



# Northumberland County Council

County Council

Wednesday, 1 November 2023

## Annual Portfolio Report - Inspiring Young People

**Report of Councillor(s)** Councillor 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

- 1.1 **Achieving Value for Money** – The Portfolio contributes to Value for Money by securing best value in contracting and commissioning. We also aim for innovative approaches and continuous improvement in our services to children, young people and families.
- 1.2 **Tackling Inequalities** – The Portfolio plays a vital role in driving delivery of the Council's Inequalities Plan through giving children the best start in life, supporting families and ensuring young people can fulfil their potential at school and beyond.
- 1.3 **Driving Economic Growth** - The Portfolio contributes to ensuring our young people and adults have the qualifications and skills to participate and benefit from job opportunities and that businesses have access to the skills they need to thrive.

### 2. Purpose of report

- 2.1 This is the Annual Portfolio Report from the Portfolio Holder for Inspiring Young People. The Report contains issues that set the context for delivery of the Portfolio. It highlights achievements over the past year and, outlines the areas of focus for the coming year.

### 3. Recommendations

- 3.1 Council is recommended to:
  - Note the Cabinet Member for Inspiring Young People Annual Portfolio Report.

#### 4. **Forward plan date and reason for urgency if applicable**

18<sup>th</sup> October 2023. The report is to note and does not require key decision.

#### 5. **Background**

- 5.1 The Annual Portfolio reports from each of the Council's Cabinet Members provide a valuable opportunity for Council to consider and comment on the work of each Portfolio. This strengthens the important link and accountability between key decisions taken by the Cabinet and achievement of the three priorities of the Council as set out in the Corporate Plan.
- 5.2 The Council adopted the Corporate Plan at its Annual General Meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> May 2023. The Plan establishes three priorities for the Council, underpinned by our approach to tackling Climate Change. The Annual Council Achievements Report (reported to Council in March 2023) sets out overall progress against the three priorities whilst this Portfolio report provides an opportunity for Members to drill down further into the work of the Inspiring Young People Portfolio.
- 5.3 We continue to focus on ensuring children and young people have the best start in life and grow up well. We know inequalities in early years can have lifelong impacts on physical and emotional health, language and social skills, impacting on readiness for school, education, training, skills, employment and healthy relationships. So, we continue to work with schools, partners and families to develop services used by everyone as well services for those that need more help.
- 5.4 As we recover from the period of Covid restrictions, children, young people and families continue to experience medium to long-term impacts. For example, there is evidence indicating development and attainment of children and young people from the poorest neighbourhoods were generally impacted most from the restrictions.
- 5.5 The services within this Portfolio, like all other services the Council provides have experienced challenges from high inflation, pushing up the costs of goods and services across Children's Services and Education. At the same time, additional pressures on families have increased demand for the support we provide. This places even greater importance on our ability to secure value for money and innovation in everything we do.

#### **Achievements – Education**

- 5.6 The most recent 'Northumberland Education and Skills Annual Report' highlighted the achievement and resilience of the county's young people and schools. At the time (March 2023), the Annual Report set out much to celebrate, including:
- 92% of schools rated good or outstanding by Ofsted;
  - Over 97% of Northumberland parents gaining their first choice of primary school and 95.45% secondary school for their children;
  - More of our young people moving to universities of their first choice and to Russell Group Universities;
  - Being in care having a positive impact on education outcomes for 'care-experienced' young people with more pupils back on track and working within their age-related curriculum and more care leavers staying in further and higher education;

- The Council continuing to fund its major investment programme, to maintain the schools estate, grow school places and deliver projects to support school re-organisation.
- 5.7 These achievements underlined the hard work and dedication of many school leaders, teachers, pupils, school partners, parents and carers, all supported by our School Improvement Team and the wider Children's Services team. It has also shown the resilience of children and young people and our workforce to overcome the challenges of Covid recovery. The Annual Report also set out some of the important work underway to sustain, innovate and adapt services. These include:
- The Council continuing to invest in the School Improvement Team;
  - The Virtual School's role extended to champion the education of care-experienced young people and all children who have or have had a social worker;
  - In Early Years, the Northumberland 'Early Years Passport' is making sure all children are school-ready;
  - Northumberland Skills investing in courses and facilities to widen career opportunities;
  - The SEND Capacity and Place Planning Strategy promoting Northumberland's vision that learners with SEND have the best start in life and are supported, through effective and inclusive educational provision, to attend settings as close to home as possible.
- 5.8 The Council's school investment and improvement programme continues to take shape. The multi-million-pound school investment across the county is part of the Council's largest ever capital programme, with over £100m invested in transforming schools and facilities for young people now and for future generations.
- 5.9 Students are already enjoying new and improved facilities at Haydon Bridge High School, Ponteland High School, Hexham's Queen Elizabeth High School and Emily Wilding Davison School in Ponteland. And projects are now underway to refurbish and rebuild schools in the Coquet, Seaton Valley and Berwick partnerships of schools, to include state-of-the art high schools as well as investment in primary schools, specialist, post-16 skills and post-18 provision.
- 5.10 With schools nationally affected by the issue of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete being used in some older builds, it was reassuring that no issues with concrete have been reported in our maintained schools. The Council spends, on average, over £2m per year addressing maintenance issues across its maintained school estate.
- 5.11 So, the Council is committed to ensuring young people have access to the best school facilities. It is equally focused on working with school leaders to deliver the best standards of learning and development in those schools. We are delighted that Ofsted inspection outcomes for the county are at a record high. For primary schools the latest figures show children and young people attending good or outstanding primary schools to be at 94%. This continues the improving trend over the last 2 years and is 4% better than the national average. For 'pupils in good / outstanding secondary schools', we have also seen very impressive performance at 83.7%, which is 2% above the national average.

- 5.12 We were also pleased to see Construction starting to take shape at Gilbert Ward Academy, a new, special, 'free school' for Northumberland. The state-of-the-art special school will provide education for up to 80 pupils aged 11-16 with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs and autism spectrum condition (ASC). The new school will feature fantastic facilities, including specialist spaces to support pupils', small group work areas for focused learning, a life skills kitchen, science studio, food technology room, art and design studio, and a large sports hall. The school is part of the Council's wider strategy to increase special educational needs and / or disabilities (SEND) support across the county.

### **Achievements – Skills**

- 5.13 As well as our ambitious investment in schools, the Council is also investing in skills for the future. Northumberland's first Specialist Welding and Fabrication Training Centre at Port of Blyth is now open and recruiting for courses (from September 2023). The centre was funded by a £1.38m investment from the Council, with courses delivered by lecturers from Northumberland Skills, the Council's post-16 education provider. With 20 welding bays, a dedicated fabrication training area and state-of-the-art equipment including robotic technology, the Centre is primed to boost local skills and the economy.
- 5.14 The Welding Centre is located alongside the Energy Central Learning Hub, currently under construction and due to open in 2024. Northumberland Skills is also expanding to meet the needs of more young people in Northumberland including a new offer in the West at Prudhoe for post 16-SEND learning at the Fuse in Prudhoe.
- 5.15 The opening of the Welding Centre followed Northumberland Skills' revamped Construction Campus in Seghill which opened and welcomed students in September last year. This is helping more young people in Northumberland to get started in key growth sectors thanks to the Council's investment in vocational training facilities across the county. The revamped Lindisfarne Centre in Alnwick reopened in April this year following a £2m refurbishment, funded by the Council. This brings a range of education and community services together under one roof at the heart of the community. As well as community spaces, courses in maths, English, art, IT, childcare and construction are also being provided.

### **Achievements – Children's Services**

- 5.16 In Children's Social Care, we were delighted when, in May this year, Dame Andrea Leadsom (Government's Early Years Advisor) praised Northumberland's "trailblazing" Family Hubs for their role in giving children the best start in life. Our new Family Hubs are a one-stop-shop for family support - from 'parents-to-be' right through the teenage years to 19 or up to 25 for children with special education needs and disabilities.
- 5.17 Through Family Hubs, Midwives, registrars, health visitors, early years and mental health professionals, young people's support specialists and a host of other services, including relationship and parenting programmes, and financial advice all work together to meet the needs of children, young people and families.
- 5.18 We were also pleased when Northumberland's Youth Justice Service (YJS) was rated 'Good' with 'Outstanding' features earlier in the Summer. The Service is dedicated to supporting young people to turn their lives around. We were pleased that inspectors noted the outstanding work of our staff and volunteers, describing them as passionate, kind, enthusiastic and going the extra mile for the children they work with. Leadership, governance and partnership working in the YJS were all

noted as being effective and the integration of the Service within the Council's wider Northumberland Adolescent Service (NAS) works well.

- 5.19 The Council has continued, with partners, to support families in Northumberland during the school summer holidays. In the Summer, the Council provided a packed programme of activities for the six-week break as part of a Government scheme to help ensure our children and young people have a summer of fun, adventure and healthy food. Activities included, holiday camps, activities and trips for families, including tickets to Seaton Delaval Hall, the cinema, activity centres and passes for local leisure centres. There were also some fantastic community days in parks and beaches. Those taking part will also received a healthy meal on the day.
- 5.20 Earlier this year, Cabinet approved a £1.26m investment in six more children's residential homes. This will increase the number of places available in Northumberland's children's homes to 21 and mean more of the county's most vulnerable young people can stay closer to their communities as well as delivering better value for money in Children's Services. The six new properties will all be designed to meet the needs of one child or young person and will be part of a new model of "multi-building" children's homes. The smaller properties will be able to offer more tailored support to children with the most complex needs, or older young people who are preparing for adulthood and independence.
- 5.21 We know Children's Social Work is a challenging and rewarding area and high-quality support is key to creating an environment where staff can carry out their vital role of working with families to keep children safe. That is why the Council launched its "grow our own" Social Worker campaign to develop our own Social Workers and attract the best talent to work here. The Council also teamed up with Sunderland University to be a trailblazer in offering children's Social Work apprenticeships, enabling us to tap into a larger talent pool of caring individuals keen to make a difference to the lives of children and families.
- 5.22 Our schools have also continued to support good mental health in our young people. Earlier in the Spring, schools in Northumberland backed a campaign to transform support for children's social and emotional needs and make sure all pupils feel safe, secure and cared for. The Council teamed up with a leading behaviour expert to launch the Northumberland Schools C.A.R.E campaign, which stands for Caring about Adversity Resilience and Empowerment. The first participating schools receive additional training and support as part of a pilot project that will then help to shape the future roll out of the project and transform practice across the county.
- 5.23 Northumberland County Council was proud to support national LGBTQ+ Adoption and Fostering Week in March 2023. Led by the charity 'New Family Social', the week reminded people that if they want to foster or adopt they can be from any background, gender or sexual orientation. This year's campaign '1,2,3 or More?' highlighted the positive impact LGBTQ+ people can make by adopting or fostering single children or those in sibling groups.
- 5.24 Ofsted undertook a focused visit themed on planning for and achieving permanence for our 'Cared For Children' in July 2022. The outcome of the visit was published September 2022 with positive outcomes reported. In August 2023 Ofsted and CQC undertook a Thematic Review of our Family Hub provision (one of six nationally) to inform the future regulatory practice for Family Hubs with very positive findings about our services, practice and developments in Northumberland.

- 5.25 Kyloe House at Netherton Park is our secure unit as part of the national secure estate and has the only Outstanding Ofsted judgment for secure Residential and the Education provision in England. A reassurance visit by Ofsted in August 2023 confirmed the provision remains at the highest standard.
- 5.26 Stable Homes Built on Love is the response to the 'Josh McAllister Review' of Childrens Social Care. A number of pathfinder projects were core to the recommendations. Northumberland are partners in three pathfinders: 'Childrens Voice' data project; 'Public Law Outline' pathfinder reviewing procedures to carry out their duties in relation to initiating public law proceedings; and, a Fostering pathfinder which involves all of the North East regional Local Authorities.
- 5.27 Finally, a series of conference and summits has focused on the needs of our children in Northumberland post-pandemic and the challenges faced by families, carers and professionals. The first conference focused on a 'trauma informed' workforce, listening carefully to lived experiences. The SENCO and Early Years conferences focused on practice and practitioners and the Inclusion summit focused on Leaders and Governors and their role within an overall systems approach to support the challenges across Children's Services.

### **Key Areas of Focus**

- 5.28 The past year has seen some fantastic achievements in Children Services, Education, SEND and Skills. This is testament to the close and positive working between the Council and all its partners, striving to achieve the very best for children and young people. As we move forward our key areas of focus are:
- Sustaining the high level of performance in our Children's Services, maintaining readiness for the next Ofsted inspection;
  - Continuing to work with schools to maintain the record levels of young people attending good or excellent schools;
  - Sustaining the very high percentage of pupils who get their first choice of school;
  - Continuing our commitment to ensure pupils and families with Special Educational Needs are supported to achieve their full potential;
  - Driving ahead with our ambitious, school building investment programme;
  - Continuing to develop and embed our trailblazing Family Hubs; and innovating and improving services, ensuring value for money in response to rising costs;
  - Supporting the increasing levels of requests for Education Health Care Plans that will continue to challenge our model of operations and the rising costs of SEN transport;
  - Working with schools and the DFE to utilise the SEND funding, High Needs Budget to support our children in schools and settings;
  - Continuing the work to develop our 'placement sufficiency', including placement of children in safe residential settings and manage the increased requirements and associated costs;
  - Continue to promote our workforce opportunities to ensure we have sufficient capacity and expertise to meet the rising demands;
  - Place Corporate Parenting 'front and centre' in all we do in Northumberland.

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

- 6.1 This report provides a valuable opportunity for Council to consider and comment on the work of each Portfolio. The recommendation to Council is to note the Cabinet Member for Inspiring Young People Annual Portfolio Report. There are no alternative options in this report for Council to consider.

## 7. Implications

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| <b>Policy</b>   | This report supports delivery of all three priorities of the Corporate Plan.   |
| <b>Finance and value for money</b>  | Value for money is a priority for the Council. This Report contains no direct financial implications. The ongoing delivery of the individual actions within the Portfolio may have financial implications which would form separate reports as they arise. |
| <b>Legal</b>  | Whilst this report contains no immediate legal implications, the delivery of the individual actions within the Portfolio may have legal implications, which would form separate reports as these arise.  |
| <b>Procurement</b>  | N/A  |
| <b>Human resources</b>  | N/A  |
| <b>Property</b>   | N/A  |
| <b>The Equalities Act: is a full impact assessment required and attached?</b> | No - no equalities issues identified<br>N/A  |
| <b>Risk assessment</b>  | None at this stage.  |
| <b>Crime and disorder</b>   | N/A  |
| <b>Customer considerations</b>  | N/A  |

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| <b>Carbon reduction</b>     | N/A          |
| <b>Health and wellbeing</b> | N/A          |
| <b>Wards</b>                | (All Wards); |

**8. Background papers**

Not applicable.

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

Corporate Plan 2023-26

Corporate Plan Achievements Report March 2023

**10. Author and Contact Details**

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