved use of the strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ) is helping to target support and health services to the children and education settings with highest need.
Wards	(All Wards);

8. Background papers

Virtual School Headteacher Annual Report 2022-23

9. Links to other key reports already published

Not Applicable

10. Author and Contact Details

Lead Officer Jane Walker, Virtual School Headteacher
Email: Jane.Walker@northumberland.gov.uk

Virtual School



Headteacher's Annual Report

2022 | 23



Northumberland
County Council



Contents

Foreword from Virtual School Headteacher	Page 4-7
Achievement	Page 8-13
Stability	Page 14-19
Supporting teaching and learning	Page 20-25
16+	Page 26-29
Special Educational Needs and Disabilities	Page 30-33
Previously cared for children	Page 34
Children with a social worker	Page 35-37
Pupil voice	Page 38-39
Priorities for continuous improvement	Page 40 - 43

Profile of pupils age 5 – 16

in Northumberland's Virtual School at 31.08.23



Foreword

The Annual Report for 2022-2023 evaluates a year when there were no surprises. Cared for children and care leavers who were in stable school placements where they felt safe to learn engaged well in education and achieved their best outcomes.

It was a year when amidst the busy-ness of Virtual School and school life we tried to introduce new ideas so that we could intervene early and prevent already complex needs from escalating further. This report will demonstrate our success in achieving that, and how we still have so much to shout loudly about to show our pride as corporate parents in all of our cared for pupils.

Despite considerable challenges faced by the children, our schools and the local authority we have continued to make progress towards fulfilling our vision for our cared for children and care leavers:

We want the very best for our care experienced children and young people. We want our children to tell us we are doing a good job and that they are doing their very best at school. We want them all to have clear academic or vocational pathways when they leave school so that their lives continue to improve, and they feel a sense of belonging in their communities. We want schools and support services to see themselves as corporate parents and do a good job for their cared for children.

2022-2023 was very much a continuation from the previous year with the challenges we all faced compounded by the legacy of the pandemic. We resisted the idea that this was our new status quo and worked relentlessly with professionals and partners to prevent decline and make improvements wherever we could. Our priorities for improvement were identified in last year's Annual Report and set out in the Virtual School Improvement Plan 2022-2023.

They were to:

1. improve attendance
2. get progress back on track so that more pupils are following their age-related curriculum
3. provide leadership for promoting the education of children with a social worker
4. participate in the Pupil Premium Plus Post 16 Pilot (national)
5. deliver the Virtual School's contribution to the corporate parenting strategy

The profound impact of disrupted and missed learning is still with us, and our priorities for 2023-2024 that are identified in this self-evaluation report will focus on similar themes.

Earlier this year the government published a new vision to transform children's social care: Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation strategy and The SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan 2023. Both emphasise expanding early help to better support children at the edge of care and improving mainstream education so it can better meet the needs of children with SEND. This dovetails with our relatively new duty to promote the education of children with a social worker, and we are preparing for a further new duty to support the engagement of care leavers in education, employment and training from the ages of 18 to 25. There will be extended responsibilities for Virtual School Headteachers announced in the government's new Kinship Care Strategy.

The first report of the newly formed County Councils Network (CCN) was published in 2023 and celebrates Virtual Schools as education's 'hidden asset'. As Virtual Schools approach their 10th anniversary – in Northumberland our 12th - the report reflects on the growth of these services and highlights our considerable positive achievements, describing us as one of the most successful initiatives introduced into children's services over the past decade. Aspects of our arrangements are alluded to as strengths in the report. Virtual Schools:

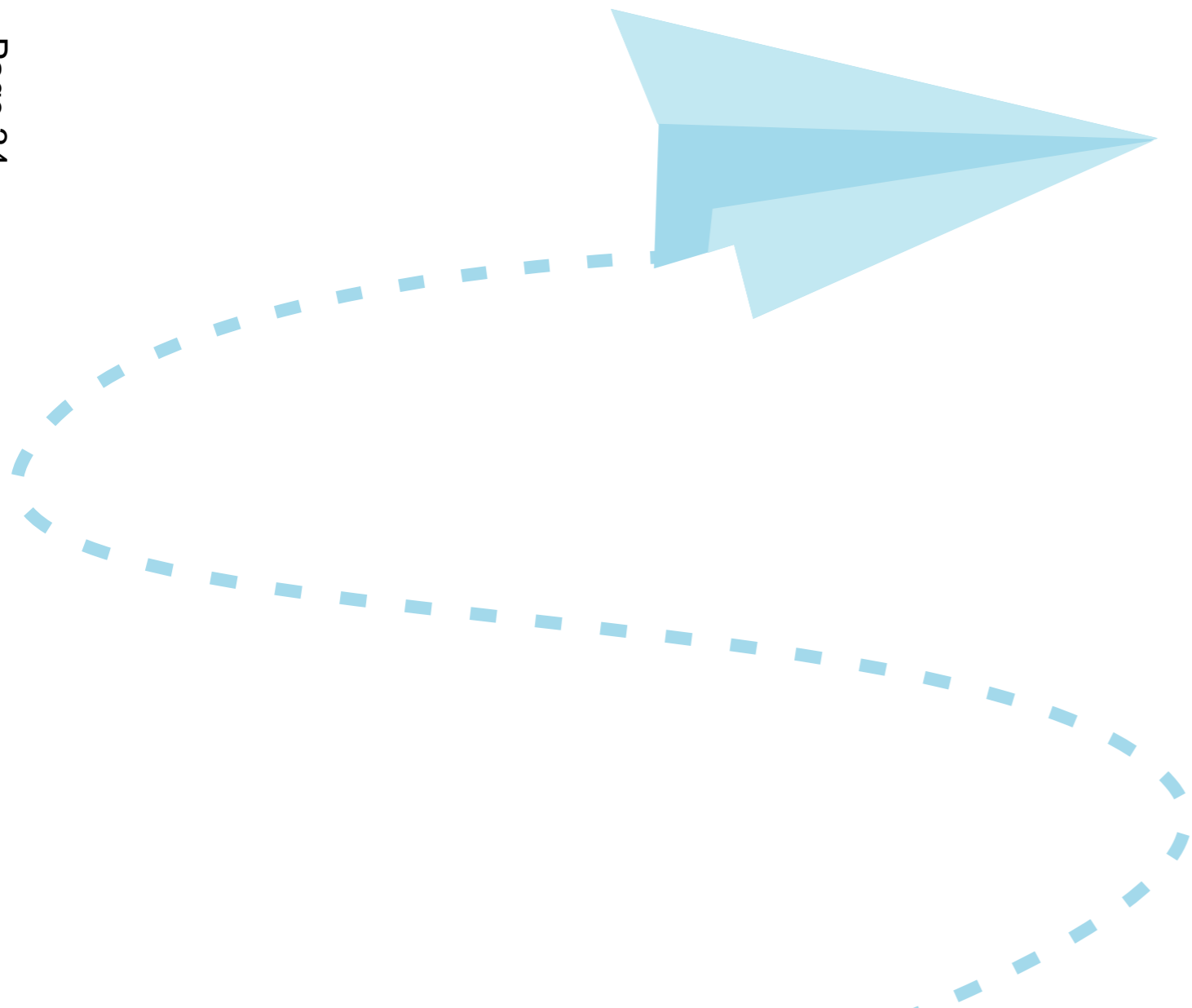
- have quietly built up a reputation as a valuable asset for both schools and councils, strategically and operationally
- play a strong role in championing the education of children in care as formidable corporate parents
- have had a transformative impact on the lives of many of the most disadvantaged children across England
- the status of our Virtual School, with a Virtual School Headteacher who is a Head of Service and able to influence decision making and policy development
- a combination of support services that promote education as a protective factor and therefore support learners most in need of additional help
- useful support to existing SEND services given our understanding of the needs of cared for children, particularly those with emotional and behavioural needs due to disorders related to attachment and trauma
- effective use of Pupil Premium Plus to resource the support service to schools, that is highly regarded and has measurable impact
- a well-respected primary point of contact with schools, and well developed relationships built on trust, including with academies.

We have a lot of achievements to shout about from 2023 and can show that in Northumberland being in care improves the experience of education of our cared for children and care leavers.

Jane Walker,
Virtual School Headteacher



WE'RE SHOUTING OUT ABOUT.....



Achievement

The education achievement of Northumberland's cared for children improves when they enter care, despite more teenage pupils entering care during Key Stage 4 with increasingly complex needs.

Education outcomes in 2023 showed improvement in some measures since last year, notably in the Early Years, at Key Stage 2 and in English GCSE at Key Stage 4.

Successes

Our pupils achieved above the national average for all cared for children in:

- Early Years Good Level of Development
- the Basics grade 5+ at GCSE
- GCSE English grade 5+

School readiness improved for pupils entering Year 1.

Key Stage 2 achievement is back on track and in-line with 2019 pre-pandemic achievement.

A higher proportion of pupils in Key Stage 4 are achieving the Basics at GCSE than before the pandemic.

The increased proportion of pupils working in their age-related curriculum from Years 1 to 9 has been sustained (with the exceptions of Years 8, 6 and 3).

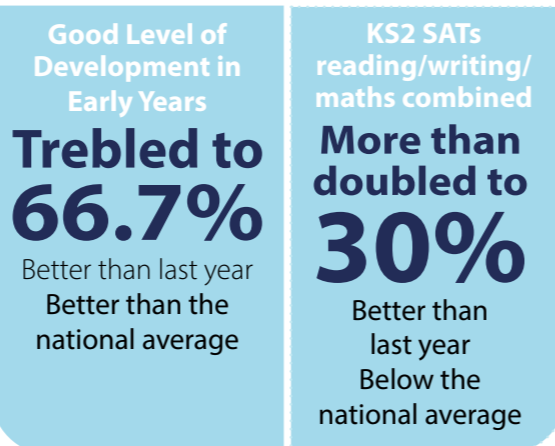
More pupils are making better progress after they enter care.

Achievement of unaccompanied asylum seeking children in Year 11 is good.

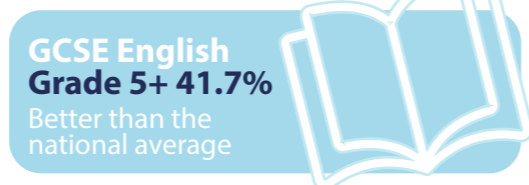
Earlier intervention from monitoring pupil progress more closely has supported more pupils to get back on track.

PEP quality is better with re-focus on academic outcomes.

Extra support and intervention for Year 11 pupils.



The increase is the impact of our focus on maths and the proportion of pupils meeting age related expectations improving from **18.2% to 45%**.



2 care leavers were successful at A Level, with one progressing to an apprenticeship and the other securing a place at Cambridge University to read Human, Social and Political Sciences.

5 care leavers completed Level 3 accredited courses and have progressed successfully to foundation degrees, apprenticeships and employment.

No care leavers were due to graduate from Higher Education this year.

Making a positive impact on achievement



ESLAC Engagement

ESLAC devised a unique programme with local alternative provider Engage to target pupils who were not attending education provision at all, with the aim of re-engaging them with alternative education as an interim plan en route to new school rolls in out of county placements. The programme was funded by PP+ and had a positive impact. The 3 pupils who worked with Engage in their home on relationships building started to attend Engage. 1 pupil attended 57 sessions in the first term which is attendance improvement from 0% to 42%.

Easter School for Year 6 and Year 11 pupils, providing intensive test /exam preparation and confidence building techniques, with local alternative provider Maximize, funded by PP+.

ESLAC Teacher was recruited on a part time basis to teach maths on a 1 to 1 basis or in small groups, funded by the School Led Tutoring Grant. 18 pupils received tuition across 14 different provisions, and 80% of those who received 4 or more sessions made progress.

Outdoor education provision from local alternative providers Nudge, Forest Schools and Clarty Commandos supported vulnerable learners who benefited from outdoor provision and individual timetables before successfully re-engaging with formal learning.

Extra support and intervention for Year 11 pupils

- Priority support from Education Intervention Workers and VS Educational Psychologists
- ESLAC worked with schools and attended Care Team meetings to improve stability
- Provided tutors to support with revision, complementing schools' use of the School Led Tutoring Grant
- Held an Easter Revision Club
- When 5 pupils didn't attend their first GCSE exam we entered 2 of them swiftly for Functional Skills so they were able to achieve accreditations

UASC in Year 11

4 pupils

1 pupil achieved
4 GCSEs and
2 were grade 4+

All 4 pupils are enrolled in full time ESOL courses at college

Factors affecting learning: achieving success at KS2

Stability was good for the pupils that achieved age related expectations in reading/writing/ maths. During Year 6:

- **there were no suspensions**
- **attendance was above 90%** and 22% of pupils had 100% attendance
- **67% had no school moves** in Year 6, the rest of the cohort had only 1 school move in Year 6
- **67% had either 1 or 0 home placement moves**
- 78% had been **in care for over a year**
- **proportion of SEND was very low** with only 2 on the K register, 0 had an EHCP

Challenges

KS1 SATs reading/writing/maths combined dipped to **12.5%**
Not as good as last year
Below the national average

KS1 -2 progress in reading, writing and maths
Similar to last year
Well below the national average

Phonics test in Year 1
Dipped to 28.6%
Not as good as last year
Well below the national average

Attainment 8 and Progress 8
22.8 and -1.37
Similar to last year
In line with national averages

55
cared for pupils lived in residential children's homes at some stage in 2022-23

87%
of that group have SEND,
80%
(45 pupils) have EHCPs

2 of the 55
pupils are working at age related expectations

12 pupils
were in Year 11 and
50%
are in EET

Their average attendance is
64.1

Outcomes at Key Stage 1 are telling us that pupils still have gaps in their learning from 2 years ago and that we need to prioritise school readiness for our cared for children currently in the Early Years phase.

Although progress is being made, the rate is slow and needs to accelerate to avoid future under-achievement.

The impact of lower achievement at GCSE shown in the reduced number in education, employment and training for September 2023.

The achievement of pupils placed in residential homes is not as good as that of cared for pupils in foster placements.

A growing number of pupils experienced instability at school and this had a negative impact on their education achievement.

No special arrangements were allowed for tests and GCSE as in previous post-pandemic years.

Factors affecting learning: challenges for Year 11

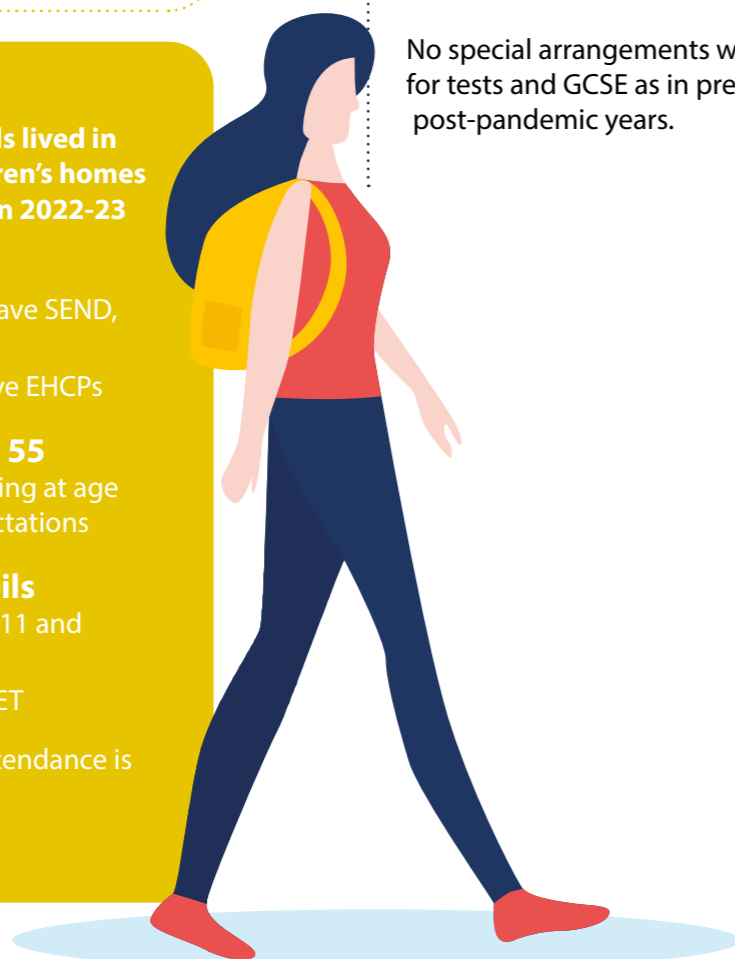
This cohort of pupils was in Year 8 when the pandemic started. Their achievement has dipped the further away we move from the pandemic years, indicative of the impact of disruption to learning and school closure.

This was a large and complex group of pupils:

- only half of the cohort were entered for at least 1 GCSE
- 5 pupils missed at least one GCSE exam
- high proportion of the cohort have an EHCP
- 1 is an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child with English as an additional language
- 2 pupils were in school placements in Scotland and did not take GCSE exams, 0 were entered for the Scottish Nationals (GCSE equivalent)

Stability was poor overall:

- Overall attendance during year 11 was only 88%
- Levels of persistent absence were very high
- 12 pupils entered care at the beginning of KS4 (Sept 2021)
- 3 pupils had been permanently excluded from school prior to entering care and had no school roll
- Over half the cohort had at least 1 suspension
- 11 pupils attended alternative provision
- 3 pupils had a school move during year 11 due to their SEND
- 12 pupils had at least one placement move
- 11 were placed in residential children's homes



Achievement

Next Steps



Work with the Early Years service to improve school readiness in Year 1

With schools, use Pupil Premium Plus differently to accelerate progress during Key Stage 2



Sustain improved achievement at the end of Key stage 2

Support schools to improve achievement in GCSE maths



Target more EP and specialist resources into residential homes to work with pupils and staff

Recruit part time teachers in English, maths and science to work into residential homes



Develop the monitoring framework to target support and intervention that gets pupil progress back on track from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4



Summary of education outcomes 2022-23

2023	Northumberland CLA* (all) %	Northumberland OC2** %	National All 20.2%
Early Years GLD	52.9%	66.7%	67.2%
Phonics Year 1	55.6%	28.6%	79%
KS1 R/W/M	33.3%	12.5%	56.0%
KS1 Reading	42.9%	12.5%	68.3%
KS1 Writing	38.1%	25%	70%
KS1 Maths	47.6%	25%	70.4%
MTC average score	18.33	18.75	20.2%
KS2 R/W/M	25.9%	30%	59.5%
KS2 Reading	44.4%	40%	72.6%
KS2 Writing	44.4%	35%	71.5%
KS2 GPS	48.4%	40%	73%
KS2 Maths	48.1%	45%	72.9%
KS2 Progress Reading	-3.11	-3.88	+0.03
KS2 Progress Writing	-3.33	-4.00	+0.04
KS2 Progress Maths	-2.83	-3.27	+0.04
KS4 Basics 4+	37.5%	33.3%	65.1%
KS4 Basics 5+	25.0%	16.7%	45.4%
KS4 English 4+	41.7%	41.7%	74.8%
KS4 Maths 4+	41.7%	33.3%	70.2%
KS4 English 5+	41.7%	41.7%	60.8%
KS4 Maths 5+	25.0%	16.7%	50.9%
KS4 Progress 8	-1.87	-1.37	-0.03
KS4 Attainment 8	24.5	22.8	46.4

* where CLA is child looked after
 ** OC2 is the official cohort CLA national averages are not yet available for publication (see 'A note about the data' on the back cover)

Stability

Stability is about safeguarding and learning. It's where the Virtual School's ESLAC team can make a difference and help to make the conditions for learning right for every cared for child.

We want our children to tell us that they feel safe to learn.

We make a valuable contribution to stability and permanence.

Successes

No permanent exclusions for **15 years** **29** permanent exclusions were prevented

More pupils attend schools judged to be Good or Outstanding by Ofsted.

Reduction in mid-year school moves from 8% to 7% of pupils experiencing at least one move.

ESLAC staff a consistent factor for pupils experiencing school moves.

Effective working between the Virtual School and Children's Social Care to maintain school placement stability.

A rise in Northumberland in the percentage of cared for children who had no social worker change over 12 and 24 months.

Strengthened and diversified the offer of support from our VS Educational Psychologists.

EBSA training from VS Educational Psychologists for Designated Teachers, Foster Carers and Care Teams including assessment of risk factors, and the push and pull factors framework.

Funded additional training for schools from the NEWST Occupational Therapist.

Improved use of attendance data to identify pupils and schools for earlier intervention.

Used Pupil Premium Plus funding differently to encourage use of alternatives to suspension.

Effective monitoring of attendance by Education Welfare management team.

Good and Outstanding schools **82%**
89% of primary pupils, 70% of secondary pupils
Better than last year

Emotional and mental health and wellbeing contributes positively to stability and improves engagement in education. Use of the SDQ behaviour screening tool this year helped discussions about the emotional health of individual pupils at all PEP reviews, and informed the emotional and mental health and wellbeing outcome in each pupil's PEP. This year the SDQ score was used as a benchmark, in 2024 we will compare scores to see if EMWHB is improving.

79 pupils received 1:1 support to learn self-regulation

An innovative relational and trauma informed approach to working with cared for children is being successfully implemented following a launch at the Relationships Matter multi-agency conference (March 2023)

details in the Children With a Social Worker section of this report



Virtual School Educational Psychologists

were in high demand and made a big difference:

30+
school consultations

75

EP assessments on entry to care

1 to 1

support for 76 pupils at risk of permanent exclusion

41

pupils had EP involvement after referrals from professionals

10

training sessions on themes to promote better emotional and mental health: Attachment and trauma, Bereavement and loss, Resilience, PACE, Emotion based school avoidance (EBSA)

Alternatives to suspensions were encouraged by giving additional funding to 3 schools with the highest number of suspensions.

Impact was positive:
2 stopped using suspensions;
1 used fewer suspensions as a last resort



Other things we did that prevented more suspensions

Training and guidance to promote alternatives to suspension restorative approaches and reparation, daily problem-solving circles, developing relationships between adults and children

Provided support problem solving consultations, group supervision and training for staff

Delivered therapeutic interventions Thrive, Drawing and Talking, Lego Therapy, mentoring

Involved the local authority's Inclusion Team and HINT team for advice and support
promoted the Northumberland Exclusion Handbook

Arranged time limited part time timetables for individual pupils

Made appropriate use of alternative education provision alternative providers, Northumberland's Pupil Referral Unit and Primary Support Bases

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) scores for our children give us an indication of their emotional and mental health and wellbeing. The average score for Northumberland's children has improved from 17 to 14.9 which is encouraging news. It means that the scores are in line with the average for all cared for children in England, and puts Northumberland in the 'borderline' band when previously it was in the 'cause for concern' band.

Challenges

Overall absence and the proportion of pupils that are persistently absent from school have reached record high levels

Almost a third of our school aged cared for pupils have school attendance below 90%. This is different to the national trend where the % of persistent absentees in the cared for population is lower than the overall pupil population

A very high proportion of children have SEND

76 changes of Designated Teachers

First request made for direction from the Secretary of State to admit a pupil to an out of county school

121

is too many changes to education provision as pupils moved into alternative provision, had tutors or moved schools

Too many missed learning sessions for term time holidays, medicals and contact

Pupils' needs are increasingly complex

Frequent and rising use of suspensions to manage challenging behaviour.

The increasing number of out of county placements presents challenges for the provision of timely support

Overall absence
Increased to 10.3%
Not as good as last year
Higher than the national average

Persistent absence
Increased to 28%
Not as good as last year
Higher than the national average

Phase change school moves
64 pupils
Similar to last year

Learning sessions missed
Total of 837 (all pupils)
More than last year

Mid-year school moves
41 pupils
More than last year

Suspensions
158 suspensions for 46 pupils from 32 schools
More than last year

Top 10

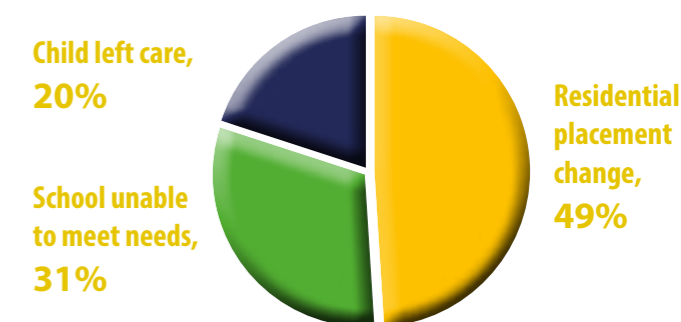
reasons for poor attendance

1. Inflexible school behaviour policies
2. Instability and previous disruption to school attendance e.g. school moves, breakdown of foster placement
3. Family issues e.g. loss of a parent
4. Disrupted learning and gaps in learning before entering care, including poor attendance, extended periods of time off school, moving schools
5. Unmet SEND
6. Poor punctuality while at home and lack of boundaries
7. Parental influence and their educational experiences
8. Emotional impact of their experiences including not trusting adults, no sense of belonging, feeling unsafe and not worthy
9. Friendship difficulties
10. Complexity of needs due to fragmented educational experience

The presence of the Virtual School at planning and placement panels had a positive impact and the proportion of mid-year schools moves due to residential placement moves did improve this year, despite the overall number of moves increasing.

To avoid delay when pupils need to attend an alternative provision, the PRU or Primary Support Bases the Deputy Virtual School Headteacher now has delegated responsibility to allocate places and funding so that decisions for cared for children can be made outside of the Inclusion Panel. A positive impact on stability is expected during 2023-24.

Reasons for mid-year school moves



Good Practice *Case Study*

Jake's journey : what it takes to achieve stability in a school placement

Jake is a pupil in Year 5 who has been cared for since 2016. He had two unsuccessful adoptions and experienced 8 changes in schools and 5 home placements before returning to care. His last unsuccessful adoption ended abruptly so he returned to the North East at very short notice and was placed with a temporary foster carer before returning to his current carers who had always wanted to keep him long term.

Jake was highly dysregulated and had experienced significant trauma and rejection. At the start of the pandemic Jake was struggling in mainstream. He had an EHCP that was shared with schools but no Northumberland special schools could meet his needs. After numerous meetings, panels and discussions with schools a place was eventually identified at a local independent special school (albeit in another local authority). The Virtual School's Lead Teacher for Primary supported with the transition.

Jake did not settle and the school was constantly challenged regarding their inclusivity and support for him. The school ended his placement which subsequently put pressure on his foster placement. Discussions took place to explore out of county residential placements with education. Specialised alternative provision was identified in the interim to enable him to continue in education while options were explored.

Suitable education provision was explored with multiple schools and eventually a place was agreed at a Special Academy that specialises in educating children with social, emotional and mental health needs. The Lead Primary Teacher visited the school with the carer to support and discuss how Jake would be integrated.

A package of funding and support was put in place and Jake started at the Special Academy in March 2022. After a positive start he became dysregulated, and staff struggled with his level of need. He was placed on a part time timetable which included forest school provision, but Jake could not cope and became further dysregulated. Eventually he refused to attend.

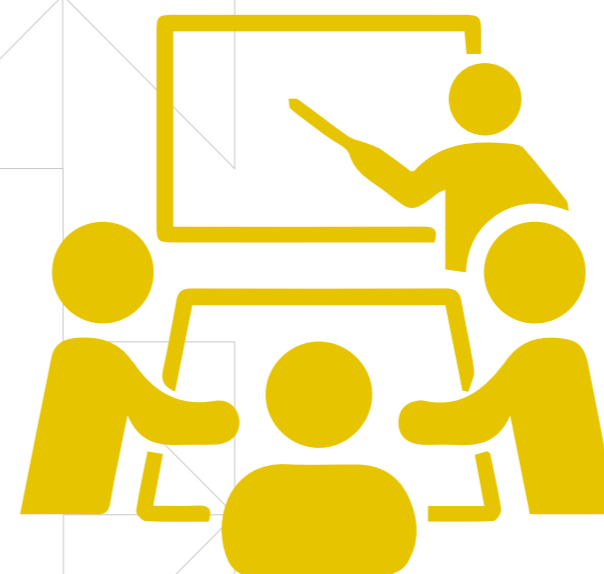
The Virtual School Educational Psychologist supported the Care Team to get a greater understanding of Jake's life. In December 2022 the EP and Lead Teacher visited the carer at her home and the EP recorded an interview which told the story of this life. This was very emotional for the carer as she recalled his past experiences.

With permissions from the carer and Care Team the recording was then shared with school staff, and it totally altered their perception of Jake. They changed their way of managing his behaviour, based on an in-depth report prepared by the EP that included his survival strategies, hypotheses around his internal working model and next steps.

The Virtual School continued to work closely with the Special Academy as Jake's timetable gradually developed until he was receiving full time education by April 2023.

The impact of this tenacious, partnership working is that Jake is receiving full time education in a stable school placement. The academy is fully aware of his needs, background and the support required and there has been a reduction in incidents where Jake becomes dysregulated. Consequently, his academic progress and attendance have both improved. Jake has stability at home and is forming friendships and relationships both with adults and peers and is part of the football team in his home community. The recording has been used for training in the Virtual School.

STABILITY:



NEXT STEPS

Address the **top 10 reasons for poor attendance**

As Northumberland's Attendance Strategy is implemented, **ensure the needs of cared for children are well understood and prioritised as 'everyone's business'**

Deliver more training and develop more resources to promote alternatives to suspension

Work with Care Teams to reduce the number of missed sessions

Supporting Teaching and Learning

The ESLAC team is here to help. We do everything we can to support Designated Teachers so that school communities can nurture every child to fulfil their academic potential. Our diverse training programme, free of charge, is our response to what our children and Designated Teachers tell us they need. We make sure that resources get to the children and schools that need them the most.

Successes

Different use of Pupil Premium Plus for greater impact.

Diversified our training programme for Designated Teachers, Foster Carers and Care Teams, all delivered free of charge.

More focussed use of the PEP linked to PP+ e.g. all pupils have one attendance outcome, one EMHWP outcome.

A record number of 27 pupils achieved our Expert Learner Award, by meeting the demanding criteria.

The PEP completion rate is the highest it has been for the last 5 years.

Quality assurance of PEPs shows that this is a process that supports teaching and learning effectively, and not just a form that has to be filled in.

Challenges

Legacy of the pandemic – gaps in learning, disrupted progress, poor emotional and mental health and wellbeing

While we know that progress was made by most pupils, we need a deeper insight into the impact of PP+ in schools

Some Outcomes in PEPs are not SMART enough

The terms and conditions of grant funding are known about late and are fixed term, and this can have a negative impact on getting best value for money from the Virtual School's allocation

You are an Expert Learner if you have:



Virtual School

For the academic year 2022-23 our total PP+ budget was £851 235.

In line with our PP+ policy we top-sliced £915 from each grant of £2410 and used that centrally held funding of £308 550 to provide:

Support for Designated Teachers

- Staffing
- Rewards
- Crisis support
- ePEP development
- Training from external providers, including Thrive

Therapeutic assessments and interventions

Education resources

- Lexia licences and Britannica
- IT equipment for pupils
- Globalbridge (careers resource)

Teachers

Alternative provision re-engagement programme (ENGAGE)

Prevention of suspensions funding dispersed to 3 education settings

The Virtual School is also responsible for the early years pupil premium (EYPP) which in Northumberland is distributed through the Early Years team to providers that educate cared for children who are taking up the free early education entitlement for 3 or 4 year olds.

The local authority receives £353.40 EYPP funding per eligible child taking up 15 hours of early years provision. This was topped up by £433.20 from the Early Years deprivation supplement from the 3 and 4 year olds' budget.

The Virtual School's use of PP+ had a positive impact on education outcomes across the support and intervention spectrum, by preventing escalation and responding reactively in crisis situations.



Pupil Premium Plus 2023

A Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) grant of £2410 was allocated by the DfE for every eligible school aged cared for and previously cared for child.

Schools

Schools were allocated a maximum of £1495 of the DfE allocation of £2410 for each eligible pupil which was a total of £542 685. The funding allocated was dependent on providing effective support for each pupil to achieve their individual outcomes and the quality of their Personal Education Plan (PEP).

What the PEPs are telling us about the impact of PP+ on education outcomes:

Key Stage 1: Academic progress was recorded in the ePEP in at least one subject for 8 pupils (22%)

Key Stage 2: Academic progress was recorded in the ePEP for 46 out of 68 pupils (68%)

21 out of 23 Year 6 pupils showed improvement in at least one subject (91%)

Key Stage 3: Academic progress was recorded in the ePEP in at least one subject for 50 out of 61 pupils (82%)

Key Stage 4: Academic progress was recorded in the ePEP in at least one subject for 11 out of 50 pupils (22%)



What schools used PP+ to fund in 2022-23

	Key Stage 1	Key Stage 2	Key Stage 3	Key Stage 4
Number of pupils eligible for PP+	36	68	61	50
Alternative provision			4	8
Resources	3	4	12	6
Group	8	16	11	4
1:1	11	21	12	12
Therapeutic intervention	11	16	13	11
Behaviour management	3		3	1
Designated Teacher			3	6
Educational visits		1	3	1
Study support		10		1

Schools' use of PP+ had a positive impact on education outcomes, getting more pupils back on track to make academic progress and developing bespoke packages of support to engage pupils in learning

Other grant funding

School Led Tutoring Grant:

used to provide 1 to 1 tuition to pupils with high levels of need who were unable to engage in full time education at school. Providers included Nudge, Teaching Personnel, Engage, Prospero, Nudge and Academy 21

Covid Recovery Premium:

used to fund interventions based on individual assessments of need and including play therapy, dyadic developmental psychotherapy, EP resources, licenses for Paul Dix behavioural management online courses, emotion coaching and Thrive attachment therapy

Post 16 Pupil Premium Plus:

funding for a one year DfE pilot to improve recruitment and retention in further education. Used in Northumberland for the development of a new statutory 16-18 ePEP and a Post 16 Education Intervention Worker

Promoting the education of previously looked after children (extended duty):

used to fund 1 x FTE Educational Psychologist post

Promoting the education of children with a social worker (extended duty):

used to fund 2 Education Welfare Support Officer posts, a Children Not in School Co-ordinator post, Relationships Matter Conference March 2023 (launch of the relational and trauma informed approach), attendance campaign, Performance and Intelligence Lead post

Designated Teacher Training

A comprehensive training programme was delivered by Virtual School staff free of charge to schools with Northumberland cared for children both in and out of county. Alongside the termly Designated Teacher conference, with a varied agenda, the programme was responsive to Designated Teacher and children's needs and included:

- Designated Teacher: New to Role
- Secondary PEP and Outcomes Refresher
- Primary PEP and Outcomes Refresher
- Attachment & Trauma
- Bereavement & Loss
- Resilience
- ESLAC Transition Briefing for Designated Teachers
- Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)
- Designated Teacher Conference
- ESLAC SATS Preparation and Wellbeing Support
- ESLAC GCSE Preparation and Wellbeing Support .



Two thirds of Designated Teachers who completed the feedback form reported enhanced understanding of the needs of cared for children following the consultation sessions.

- 83% of DTs who completed the feedback form reported that the consultation sessions helped them / their school to further meet the needs of cared for children and improve outcomes
- Designated Teachers reported being better able to support staff working with cared for children, exploring solutions and reducing suspensions as a result of the consultation sessions

Foster Carer Training

We delivered our first face to face training session to 16 foster carers looking at a range of resources and interventions that the Virtual School funds to support learning including:

- Lexia, reading program for Reception to Post 16 pupils
- Britannica, an online secure encyclopaedia supporting study at all levels from early years to university level
- Night Zoo Keeper, a differentiated writing program supporting 4 –12 year olds.

The PEP process is being used as an effective tool in recording educational information and supporting pupils to make progress or better than expected progress.

- 621 PEPs have been completed this year, increase from last year
- 96% PEP completion rate, consistent with 2021/22
- 177 are rated as 'green', this is higher than last year
- Interim PEPs are being held to reflect significant changes
- 74 pupils were transitioned to new schools, 43 were entered their next school phase and had a joint PEP meeting between schools
- Enhanced training offer:
 - 5 sessions to Designated Teachers inc SMART outcomes
 - 2 CPD sessions for the ESLAC team on progress and attainment
 - Foster carer training on education and interventions

SUPPORTING TEACHING AND LEARNING:

NEXT STEPS

Pilot a PP+ impact evaluation with volunteer Designated Teachers in a representative sample of schools

Deliver more training that focuses on the emotional and mental health and wellbeing of pupils

Ensure that the PEP quality assurance process improves the quality of SMART outcomes



16+

Successes

Virtual School participated in year 2 of a national Pupil Premium Plus Post 16 pilot

Led priority 6 of the council's Corporate Parenting Strategy action plan that involves work with the private sector to create EET opportunities

A high proportion of school leavers are choosing to stay in education at 16

Retention of 17-18 year olds in EET has improved significantly

The majority of 17-18 year olds are still in full time education

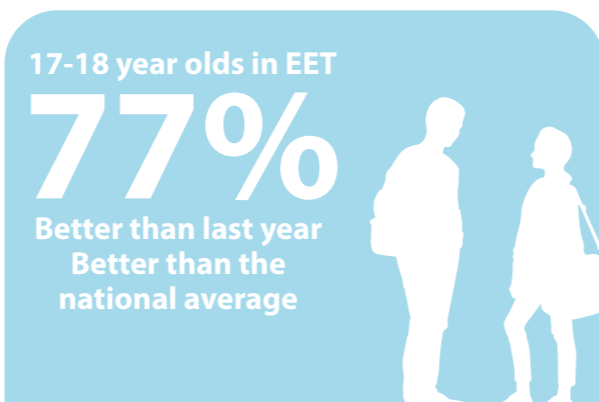
25% of students are on Level 3 courses which is similar to last year and correlates with 2 good years of GCSE results in 2022 and 2021

Introduction of new statutory Post 16 ePEP

Strengthened support with two new posts of Post 16 Education Intervention Worker and Virtual School Careers' Adviser

Increase in staff capacity has meant more support to NEET young people as well as those preparing to leave education and we expect this to be reflected in the number engaging in EET in September

EET Clinic Terms of Reference reviewed and are now managed through the Virtual School



Level 3 qualifications



More young people are progressing into EET through the clinics

- 10 EET clinics have taken place:
- 74** young people were discussed
 - 6** have started re-engagement activities
 - 5** have progressed into EET
 - 7** started courses in September

A higher number of care leavers engaged in education, employment and training through the multi-agency EET Clinics.

Successful liaison with Northumberland College means that our Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children have access to an English language course.

Strong integrated working with social workers (Personal Advisers).

We know our young people well – the circumstances of the pupils that are NEET are known and they are all engaging with Virtual School Careers' Advisers.

Joined the Northumberland Employability Network that increases our awareness of non-government funded EET and re-integration opportunities.

During SEND practice week we developed criteria for assessing when direct careers guidance is appropriate for young people with complex SEND.

Helpful involvement in the newly formed Regional Post 16 Virtual School Steering Group where common issues such as lack of ESOL provision and SEMH provision are addressed.

3 young people are in EET with local company Bernicia Homes

Opportunities with Morgan Sindall are being promoted through schools, FE providers and the EET clinic



Pupil Premium Plus Post 16 Pilot

Grant funding received through the pilot was ring-fenced for retention of students in further education. It coincided with a new statutory requirement for young people having a personal education plan (PEP) until they are 18, so that they continue to be supported in education, achieve well and are aspirational. We combined the funding with this requirement to develop a post 16 ePEP, ready for implementation in September 2023. The grant also meant we could appoint to a new post of Post 16 Education Intervention Worker to implement the new PEP and develop relationships with students and further education providers.

Care Leavers' Covenants

We are involved in 3 Care Leavers' Covenants that aim to provide support and services to care leavers beyond the statutory minimum required.

Northumberland Care Leavers' Covenant

Our original covenant from 2018 was refreshed in 2023 to re-affirm our promise to our care leavers to go the extra mile as their good corporate parents. We promise to support them to live independently and involve our partners from the public, health, voluntary and private sectors

North East Raising Achievement Partnership Care Leavers' Covenant

This is a collaboration of our 5 local universities that offers a Choices Together programme to engage pupils from an early age and supports them to build academic pathways out of school.

North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board Care Leavers' Covenant

Delivering their promise through a NHS Universal Family Project with Northumberland, North Tyneside and Newcastle local authorities, to support care leavers into employment.

Challenges



Low numbers of pupils achieving the Basics at GCSE reduces the range of opportunities available at 16+



Lack of suitable post 16 provision for school leavers with SEND



Cohorts of pupils are increasingly challenging and experience significant levels of instability that impact on the opportunities available to them at 16



For those care leavers staying in education, we want them to progress from GCSE level 2 courses to level 3 courses.



Education, Employment and Training at 16 dipped

to 74%

Not as good as last year
National average not yet known

External factors

When a post 16 provider unexpectedly closed down in August it meant that 6 SEND learners who intended to start courses in September then had no destination arranged and were NEET

Progressing to level 3 courses
10% of Year 11 cohort

Not as good as last year
National average not yet known

Pathways at 16: main barriers

- Lack of specialist provision
- Home placement instability (waiting for residential moves)
- Disengagement

16+



NEXT STEPS

Embed the Post 16 ePEP

Through the Northumberland Employability Network, **broaden the range of opportunities available at 16+**

Deliver training for providers about the needs of our young people

Fulfil our commitments through the Care Leavers' Covenants

SEND Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

We want to be the best corporate parents we can be for our cared for children with SEND. The proportion of cared for children with an identified SEND in Northumberland is high and rising so we champion their needs relentlessly with our partners and other local authority services to ensure that they are in the right education provision, at the right time, where their needs are being fully met.

Impact of the role of the SEND Lead Officer for looked after children

Local authority review of SEND processes to improve the service for cared for children – an action in Priority 6 of the Corporate Parenting Strategy action plan: *Ensure that processes to identify and meet SEND need prioritise the care experienced population*

50% of EHCP reviews are aligned with looked after reviews

The **SEND Lead Officer for looked after children role**, funded by the Virtual School and inducted through the SEND Assessment Team, has had a positive impact: there is improved multi-agency working with colleagues from health and children's social care, including information sharing. Virtual School staff have been upskilled in SEND processes and cared for children are prioritised more in the SEND department because they have a dedicated advocate for their education plans. This has resulted in an increased numbers of COSAs and EHCPs that has reduced the proportion of children with unidentified needs.

SEND processes have been reviewed to the advantage of cared for children through a new Specialist Overview Resource Team (SORT), and additional panels have taken place to accelerate the placement process.

School age cared for children 5-16

- 74 pupils have an EHCP and attend Northumberland schools
- 17 pupils have an EHCP and attend out of county provision (Northumberland holds their EHCP)
- 11 pupils have an EHCP and attend out of county provision (host local authority holds their EHCP)

Post 16 cared for children and care leavers 16-19

- **14** students have an EHCP and attend Northumberland schools
- **7** students have an EHCP and attend out of county provision (Northumberland holds their EHCP)
- **13** students have an EHCP and are not in education, training and employment

Cared for Children with SEND

35% EHC Plan
22% SEND Support
More than last year
Lower than the national average

Challenges

Increasing number of children entering care with previously unidentified SEND

Increasing complexity of SEND

Legacy impact of the pandemic – gaps in achievement between cared for pupils with SEND and the pupil population are widening

Increasing number of out of county placements requiring school moves that have a negative impact on stability

Schools saying they cannot meet needs

Delays in arranging placements

Delays when another local authority holds the EHCP of our children

Inconsistent interpretation of the Belonging Regulations in different local authorities

Lack of appropriate SEND provision in other local authorities. Too many learners are placed in areas where education providers cannot meet their needs

EHCP Reviews are not always well attended by social workers and health professionals

Delay in opening of new independent special school in Northumberland

Withdrawal of providers at short notice



Good Practice *Case Study*

Charlie's journey: the right support at the right time for care leavers with SEND

Charlie completed A-levels after doing well in his GCSEs but due to working from home during lockdowns and school closures, combined with his diagnosis of ASD and mental health issues exacerbated by the pandemic, he struggled with post-16 education. He didn't achieve the grades he was initially predicted and decided that Higher Education, which was his original plan, was not right for him at this time.

Charlie wanted to do an apprenticeship, but he and his Care Team felt that he wouldn't cope with the social demands of this at that time and would need to build up to a full-time job. The Virtual School Careers Adviser suggested the NHS Project Choice Programme, liaised with the post-16 SEND team regarding funding, and Charlie and his parents attended an information session. Charlie decided this was the best option for him as it would give him the support he needed to get into the workplace.

Unfortunately, due to Covid, the work placements Charlie had hoped for weren't available, so he spent the first two terms in a charity shop. While this wasn't what he would have chosen, he did gain a lot of experience, including customer service which he had thought he wouldn't be able to do. Charlie is now in the 3rd term of the programme and is on placement within the NHS; he has had training on the patient record system which improves his chances of gaining employment within the NHS after his course.

Due to having the right advice and support at the right time, and working hard on the programme, Charlie now has choices. The year has made him reflect on what he wants and he has decided that he does want to return to education. Project Choice staff, with support from his 18+ social worker and Virtual School Careers Adviser, have supported him to arrange student finance. He has a place on a Foundation Degree and is excited to get started.



Achievement for pupils with SEND

50% of children achieved a Good Level of Development at the end of Early Years
Better than the national average

No pupils met the standard for the Phonics test
Below the national average

No pupils met the expected standard in reading, writing and maths at the end of **Key Stage 1**
Below the national average

2 of the 11 pupils with SEND in Year 6 met age related expectations in reading/writing/maths at **Key Stage 2**
Same as the national average

5 of the 12 pupils with SEND in **Year 11** were entered for at least 1 GCSE and 1 pupils achieved the Basics grade 5+
Better than the national average

For all pupils with SEND in Year 11 the **Attainment 8** score is 16.1 which is lower than the score of 22.8 for all of our cared for pupils in Year 11
Below the national average

The Progress 8 score for our Year 11 pupils with SEND is -0.76 which is much better than the score of -1.37 for all of our cared for pupils in Year 11 and shows that our SEND pupils have been helped by their schools, Virtual School and Care Teams to make more progress since Key Stage 2 than their cared for peers with no SEND
Better than the national average

57.9% of our Year 11 school leavers are in **education, employment and training**
No national data available yet

SEND NEXT STEPS

Further develop good corporate parenting for cared for children with SEND through the Corporate Parenting Strategy Action Plan

Work with SEND services to refine new processes to ensure that cared for children are prioritised through all systems and panels whilst complying with the relevant terms of reference

Further align decision making about home placements with decision making about education so that Northumberland retains ownership of more EHCPs

Work with regional and National Association of Virtual School Headteachers to address the issue of communication between local authorities that can cause drift and delay for cared for children with SEND

Promote an EHCP review on entry to care as good practice

Develop guidance for SEND and Care Teams on supporting school moves for pupils with an EHCP that includes promoting the graduated approach to meeting SEND needs prior to a special school request

Review Belongings Regulations in accordance with the High Needs Funding 23-24 operational guide gov.uk

Previously cared for children

We understand the long-term impact of trauma and loss on learning and this informs the support and guidance we give to parents, carers and professionals who live and work with previously cared for children. We aspire to providing good quality advice and guidance that helps previously cared for children to fulfil their potential in education.

In our statutory role to provide advice and guidance to families and professionals living with and supporting previously cared for children, we have:

- Co-operated with other VSHs, adoption support teams and adoption support organisations through the regional network co-ordinated by Adopt North East
- Led on the application for a boarding school place for a previously cared for pupil
- Responded to requests for advice from families and schools on a range of subjects, but predominantly Pupil Premium Plus and school applications
- Promoted the same high standards, expectations and aspirations for previously cared for children as we do for those children currently in care



Our relationship
with the Family Placement
Team and mental health
services is a strength

Our Virtual School Educational Psychologists:

- develop and refresh guidance resources on a range of relevant themes **and share expertise on what works for previously cared for children**
- **support individual previously cared for children** whose school place is in crisis



Believe



Keep going, no matter how bad things may seem
Even in the dark there will always be a light beam

Keep going, even if you feel as grey as the sky
Even in the saddest moments there will not be a reason to cry

Keep going, even in the meanest of moments
Even in the bad times there will always be the
greenest of fields on your doorstep

Keep going, even if you don't want to get out of bed
Even in the most boring of times, you have to look ahead

There is only one thing to fear in life
When you don't bring yourself to believe.

Poet:
Northumberland cared for child



Children with a social worker

Since Virtual School Headteachers were given an extended duty to promote the education of children with a social worker (Promoting the education of children with a social worker, June 2022) our response in Northumberland has developed at a rapid rate.

We now know that the two areas that will have the greatest positive impact for this group of learners are attendance improvement and embedding relational and trauma informed practise.

Successes

Strong leadership to promote the education of children with a social worker.

Promoting the education of children with a social worker is a theme now incorporated into Northumberland's safeguarding partnership (NCASP) via the Safer in Education sub-group chaired by the Virtual School Headteacher.

Co-planned and delivered with the Be You team, a Relationships Matter conference that launched a county-wide relational and trauma informed approach to working with children.

Good progress with Northumberland Schools C.A.R.E initiative.

Strengthened Education Welfare service.

Multi-disciplinary training developed and delivered to children's social care by ESLAC, Education Welfare and Inclusion teams about schools' statutory guidance for attendance, behaviour and suspensions/exclusions. **Over 100** social care team managers and social workers joined the training.

Was the journey easy?
No.
Was the journey and approach worth it?
You bet it was!

Paul Dix

Our aim is that the education of children with a social worker will be routinely considered in day-to-day practice, or Business As Usual. This will ensure that education is embedded as a protective factor

Research shows that relational practice:

- develops social and emotional competencies
- supports responsible decision making
- improves self-discipline
- increases empathy
- develops self-confidence and resilience
- improves outcomes

Education Welfare Support Officers worked with **51 children who have social work involvement and 13 cared for children**

The aim is to empower leaders to embed a relational approach in school through restorative methods by **"teaching behaviour but never excusing it."**

A Task and Finish group, chaired by the Head of Safeguarding, has strengthened the relationship between education and social care.

Two case file audits were carried out in line with the quality of practice framework in children's social care, showing that there has been progress in recognising education as a protective factor and ensuring that improved school attendance is part of safety plans.

A Virtual School SharePoint webpage has been launched with a dedicated section for promoting the education of children with a social worker.

The Early Help Education team has developed an in-school early help map to capture what is accessible to children before schools need to engage other services to meet additional needs.

Northumberland contributed to the DfE evaluation of the first year of the Virtual School Headteacher's extended duty to promote the education of children with a social worker and learning from the first year has been factored into future improvement planning. The recommendation to DfE to make this duty statutory has also been noted.

We know that grant funding from the Virtual School to provide this support and resources is having positive impact because:

over 300 professionals from Northumberland schools have signed up to the Online Change Behaviour course which is 7 hours of pre-recorded content to support relational behavioural practice development with practical tasks to carry out in school

the Northumberland Relationships Matter website is attracting an average of 88 unique visitors every month

With the **Be You team**, the Virtual School jointly launched a multi-agency initiative to embed a relational and trauma informed practice approach. The aim is for all schools to be attachment aware and trauma informed so that the underlying reasons for children with a social worker not doing as well at school as their peers are understood and overcome.

The starting point was a **Relationships Matter** conference in March 2023 attended by over 200 professionals in person, with the recording then shared so that it could be used by all professionals for further staff training. The training provider was *Paul Dix* and his team, author of *When the Adults Change*.

This was used as a springboard for the launch of a pilot scheme called **Northumberland Schools C.A.R.E.** which stands for **Caring about Adversity Resilience and Empowerment** and is a collaboration between the Virtual School, Be You and NEWST teams. A pilot is underway with 9 pilot schools completing a relational audit and a training session on attachment and trauma, with half termly supervision via network meetings. All of the pilot schools have self-evaluated their current practice and knowledge against given criteria to support their planning to develop relational practices and become trauma informed.



Successes



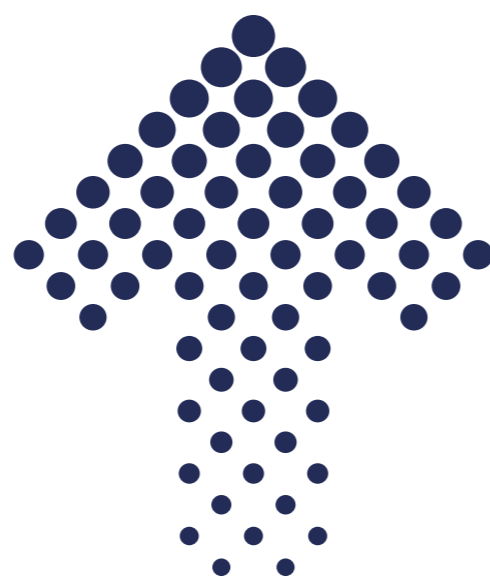
Overwhelmingly positive feedback from Relationships Matter conference

An excellent day that exceeded expectations. One of the most useful and exciting conferences I have attended for a while.

Brilliant content and aims for Northumberland it's been a long time coming schools changing practice.

Thank you so much for such a fantastic conference. I feel so lucky to have had the opportunity to attend. Every single speaker and presentation offered valuable insight and the entire day was so cohesive and joined up. Everything aligned with our approach at both of the schools I work at and it was really affirming. I have loved being part of such an interesting, informative and important event.

This has truly been the best Conference I have attended in some time. Already passionate about the content, I feel further inspired after today. Thank you SO much. I only wish our entire school had been there with me.



Outcomes that are much better than 2022

Pupils meeting age related expectations in reading/writing/maths at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2

Outcomes that still need to improve in 2024

Overall attendance, suspensions, permanent exclusions and GCSE achievement are areas for improvement

Challenges

Developing a meaningful data set has been challenging as the group is large and data information systems from schools, education and social care do not 'talk to each other' easily

There are over 4000 children in the group of those who have or have had a social worker in the last 6 years, involving all schools in Northumberland (166), alternative providers and many out of county

Getting an insight into what pupils are telling us are their barriers to education

Children with a social worker

NEXT STEPS

Recruit to 2 new fixed term posts of Virtual School Co-ordinator: children with a social worker, and Virtual School Learning Mentor: children with a social worker

Develop a more sophisticated data set and outcomes framework

Provide guidance and support to develop the role of the Designated Teacher with all children who have social care involvement

Continue to implement the Northumberland Schools CARE initiative

Facilitate the next Relationships Matter conference to target social workers

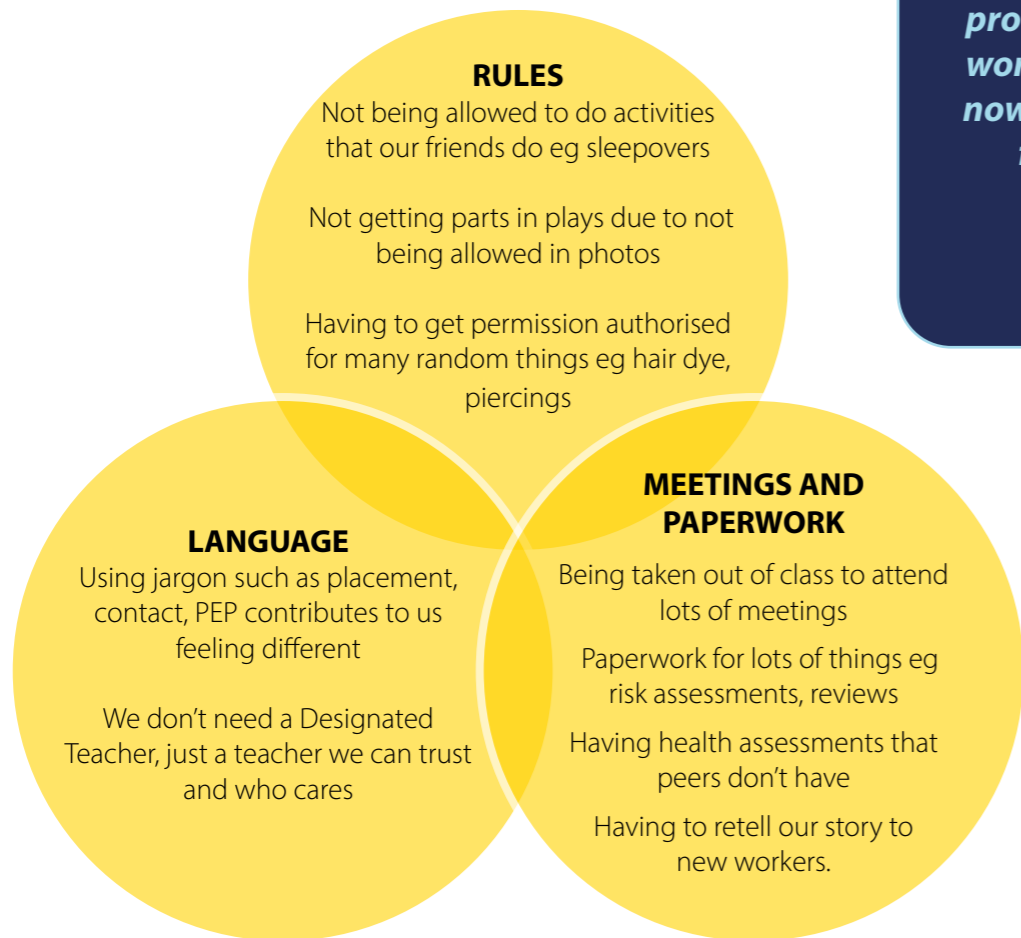


Pupil Voice

We want to have meaningful conversations with our cared for pupils about their education. Listening to what our children are saying gives us an insight into their experiences of school so that we can take action when needed to make things better.

Our cared for children's council, Voices Making Choices, worked closely with the Participation team (Northumberland Adolescent Services) to produce a short film for adults and professionals working with them that shares their views about stigma in the care system. We want our children to know that we listened to what they said and will try to do better for them.

These are some of the messages they wanted us all to hear in Children's Services



You Said

You don't like being labelled as looked after children or worse called LAC

We Did

Children's Services and all professionals that work with you will now call you cared for children

Priorities for Continuous Improvement

The NEXT STEPS for 2023-24 identified in each section of this self-evaluation and have been organised into 4 priorities for improvement. Specific actions under-pinning each priority are set out in the separate document that is the Virtual School Improvement Plan 2023-24.



Improvement Priority

Raise achievement

Summary of NEXT STEPS

- Work with the Early Years service to improve school readiness in Year 1
- Support schools to improve achievement in GCSE maths
- Develop the monitoring framework to target support and intervention that gets pupil progress
- Recruit part time teachers in English, maths and science to work into residential homes
- Target more EP and specialist resource into residential homes to work with pupils and staff
- With schools, use PP+ differently to accelerate progress during Key Stage 2



Improvement Priority

Improve stability to create the right conditions for learning

Summary of NEXT STEPS

- Address the top 10 reasons for poor attendance
- As Northumberland's Attendance Strategy is implemented, ensure the needs of cared for children are well understood and prioritised as 'everyone's business'
- Work with Care Teams to reduce the number of missed sessions
- Deliver more training and develop more resources to promote alternatives to suspension

There's so many things that need to change around the foster care system. It is so important that the government, the people who have the power to make a difference, take some time to listen to children and young people who have experienced being in the care system. To them, this is just a job, but this is our lives. They have so much power to change the way things are.

Chloe (Care experienced A National Voice Ambassador (ANV) and Chair of ANV)

Priorities for Continuous Improvement

Improvement Priority

03

Support teaching and learning in schools

Summary of NEXT STEPS

- Deliver training that focuses on the emotional and mental health and wellbeing of pupils
- Pilot a PP+ impact evaluation with volunteer Designated Teachers in a representative sample of schools
- Ensure that the PEP quality assurance process improves the quality of SMART

Improvement Priority

04

Improve recruitment and retention in education, employment and training Post 16+

Summary of NEXT STEPS

- Fulfil our commitments through the Care Leavers' Covenants
- Embed the Post 16 ePEP
- Through the Northumberland Employability Network, broaden the range of opportunities available at 16+
- Deliver training for providers about the needs of our young people

Improvement Priority

05

Improve the experience of education of cared for children with SEND

Summary of NEXT STEPS

- Further develop good corporate parenting for cared for children with SEND through the Corporate Parenting Strategy Action Plan
- Work with SEND services to refine new processes to ensure that cared for children are prioritised through all systems and panels whilst complying with the relevant terms of reference
- Further align decision making about home placements with decision making about education so that Northumberland retains ownership of more EHCPs
- Work with the regional and National Association of Virtual School Headteachers to address the issue of communication between local authorities that can cause drift and delay for pupils with SEND
- Promote an EHCP review on entry to care as good practice.
- Develop guidance for SEND and Care Teams on supporting school moves for pupils with an EHCP that includes promoting the graduated approach to meeting SEND needs prior to a special school request
- Review Belongings Regulations in accordance with the High Needs Funding 23-24 operational guide gov.uk

Improvement Priority

06

Promote the education of children with a social worker

Summary of NEXT STEPS

- Recruit to two new fixed term posts of Virtual School Co-ordinator: children with a social worker and Virtual School Learning Mentor: children with a social worker
- Develop a more sophisticated data set and outcomes framework
- Provide guidance and support to develop the role of the Designated Teacher with all children who have social care involvement
- Continue to implement the Northumberland Schools CARE initiative
- Facilitate the next Relationships Matter conference to target social workers

Northumberland's Virtual School

Northumberland's Virtual School

Northumberland's Virtual School Headteacher is managed through children's social care and has Head of Service oversight of the work of 4 teams that fulfil statutory duties for the local authority to ensure that children are safer in education. Those services are:

- Promoting the education of looked after and previously looked after children
- Promoting the education of children who have and have had a social worker
- School attendance
- Children missing and at risk of missing education
- Elective home education
- Licensing for children in entertainment and employment
- Safeguarding standards in schools, including the training of Designated Safeguarding Leads
- Providing education for children with health and medical needs who cannot attend school

The Virtual School Headteacher chairs the Safer in Education Group of the Northumberland Children's and Adult's Safeguarding Partnership.

The ESLAC – education support for looked after children – team is the operational arm of the Virtual School that is dedicated to cared for and previously cared for children. It is a multi-disciplinary team with 22 staff/17.52 FTE providing a range of expertise in teaching, educational psychology, education welfare, careers' guidance and therapeutic interventions.

The team provides training and support for Designated Teachers for looked after and previously looked after children in all education settings.

The MALAP – multi agency looked after partnership – has terms of reference as the governing body of the Virtual School. Governance is provided by the Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting Group (SCPG).

ESLAC is funded by NCC and the Pupil Premium Plus grant from the DfE.

Northumberland's Virtual School is a member of the National Association of Virtual School Headteachers.

ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Definition	Abbreviation	Definition
AP	Alternative Provision	K	SEND need
A8	Attainment 8 is an average of pupils' highest scores in a secondary school in 8 specific subjects	KS1	Key Stage 1
COSA	Consideration of Statutory Assessment	KS2	Key Stage 2
CYPS	Children and Young People's Service	KS4	Key Stage 4
		NEWST	Northumberland Emotional Wellbeing Support Team
DVSH	Deputy Virtual School Headteacher	NEET	Not in education, employment and training
EBSA	Emotionally based school avoidance	PP+	Pupil Premium Plus
EET	Education, employment and training	PACE	Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy
EHCP or E	Education, Health and Care Plan	PEP	Personal Education Plan
EIW	Education Intervention Worker	PMH	Primary Mental Health
EMHWP	Emotional and mental health and wellbeing	P8	Progress 8 is an average score measuring progress over 5 years since KS2. 0 means in line with the average rate of progress of all children nationally
EP	Educational Psychologist	SDQ	Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire
ePEP	Electronic Personal Education Plan	SEMH	Social, emotional and mental health
ESLAC	Education Support for Looked After Children team	UASC	Unaccompanied asylum seeking child
ESOL	English as a second language	VS	Virtual School
EY	Early Years	VSH	Virtual School Headteacher
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education		

A note about the data

The official cohorts reviewed in this report are small and the individual pupils comprising the cohorts change during the course of each phase. Percentages can vary considerably so that comparisons with other groups of pupils or establishing trends in performance over time are not always meaningful.

The official cohort does not comprise all pupils in a year group at the time of the assessment, but all those of statutory school age who have been in care for 12 months or more from 31st March of 2022 and of those how many match to the school census. This can change what the data might be telling us significantly. For example, in Year 11 in 2022-23 the actual cohort was 31 pupils, the official cohort was 23 pupils, and the official cohort matched to the school census is 12 pupils.

The Virtual School captures data for whole cohorts, so where local data (and not validated DfE data) is quoted then it refers to all pupils in one year group at one time regardless of the length of time they have been in care or the school census.

Disclaimer

The information provided in this publication is, to the best of our knowledge, accurate at the time of production. Data sources are available upon request.

OTHER FORMATS

If you need this information in large print, Braille, Audio, or in another format or language please contact us:

0345 600 6400

If you are deaf or can't speak on the phone, contact us using Relay UK. Download the Relay UK app or using your existing text phone prefix our dedicated text Relay number:

018001 01670 623 515

British Sign Language users can contact us using an online sign language interpreting service:

northumberlandcc-cs.signvideo.net

Northumberland County Council, County Hall, Morpeth NE61 2EF.

Telephone: 0345 600 6400





Northumberland County Council

FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 07 March 2024

Inequalities, Poverty and Hardship Plan

Report of Councillor(s) Guy Renner-Thompson, Cabinet Member for Inspiring Young People

Responsible Officer(s): Audrey Kingham, Executive Director for Children, Young People & Education

1. Link to Key Priorities of the Corporate Plan

This report is relevant to the following priorities in the NCC Corporate Plan 2023-26:

- Achieving value for money: Ensuring best use of resources and
- Tackling Inequalities: Working collaboratively to support residents soonest and to greatest effect.
- Driving Economic Growth: Building on strengths and connections to enable residents to see and access opportunities available to them.

2. Purpose of report

To update on the progress of the Poverty and Hardship plan, with a focus on children and young people.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 Family and Children Scrutiny committee are recommended to consider and comment on progress described in this report, which has been amended and updated from the report taken to Health and Wellbeing Board in December 2023.

4. Forward plan date and reason for urgency if applicable

11 January 2024

5. Background

- 5.1 The Poverty and Hardship Plan - Section 4.5 of the System Inequalities plan - is Northumberland County Council's response to financial hardship and cost of living pressures.
- 5.2 This work aims to keep residents to stay safe and well while enduring cost of living pressures and to prevent further widening of the inequalities gap, supporting the longer-term preventative and proactive measures in the wider system inequalities plan.
- 5.3 It was previously agreed (HWB OSC 6th September 2022 and HWBB 8th September 2022) that £1m from the Public Health reserve be available to support the council's implementation of a Poverty and Hardship Plan.
- 5.4 The plan was developed and is delivered with representation from key areas of the Council and the Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise sector (VCSE). Priorities drawn from Public Health prioritisation exercise: 'aim to reduce inequalities' and 'local need', 'evidence of impact/ effectiveness', and 'prevention'. It includes relevant reports of Holiday Activity and Food investment (£1.02m) and Household Support Funding (£4,96 m)
- 5.5 **Population Health Management funding** in addition to the Public Health reserves, £1 million was committed to NCC by Northumberland Clinical Commissioning Group (now Integrated Care Board) via section 256 agreement.
- 5.6 £430K allocated to Population Health Management/Health Inequalities Fund for communities (£250,000), and Creative Health Strategic Manager.
- 5.7 November 2022 System Transformation Board agreed proposals for £570K cost of living funding for additional Citizens Advice Capacity, Make Every Contact Count trainer, and additional energy support via Primary Care.
- 5.8 Governance: The Section 256 funding and the Poverty and Hardship plan sit within the Inequalities plan and report therein.
- 5.9 **Areas of focus for the plan:**
- The poverty and hardship plan focuses on
- hardship support including Household Support Fund, food, fuel and warm homes,
 - mitigating the impact of poverty and cost of living on children and young people,
 - building resilience in our households and communities.
- 5.10 Northumberland is an asset and opportunity rich county; the plan supports our aspiration that all residents can live their best life, and that children and young people are able and supported to thrive. Understanding our challenges and strengths and working together to build solutions is key.

6. Working with Knowledge

The council has access to information and data which can ensure the greatest impact and best value from limited resources available.

- 6.1 LIFT tool (Low Income Family Tracker) combines a welfare policy analytics engine with local authority data to identify financially struggling residents, design appropriate confidential, non-stigmatising interventions, and track the effectiveness of these interventions.
- 6.2 Development of a poverty and hardship data dashboard combining mixed source available information to give insights into household expenditure and current costs.

7. Financial pressures on households with low incomes

The impact of inflation which for housing fuel and water peaked at 11.8% in January, food prices rose by 19.2% in June 2023 – the highest for 45 years, while inflation is currently 4% (10.9% January 2023) long term average is 2.8% and prices are not following at pace.

- 7.1 Average weekly wages at £543 compared to £613 in England and £539 in the North East. Households are spending an average of 16% more on housing, fuel and water, and 27% more on food. Northumberland has a 5.7% unemployment rate (national 3.6%). Around 21000 households claim Universal Credit (UC).
- 7.2 31% of Northumberland children are living in poverty, two thirds of these live in a working household.
- 7.3 There are 11,100 children in Northumberland living in families with UC debt deductions (58% of all children living in UC households), losing an average of £75 per month from their entitlement – or a collective total of £420,000 a month across the county.
- 7.4 Free School Meal (FSM) entitlement is for families earning less than £14,000 per year on UC, or £16,190 per year on Child Tax or Working Tax credit. Low income is defined as 60% of the median which in the current year is £19,134.00. 10278 Northumberland children are eligible for FSM.
- 7.5 Rural residents typically spend between 10-20% more on everyday requirements than those living in urban settings, despite average wages being some 7.5 per cent lower.

Household Support Fund (HSF)

- 7.6 Household Support Fund is to provide crisis and financial support to households in most need with food, fuel, and essentials, particularly for residents not entitled to other government support.
- 7.7 £3,142,349 has been awarded to vulnerable households – a total of 67,824 awards.
- 7.8 Household Children made up £1,784,556 of this. Children with a Disability/Special Education Needs are counted within Household Disabled Person which has seen additional awards totalling £675,406
- 7.9 By volume most awards were made ahead of school holidays to families with children entitled to Free School Meals (18997 awards), followed by energy and fuel support (2818), food support (2519), and energy essentials and wider essentials (1983).

- 7.10 More than £1m of awards were made in vouchers.
- 7.11 **Citizens Advice Northumberland** capacity – CAB currently manage £6m+ in debt, in the last year worked with 3199 clients, more than 1800 in relation to cost of living.
- 7.12 **Citizens Advice at the School Gates** North of Tyne Combined Authority core funded and in line with asset based working. Citizens Advice upskill local workforce to provide quality assured advice in school setting and direct CAB referral through Northumberland Frontline.
- 7.13 Autumn term 65 families supported across the 11 schools, achieving financial benefit gains of £129,000 and supporting clients with a total of £63,400 of debts.
- 7.14 Community advice in Primary care for the same period: 86 referrals, £483,879.58 in financial results for these clients.
- 7.15 A Financial Wellbeing collaborative has been initiated working with the Community Bank, Citizens Advice, and key stakeholders from all sectors. Using the Money and Pensions Services Financial Wellbeing strategy the group will first produce a simple pathway early in 2024 for residents to navigate the financial wellbeing advice and support available across the life course. Into 2024 the group will consider financial education and resilience for children and young people.
- 8. Warm spaces and pop ups**
- 8.1 The warm spaces network is live ahead of winter with 102 spaces registered and offering a warm and social space to residents across the county. In line with Inequalities Plan question 2 - "What can communities do with a little help" - community embedded staff continue to work alongside our warm space network, and others to take forward initiatives that build cohesion and resilience at place.
- 9. Access to fresh and affordable food**
- 9.1 Food support is the highest demand on Northumberland Communities Together (NCT) with a third of weekly calls (average 209) regarding food. Citizens Advice reports similar increases for crisis support managing an average of 1200 cost of living related issues per month for clients, predominantly crisis and charitable support.
- 9.2 Across the county 20+ food based resilience building pilot activities are in place including community lunch clubs, breakfast meet ups, growing walls, after school food, homework clubs, and community fridges. We commit to identifying best practice in addressing food affordability and access to healthy food.
- 10. Food insecurity and children**
- 10.1 Northumberland County Council committed to continue supporting families eligible for Free School Meals during school holidays issuing HUGG supermarket vouchers to 10482 children/families (3724 Children with Special Needs and Disability) via schools to the value of £250 per child across the 6 holiday periods (01/04/23 - 31/03/24).
- 10.2 2024 pilot "auto enrolment" Free School Meals meaning entitlements in place at the earliest time giving families and schools access the national financial support available.

- 10.3 Northumberland Holiday Provision (HAF) provides the scope and funding for partners & providers across the county to engage free school meal eligible children and young people in enriching camps and activities that all include a food offer. Delivery is local and saw more than 9000 eligible children attending activities or camps in 2022, efficacy rate for Free School Meal children is around 43% - 62% varying per holiday, (the national average efficacy varies from 17% to 32%).
- 10.4 Healthy Start vouchers provide families with support towards fruit, vegetables, milk and vitamins. Current uptake is 77% of 2468 eligible families: A rise from 66% (Jan 2023) can be attributed to a refreshed collaborative effort across family hubs, community, and public health.

11. Warm Homes – Energy Pathways

- 11.1 Fuel poverty is driven by low incomes, high energy prices and energy inefficient homes. Households are fuel poor if after accounting for fuel costs households are left with a minimal income. We also see correlation between fuel poverty and debt.
- 11.2 Northumberland Energy Pathway makes up around 30% of the current Household Support Fund projected spend (£1.4m). Over the reporting period May to December 2023 1229 households have accessed energy support and resilience measures administered by Citizens Advice energy team:

£351,249 potential Income Gain, including £35,437 in benefits awards

£403,365 other supports, including Energy Efficiency advice

£16,800 Debts written off

- 11.3 **Energy Pathway Plus** (Warm Homes on Prescription) prioritises households adversely affected by cold homes for energy efficiency and support interventions, including larger families and households with a member with a disability. This work is a collaboration between NCT, Citizens Advice, Community Action Northumberland, NCC Environment team, Public Health, and Primary Care, including the additional investment from Integrated Care Board (see 4.6)
- 11.4 To date 62 clients have benefitted from an energy audit and bespoke interventions: Income gain - £38,706 including maximizing income/Warm Home Discounts, other income gain (including Energy Efficiency advice/savings) £25,336
- 11.5 70% on signposting and resilience building (eg to Solid Foundations employability programme)

12. Children and young people : Starting and Growing Up Well:

- 12.1 For the best start and to grow up well, children must be able to see and access opportunities available to them. The plan acknowledges the significant support activity across the county but notes barriers to children and young people accessing education, enrichment, and gaining key life skills to build their futures.
- 12.2 **Eat Sleep Play Learn fund** This funding has four broad categories: eating, sleeping, playing, and learning. 262 awards have been made to date to the value of £44742.44 directly benefiting children and young people – most awards are for beds, bedding, clothes, and uniform items.
- 12.3 **Holiday Activity and Food Programme (HAF)** Department for Education funded (£1.02m for Northumberland p/a), HAF is designed to remove pressures from

families during school holidays and provide food, and fun, enriching activities for children entitled to Free School Meals. Northumbria University evidenced that every £1 spent on HAF added £11 in wider social benefits for families.

- 12.4 Securing additional funding from National Lottery Community Fund / North East Child Poverty Trust has enabled Northumberland to expand our community led offer to include children experiencing other barriers such as bereavement, disability, or social and emotional factors. Northumberland's Holiday Provision is coordinated in partnership with Leading Link.
- 12.5 In 2022 9965 children and young people attended HAF camps and activities, 883 with Special Educational Needs / Disability over all three holiday periods. Still awaiting winter data, 5300 children have attended more than 23,000 sessions in 2023. Northumberland HAF 2023 focused on developing a teen programme (HAF+) to date there have been 6 teenager camps with 1395 teenagers attending HAF overall.
- 12.6 Winter 2023-24 24 camps offered combined places of 2995 children and the equivalent of 89 days of enriching activities with each camp averaging just under 4 days.
- 12.7 Q20 events live theatre in 7 venues across the county over 4 days including an accessible performance.
- 12.8 Winter Family Activities: Wide range of enriching and engaging activities facilitated by more than 30 partners across Northumberland all with lunch, ranging from physical to educational.
- 12.9 Northumbria University's external evaluation of Northumberland's HAF provision documents a well-coordinated programme making significant difference to children's wellbeing, self-esteem, and school readiness.
- 12.10 HAF providers are working together with partners to form a Children and Young People Network as part of Thriving Together – our VCSE Support Contract. This network, launching in March, will encourage sharing best practice, build relationships, and increase readiness for future collaborative funding opportunities.

13. Mitigating poverty in an education setting

- 13.1 Proposals were invited from education colleagues – early years through to Further Education – that responded to local need, reduced inequalities, incorporated prevention, built upon community strengths and offered value for money.
- 13.2 To date proposals to the value of £177,000 have been funded–
 - 8 school led interventions addressing the inequality gap in attainment and supporting children to stay in school.
 - 3 proposals are out of school activity- rural youth provision, a listening exercise to capture the views of young people in Ashington, and emotional wellbeing programming.
 - 2 years of Globalbridge support – a CV builder tool effective in showcasing alternative and vocational skills and readiness for work.
- 13.3 **Education family support role:** additional capacity to work with children and young people at risk of missing school because of Domestic Abuse, Poverty/homelessness,

or matters arising from Protected Characteristics. This role will ensure the most timely and efficient response to support continuation of education for the young person.

14. Community resilience

- 14.1 Local relationships and access to reliable information help residents feel secure and able to manage. Ensuring good information is available, and building resilience, knowledge and capacity in communities builds on Empowering Communities and System Inequalities Plan.
- 14.2 Cost of Living website published November 2022 and ongoing expansion of Frontline library. 14000 residents have viewed NCC cost of living support, and more than 200 entries on Frontline library with more than 2000 referrals or signposts made. Frontline is commissioned in partnership with Integrated Care Board (ICB), Thriving Together, and the Council.
- 14.3 Citizens Advice community advice model increased to expand support available across Northumberland, including the additional investment from ICB for targeted training to VCSE organisations and Primary Care, complementing the “at the school gates” approach
- 14.4 Make Every Contact Count wellbeing trainer, funded by the ICB, has been in post since July and to date has attended networks and meetings across the county building confidence in talking about money and finance. Working with the Financial Wellbeing group to add value to the pathway development for residents and to take this work forward with a training plan.
- 14.5 Appointed 4 additional locality based fixed term staff to further embed asset-based community development approaches

15. Rural advocacy

- 15.1 Poverty, work, housing, and access to services are all experienced differently in rural settings. This role, embedded in Glendale Community Trust supports residents, and champions initiatives that serve our rural communities and contribute to the development of rural strategy and Combined Authority to ensure Northumberland's unique situation is articulated in regional policy.

16. Employability on a page

- 16.1 Cross sector employability network to create a live Northumberland wide employment and training pathway in one place – easier to navigate for colleagues and residents. This simple tool will be made available to all partners early in 2024.

17. Reading for Wellbeing (R4WB)

- 17.1 Building on the Ann Cleeve initiative the R4WB project workers are being supported by a refreshed steering group to reach into local communities and build capacity in the form of hyper local reading champions for adults and children.

18. Population Health Management/ Health Inequalities Fund

As noted in 4.6 £250,000 funding has been allocated to the VCSE sector in Northumberland to support communities to test new activities and interventions that improve health and life chances in Northumberland.

18.1 This process is managed by the Council's VCSE Support Contract holder – Thriving Together. The fund was launched on 4th May 2023 and 10 awards were agreed on 7th June by a cross sector panel to the value of £199,755.00. Awards were confirmed to applicants on 15th June and delivery period is 1st July 2023-31st December 2024.

18.2 Successful proposals were in relation to young people and substance abuse, neurodivergent women, drama for older residents, biking and employability, sensory impairment, legal advice for life limited patients, health literacy and digital skills, and social isolation.

19. Poverty and Hardship over coming months

19.1 A reserve of £50,000 is in place to be able to respond to needs arising given the current circumstances. The planning group continue to meet and work the plan monthly, an insights session is in planning for early 2024 for wider stakeholders.

20. Options open to the Council and reasons for the recommendations

20.1 Not Applicable

21. Implications

Policy	Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Corporate Plan. VCS Liaison Group “Working in and with VCSE in Northumberland” Northumberland Children and Young People’s Plan “Partnership’s hopes and ambitions for young people in the future.”
Finance and value for money	Represents good value for money, ensuring best use of limited resources, and insights for future decision making
Legal	Section 256 arrangement: The NHS Act 2006 makes provision for payments to be made between local authorities and NHS bodies which ensure that any such payments are subject to common conditions concerning financial management. These conditions apply to any payments made using section 76 and 256/257 of the NHS Act 2006.
Procurement	Compliant with procurement process
Human resources	Input from Public Health, Education, Childrens Social Care, and Northumberland Communities Together staff – within existing roles. Additionally supported by VCSE contract holder Thriving Together (in current roles and contract arrangements)
Property	n/a
The Equalities Act: is a full impact	No - not required at this point Addresses wider inequalities including wider determinants of health inequalities. Works to open opportunities, maximise

assessment required and attached?	income, and increase information and knowledge sharing. Informs narrative, understanding, and solutions regarding communities and households experiencing poverty and disadvantage
Risk assessment	n/a
Crime and disorder	Inroads to mitigating poverty and working at place level should have positive impact on crime and disorder over time
Customer considerations	Ensuring information and support is appropriate, effective, and accessible to customers, and best value for money is key to this plan
Carbon reduction	Builds on hyper local and local activity, using existing assets
Health and wellbeing	The funding is to improve the health and wellbeing of residents of Northumberland
Wards	all

22. Background papers

Not applicable

23. Links to other key reports already published

HWBB report December 2023:

<https://northumberland.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s18144/Poverty%20and%20Hardship.pdf>

Northumberland Inequalities Plan:

<https://northumberland.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s11715/03.%20Northumberland%20Inequalities%20Plan%20Report.pdf>

Proposals for the allocation of Public Health Reserves:

[08. Corporate Report Template August 2019.doc \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

24. Author and Contact Details

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Agenda Item 7

DECISIONS TAKEN BY CABINET SINCE LAST OSC MEETING AND FORTHCOMING CABINET DECISIONS - MARCH 2024 TO APRIL 2024

DECISION	CABINET DATE/DECISION
Cabinet Papers – 13 February 2024	https://northumberland.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=140&MId=2293
Budget Engagement Report	13 February 2024
Budget 2024-25 and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2024-2028	<p>13 February 2024</p> <p>RESOLVED that County Council be recommended to:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Note that the figures contained within the Budget 2024-25 within Appendix 1 are based on the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement of 18 December 2023. 2. Approve: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) the Revenue Budget for 2024-25 including the efficiencies totalling £10.846 million for 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1 (detailed in Appendix 10), subject to the deletion of the proposal in Environment and Transport to increase the charge for a pay and display and display parking permit (2024-25 £0.012m; 2025-26 ££0.011m; 2026-27 £0.015m); and, b) the Schedule of Efficiencies totalling £14.950 million for 2025-26 contained within Appendix 1 (detailed in Appendix 10) noting that the efficiencies identified may be progressed during 2024-25 in order to realise the efficiencies early. 3. Note the Revenue MTFP covering the period 2024-28 detailed within Appendix 1 and the requirement to deliver budget balancing measures of £20.248 million in 2026-27 and £14.238 million in 2027-28. 4. Note the estimated receipt of Revenue Support Grant of £14.020 million for 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1. 5. Note the estimated retained Business Rates and the Top-Up Grant funding to be received by the Council for 2024-25 of £103.696 million and £324.303 million over the remaining period of the MTFP contained within Appendix 1.

	<p>6. Note the estimated surplus from prior years on Collection Fund Business Rates balance of £3.471 million in 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1.</p> <p>7. Note the estimated receipt of Rural Services Delivery Grant of £2.745 million for 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1.</p> <p>8. Note the estimated receipt of the New Homes Bonus of £1.682 million (excluding service element of £0.028 million) for 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1.</p> <p>9. Note the estimated receipt of Improved Better Care Funding Grant of £12.496 million for 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1.</p> <p>10. Note the estimated receipt of Social Care Grant funding of £25.821 million for 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1.</p> <p>11. Note the estimated receipt of Adult Social Care Discharge Grant funding of £2.920 million in 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1.</p> <p>12. Note the estimated receipt of Adult Social Care Market Sustainability and Improvement Fund Grant of £6.656 million in 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1.</p> <p>13. Note the estimated receipt of the Services Grant of £0.439 million in 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1.</p> <p>14. Approve a 2.99% increase in Council Tax for 2024-25, noting that this is in line with the Government's assumptions regarding the Council's Core Spending Power; and, within the Government's referendum limit of 3.00%.</p> <p>15. Note that the MTFP 2024-28 includes a 2.99% annual increase in Council Tax for 2025-26 and then 1.99% thereafter for the remaining years of the MTFP and, that an estimate of annual tax base growth has been included.</p> <p>16. Note the non-collection rate for Council Tax purposes remains at 1.00% for 2024-25 (1.00% in 2023-24).</p> <p>17. Note the estimated surplus of £4.149 million from prior years on the Collection Fund Council Tax balance for 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1.</p> <p>18. Approve the Council Tax Support Hardship Scheme 2024-25; a reduction of up to £100.00 to council tax bills</p>
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	<p>for all working age Council Tax Support claimants; and those pensionable age Council Tax Support claimants that do not receive 100.00% Council Tax Support, once all other discounts have been applied.</p> <p>19. Approve a 2.00% increase in Council Tax for 2024-25 for use on Adult Social Care services; raising an additional £4.993 million to support the Budget 2024- 25 and note that the assumed increase included in the MTFP is 2.00% for 2025-26 and zero thereafter.</p> <p>20. Approve the Reserves Policy 2024-25 detailed in Appendix 2.</p> <p>21. Note the Schedule of Reserves and Provisions contained within Appendix 3.</p> <p>22. Approve: The net contributions from the Strategic Management Reserve of £20.885 million in 2024-25 and note the proposed net contributions from reserves of £10.831 million in 2025-26 and £0.027 million in 2026-27, and the proposed net contribution to the reserves of £0.997 million in 2027-28, contained within Appendix 1, comprising:</p> <p>a) non-recurrent pressures of £7.147 million for 2024-25, and note the non-recurrent pressures totalling £2.084 million in 2025-26, £0.027 million in 2026-27, and £0.028 million in 2027-28, (as detailed within Appendix 9; excluding the Adult Social Care Discharge Fund, Locality Coordinators, Hirst Welfare Centre – transitional support, Council Tax Support Hardship Scheme, and BEST Initiative);</p> <p>b) delayed investment interest due from the airport as a result of Covid-19 will be repaid to the Strategic Management Reserve. It is anticipated that the airport will start to repay the delayed interest over a three-year period, commencing in April 2027 at £1.025 million per annum;</p> <p>c) revenue contribution to capital (RCCO) of £13.171 million in 2024-25; comprising of £8.171 million for investment in the Schools’ Development Programme, and £5.000 million for investment in the enabling works at strategic employment sites within Northumberland; and £6.591 million in 2025-26 for investment in the Schools’ Development Programme; and,</p> <p>d) contribution from the reserve of £0.567 million in 2024-25 and note the subsequent proposed use of up to</p>
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	<p>£2.156 million in 2025-26 in order to balance the Budget.</p> <p>23. Approve the use of the Public Health Revenue Grant Reserve of £0.428 million in 2024-25, and note the proposed contribution from this reserve of £0.180 million in 2025-26 and £0.100 million in 2026-27 contained within Appendix 1, comprising:</p> <p>a) four fixed term Locality Coordinators totalling £0.178 million in 2024-25; and,</p> <p>b) Hirst Welfare Centre – transitional support at £0.250 million in 2024-25, £0.180 million in 2025-26, and £0.100 million in 2026-27.</p> <p>24. Approve the use of the Council Transformation Fund Reserve of £3.000 million to fund BEST programme delivery costs in 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1.</p> <p>25. Approve the use of the Council Tax Hardship and Discount Scheme Fund Reserve of £1.726 million in 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1 to fund the Council Tax Support Hardship Scheme for 2024-25.</p> <p>26. Note the Schedule of Service Specific Grants of £263.663 million contained within Appendix 4, and that some are still indicative pending final confirmation.</p> <p>27. Note the Schedule of Fees and Charges 2024-25 contained within Appendix 5.</p> <p>28. Approve the Inflation Schedule for 2024-25 totalling £28.559 million detailed in Appendix 6.</p> <p>29. Approve the Recurrent Growth and Pressures Schedules of £14.823 million and the additional revenue costs associated with the Capital Programme of £19.100 million for 2024-25; and note the Growth and Pressures of £2.265 million in 2025-26; £3.130 million in 2026-27; and, £0.875 million in 2027-28 and the additional revenue costs associated with the Capital Programme of £12.609 million in 2025-26; £6.000 million in 2026-27; and £6.000 million in 2027-28 included within Appendices 1, 7 and 8.</p> <p>30. Approve the Non-Recurrent Pressures of £15.221 million for 2024-25 and note the Non-Recurrent Pressures of £2.264 million for 2025-26, £0.127 million for 2026-27, and £0.028 million in 2027-28 included within Appendix 9.</p>
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	<p>31. Approve the Non-Recurrent Income of £5.475 million for 2024-25 and note the Non-Recurrent Income of £0.314 million for 2025-26; £0.283 million for 2026-27, and £0.269 million for 2027-28 included within Appendix 9.</p> <p>32. Approve the identified budget balancing measures contained within Appendix 10 of £10.846 million for 2024-25 and £14.950 million for 2025-26; and note those budget balancing measures totalling £6.017 million already identified for 2026-27 to 2027-28.</p> <p>33. Note the Corporate Equality Impact Assessment at Appendix 11.</p> <p>34. Note the Budget by Service Area 2024-25 detailed in Appendix 12.</p> <p>35. Note the receipt of Dedicated Schools Grant of £175.086 million in 2024-25; and note the revised allocation of £158.046 million for 2023-24. This is following the conversion of four schools to academy status during 2023-24.</p> <p>36. Approve the Capital Strategy 2024-25 to 2027-28 contained within Appendix 13.</p> <p>37. Approve the revised Capital Programme as detailed within Appendix 14 and note the increase in the Capital Programme 2024-28 of £277.560 million detailed in Appendix 15.</p> <p>38. Approve the delegation of the detail of the final Local Transport Programme and any subsequent in-year amendments to the Executive Director Place and Regeneration in consultation with the Cabinet Member responsible for improving our roads and highways.</p> <p>39. Approve the delegation of the detail of the capital allocation for Highways Maintenance Investment in U and C Roads and Footpaths, and the Highway Maintenance and Pothole Repair Fund to the Executive Director Place and Regeneration in consultation with the Cabinet Member responsible for improving our roads and highways.</p> <p>40. Approve the Capital Prudential Indicators 2024-25 to 2027-28 based on the proposed Capital Programme detailed within Appendix 16.</p> <p>41. Approve the Annual Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy detailed in Appendix 17.</p>
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	<p>42. Approve the Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2024-25 detailed in Appendix 18.</p> <p>43. Approve a delegation to the Executive Director for Transformation and Resources (the Council's Section 151 Officer) to draw down a total of £2.000 million from the Council's Transformation Fund Reserve and £0.800 million from the Estates Rationalisation Reserve in order to expedite work required with regard to the BEST initiative. Also, to note that Cabinet will receive updates of any drawdowns in the quarterly financial monitoring reports.</p> <p>44. Approve a delegation to amend the Budget 2024-25 and MTFP in light of any changes as a result of the final Local Government Finance Settlement to the Executive Director for Transformation and Resources (the Council's Section 151 Officer) in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services if the final Settlement is received after the 21 February 2024 Council meeting. If the final Local Government Settlement is received prior to the Cabinet or 21 February 2024 Council meeting, then a supplementary report will be provided to Members advising of any changes necessary.</p>
<p>Revenues and Benefits Policies</p>	<p>13 February 2024</p> <p>RESOLVED that County Council be recommended to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve the Revenues and Benefits Policies attached as Appendix 1 to Appendix 6; • Approve implementing the 100% Empty Homes Premium after one year from 1 April 2024; and • Make a determination to implement a 100% premium for second homes to increase the council tax charge to 200% from 1 April 2025.
<p>Corporate Fraud Policies</p>	<p>13 February 2024</p> <p>RESOLVED that County Council be recommended to approve the updated Anti-Money Laundering Policy and Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy, attached as Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 to the report</p>
<p>Summary of New Capital Proposals considered by Officer Capital Strategy Group</p>	<p>13 February 2024</p> <p>RESOLVED that:</p>

<p>Energising Blyth Programme – Culture Hub and Market Place</p>	<p>a) Cabinet approve the amended budget, shown in table 6.16, for inclusion in the Capital Programme of £16.546 million including £6.135 million from the Energising Blyth Project Delivery Support budget which is included in the Medium-Term Financial Plan;</p> <p>b) authority be delegated to the Executive Director for Place and Regeneration to enter into the main construction contract relating to the project, subject to the appropriate procurement processes being followed;</p> <p>c) Subject to approval by North East Mayoral Combined Authority (NEMCA) of the £2.5m Business Case, this be added to the Culture Hub & Market Place budget within the Medium-Term Financial Plan, and the associated financial profiles be approved as set out in the report; and</p> <p>d) Cabinet approve the transfer of funding of £0.388 million from the 2024-25 Climate Change Fund to the Culture Hub Project.</p>
<p>Gilesgate Structural Works</p>	<p>a) Cabinet approve the spend of £0.100 million to undertake the structural works at 2 Gilesgate, Hexham. This spend will be funded from the Property Stewardship budget within the Capital Programme, and</p> <p>b) Cabinet approve the amendment to the Capital Programme to reallocate the funding from the Property Stewardship budget to the 2 Gilesgate, Hexham project.</p>
<p>Broadband Connectivity and Oracle Upgrade</p>	<p>a) Cabinet note the receipt of a Gainshare payment from BT of £3.707 million;</p> <p>b) Cabinet approve the payment of a portion of the Gainshare receipt of £1.723 million to BDUK as per the terms of the funding agreement. Approve the allocation of the remaining Gainshare receipt of £1.984 million to the Community Broadband project in the Capital Programme. The £1.984 million will be profiled with £0.044 million in 2023-24 and the remaining £1.940 million in 2024-25;</p> <p>c) Cabinet approve the spend of £0.088 million for the implementation of new functionality in the Oracle system. This will be funded as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A reallocation of £0.044 million from the Community Broadband project in 2023- 24. • A reallocation of £0.042 million from the Microsoft 365 project in 2024-25.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A reallocation of £0.002 million from the Computer Hardware project in 2024-25; and <p>d) Cabinet approve the amendments to the capital programme as per the above</p>
<p>Adult Social Care: Extra Care and Supported Living Strategy</p>	<p>13 February 2024</p> <p>RESOLVED that</p> <p>(a) Cabinet endorse the Extra Care and Supported Living Strategy as the overarching strategy that will provide the context, vision and aspirations for delivery of projects in Northumberland;</p> <p>(b) Cabinet support opportunities which are consistent with the strategy including those that involve the use of Council land or buildings and planning decisions;</p> <p>(c) Cabinet note that some schemes can be developed without Council funding, whilst others may require support including capital funding and/or the use of Council land. Where Council capital funding is required for the viability of schemes, detailed business cases will be prepared; and</p> <p>(d) the Executive Director for Adults, Ageing and Wellbeing be requested to prepare a future report on the capital requirements of this programme once a number of submissions have been analysed.</p>
<p>North East Investment Zone</p>	<p>13 February 2024</p> <p>RESOLVED that:-</p> <p>(a) Cabinet note the proposals in relation to the North East Investment Zone (NEIZ), including the inclusion of the Blyth Energy Central Site as an Investment Zone (IZ) Tax Site;</p> <p>(b) Cabinet authorise inclusion of the Blyth Energy Central BRR Site in the NEIZ for 25 years, noting the NEIZ Business Rates Reinvestment Strategy (attached at Appendix 1); and</p> <p>(c) Cabinet authorise the Executive Director of Place and Regeneration, in consultation with the Director of Finance, the Director of Law and Corporate Governance, the Cabinet Member for Supporting Business and Opportunities and Cabinet Member for Corporate Resources, to finalise the elements of the NEIZ proposal specific to Northumberland County</p>

	<p>Council in conjunction with the Interim Chief Executive Officer for the North East Mayoral Combined Authority, and enter into a written agreement with the North East Mayoral Combined Authority and constituent local authorities.</p>
<p>School Admission Arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools for the 2025/2026 Academic Year</p>	<p>13 February 2024</p> <p>RESOLVED that:-</p> <p>(a) Cabinet note the outcomes of the six week consultation undertaken in relation to the Council’s proposed admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled schools for 2025/26 that took place between 10th November 2023 and 22nd December 2023;</p> <p>(b) Cabinet approve the proposed co-ordinated admission scheme for all maintained schools and academies, as provided in Appendix 1 of the report;</p> <p>(c) Cabinet approve (determine) the proposed admission arrangements, including proposed oversubscription criteria and proposed admission numbers for First and Primary community and voluntary and controlled schools, as provided in Appendix 2 of the report;</p> <p>(d) Cabinet approve (determine) the proposed admission arrangements, including proposed over subscription criteria and proposed admission numbers, for Middle, High and Secondary Community and Voluntary Controlled schools, including sixth forms, as provided in Appendix 3 of the report;</p> <p>(e) Cabinet approve a reduction of the Published Admission Number at Seahouses Primary School from 21 to 15 with effect from September 2025, in view of current and future pupil numbers; and (f) Cabinet Approve a reduction of the Published Admission Number at Longhoughton Primary School from 30 to 15 with effect from September 2025, in view of current and future pupil numbers.</p>

FORTHCOMING CABINET DECISIONS

<p>Financial Performance 2023-24 – Position at end of December 2023</p> <p>The report will provide Cabinet with the revenue and capital financial performance against budget as at 31 December 2023.</p>	12 March 2024
<p>Energy Central Campus Phase 1 – Technical Training Kit: Outline Business Case</p> <p>In accordance with the Energising Blyth Programme - Local Assurance Framework, the report seeks the approval of the Outline Business Case (OBC) for the Energy Central Campus Phase 1 – Technical Training Kit which is part of development and delivery of the £20.71m Levelling Up Deep Dive (LUDD) funding awarded to Blyth earlier this year. The OBC has been externally appraised with a recommendation to proceed to Full Business Case (FBC).</p>	12 March 2024
<p>Financial Performance 2023-24 - Position at the end of December 2023</p> <p>The report will provide Cabinet with the revenue and capital financial performance against budget as at 31 December 2023.</p>	12 March 2024
<p>Hirst Masterplan</p> <p>To introduce the Hirst Masterplan to cabinet and seek authorisation to move forward in developing its contents further.</p>	12 March 2024
<p>Housing Regeneration Report – Stock Rationalisation</p> <p>The report seeks Cabinet approval to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decommission a number of low demand homes in Blyth (See appendix 1A); • To place on hold lettings for empty homes and any homes that become empty in the addresses listed within this report; • To give priority status for re-housing to all customers who currently reside in any of the addresses detailed in this report. • To approve the award of Homeloss & Disturbance payments for any customers relocating from the properties detailed in this report 	12 March 2024
<p>Northumbria Road Safety Partnership</p> <p>To consider and determine entry into a new Northumbria Road Safety Partnership (NRSP) with the five Tyne and Wear local authorities and Northumbria Police.</p>	12 March 2024
<p>Summary of New Capital Proposals considered by Officer Capital Strategy Group</p> <p>This report summarises the capital proposals considered by the Capital Strategy Group on 30 January 2024.</p>	12 March 2024

<p>Climate Change Action Plan 2024-26</p> <p>To replace the expiring Climate Change Action Plan 2021-23 and to set out our intended strategies for reaching our climate change targets across the next three years and beyond.</p>	<p>9 April 2024</p>
<p>Housing Regeneration Report – Stock Rationalisation</p> <p>The report seeks Cabinet approval to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decommission a number of low demand homes in Blyth in low to mid rise blocks; • To place on hold lettings for empty homes and any homes that become empty in the addresses listed within this report; • To give priority status for re-housing to all customers who currently reside in any of the addresses detailed in this report. • To approve the award of Homeloss & Disturbance payments for any customers relocating from the properties detailed in this report. 	<p>9 April 2024</p>
<p>Energising Blyth: Levelling Up Deep Dive – Bowes Ct.</p> <p>This report updates Cabinet and seeks approval of the Outline Business Case and other key decisions regarding the delivery of the Bowes Court retro-fit of properties. It will recommend the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To approve the Outline Business Case to enable progression to Full Business Case.? • Delegate authority, in accordance with the Local Assurance Framework, to the Council’s Executive Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) following consideration by the Energising Blyth Programme Board to approve the Full Business Case.? • Delegate approvals to the Executive Director for Place and Regeneration to enter into any contracts relating to the project subject to confirmation of associated funding being in place and the appropriate procurement processes being followed. 	<p>9 April 2024</p>

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Northumberland County Council

Family and Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Work Programme and Monitoring Report 2023 - 2024

Page 77

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TERMS OF REFERENCE

(a) To monitor, review and make recommendations about:

- Early Years
- Education and Schools
- Special education needs and disability
- Adult and Community Education
- Training and Vocational Education
- Lifelong Learning
- Youth Offending
- Social Services for Children and Young People
- Children's Health
- Teenage Sexual Health
- Looked After Children
- Safeguarding – Children
- Youth Services
- Family Services
- Children's Centres

(b) To oversee and monitor school improvement, as follows:

- (i) To receive feedback on the Ofsted inspection of schools.
- (ii) To support the work of the County Council and the progress of schools on the School Intervention and Support Programme in specified categories.
- (iii) To receive an annual report about the number of schools that have been on the School Intervention and Support Programme, the reason(s) for their inclusion, the support given by the Council and the success of this support.
- (iv) To receive an annual report on the performance of schools.

ISSUES TO BE SCHEDULED/CONSIDERED

Regular updates:

Safeguarding Activity Trends Report
Finance and Performance Six Monthly Report
Children Permanently Excluded from School/Elective Home Education
Schools performance
Joint Targeted Area Inspection

Issues to be raised:

Themed Scrutiny:

Issues to be scheduled:

**Northumberland County Council
Family and Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Work Programme 2023 - 2024**

7 March 2024

Page 80

Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher and Elective Home Education

To present the education outcomes of Northumberland’s looked after children for the academic year and information about the increase in the number of children who are electively home educated, and the multi-agency support that is in place for families.

Annual Representations 2022/23

The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 require the submission of an Annual Report by every local authority which “provides a mechanism by which the local authority can be kept informed of the operation of its complaints procedure.” The report has been prepared in conjunction with regulatory requirements and provides data and analysis of information in relation to feedback from complaints, compliments and other enquiries, submitted to Children’s Services and those referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. This information is produced with the aim of providing intelligence to show where lessons can be learned, and service improvements may be required.

Inequalities, Poverty and Hardship Plan

To update on the progress of the Poverty and Hardship plan, with a focus on children and young people.

25 April 2024

Home to School Transport Review

An update on following the Home to School Transport Review presented to FACS in June 2023.

	Family Hubs Evolution and Support Services for Young People	A report detailing the development of the family hub scheme in Northumberland and the current offer of support services for young people.
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**Northumberland County Council
Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee Monitoring Report 2023-2024**

Ref	Date	Report	Decision	Outcome
1	1 June 2023	Annual Report of the Principle Social Worker	RESOLVED that the contents of the report and work completed over the year be acknowledged and the priorities identified be agreed. Information was requested to be included in next year's report on the progress in raising the profile of becoming a social worker within schools and how the sector could be more welcoming for men.	No further action.
2	1 June 2023	Home to School Transport Review	RESOLVED that the information be noted.	An update on the implementation to be given to FACS at a future date.
3	18 July 2023	Outcomes of Statutory Consultation on Proposals for The Berwick Partnership	RESOLVED that Cabinet be advised that the recommendations outlined in the report were supported by this Committee.	The Committee's comments were considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 20 th July 2023
4	7 September 2023	SEND Self-Evaluation Framework	RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted and next steps be supported by the Committee.	The Committee will continue to examine SEN services.
5	7 September 2023	Report of the Schools Improvement Team	RESOLVED that the report be accepted and that whilst the Committee noted the changes to funding imposed by the DfE they asked that Northumberland County Council continue to fund the service.	FACS recommends that Northumberland County Council continue to fund the Schools Improvement Team

6	2 November 2023	Quality of Practice in Children's Social Care	RESOLVED that the way in which the Council assured itself that they were improving the lives and safeguarding children and young people was recognised by the Committee.	No further action.
7	2 November 2023	Children's Social Care Self-Assessment and Improvement Plan	RESOLVED that: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The areas of good practice in safeguarding and supporting children young people and their families be recognised; and 2. Areas for additional scrutiny and challenge had been identified and clarification provided. 	
8 Page 83	7 December 2023	Education, Send and Skills Annual Report 22-23	RESOLVED that the Committee had received and reviewed the annual report recognising the performance and challenges; recognised the education achievements of children, young people and residents in 2022/23; and acknowledged the valuable support provided to all learners with all settings.	This report will inform the 24/25 work programme, with updates being provided as required.
9	9 January 2024	Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy Refresh – Giving Children and Young People the Best Start in Life	RESOLVED that: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. note and comment on the achievements described in the report, and 2. that the proposed amendments to priorities, actions, and indicators or evidence of achievements for the theme be noted 	The implementation of this strategy will be overseen by Health and Wellbeing OSC.
10	9 January 2024	Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy Refresh – Building Blocks Theme	RESOLVED that: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. note and comment on the achievements described in the report, and 2. that the proposed amendments to priorities, actions, and indicators or 	The implementation of this strategy will be overseen by Health and Wellbeing OSC.

			evidence of achievements for the theme be noted	
11	9 January 2024	Adults and children's Safeguarding Board Annual Report	RESOLVED that the report and comments made be noted	This report will inform the 24/25 work programme, with updates being provided as required.