



Northumberland

County Council

Families and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee

Date: 1st April 2021

Mental Health Support in Schools

Report of the Executive Director of Adult Social Care & Children's Services, Cath McEvoy-Carr

Cabinet Member for Children's Services: Councillor Guy Renner-Thompson

Purpose of report

To inform the Scrutiny Committee about the current offer of mental health support available to students and staff in schools across Northumberland. It has been written in conjunction with Helen Bowyer, CYP Operational Commissioning Manager, Northumberland CCG, with contributions from Yvonne Hush, Public Health Manager and Kay Vincent, Professional Lead and Clinical Manager within Northumbria Healthcare Trust responsible for School Health.

It therefore offers a comprehensive overview of support provided across NCC and partner agencies.

The report summarises the position with regard to services usually available, and the additional offer in place to support during the COVID 19 pandemic.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- 1) Note the contents of the report.
- 2) Recognise the support on offer to staff and students in Northumberland Schools and identify any potential issues for further consideration if appropriate.

Link to Corporate Plan

This report is relevant to priority 3 in the NCC Corporate Plan 2020 (Living) and

priority 6 (Learning).

It is also relevant to priority 5 of the [Northumberland Children and Young Peoples Plan](#); that 'children and young people feel safe and supported and are able to cope with life's ups and downs.'

Key Issues

1. Improving local services for mental health support has been high on the agenda for Northumberland County Council and its partners, with significant national drivers, since 2015. The vision, and improvement plans have been documented within the [Local Transformation Plan](#), and work is ongoing. Progress through that plan is monitored via the Health and Wellbeing Board.
2. COVID 19 and the global pandemic of 2020/21 has brought significant further challenge for children, young people and families, and also to schools as they have played an important role in supporting their communities and ensuring stability in an ever-changing landscape
3. For the academic years 2019/20 and 2020/21 there has been an enhanced offer beyond that which is usually available, to meet the additional need created by the pandemic. This enhanced offer has been created by joint work across the Northumberland County Council education and social care workforce along with the services commissioned by Northumberland CCG, and the ongoing Public Health activity described in the background papers listed at the end of the report
4. Service activity at the present time needs to respond to the immediate situation that residents are facing whilst mitigating the risk of the long-term impact of the pandemic. This includes building capacity in schools via the promotion of strong whole school approaches to supporting the wellbeing of staff and pupils

Section 1 – Support available to children and young people on an ongoing basis in Northumberland

1.1 Support for children and young people's (CYP) mental health in Northumberland has undergone significant change in the past 3 years. Services are offered to meet need across a range of severity, with the aim of providing the right service at the right time, based on the Thrive model whereby families, schools and all referrers are encouraged to consider which service is appropriate based on the severity of the need, whilst internal pathways reduce the 'bounce' between services. The [Be You](#) website was recently launched to provide access to information related to this, and has separate areas for young people, parents and carers and professionals. It contains additionally self-help and resource materials, local events and training opportunities. This is a very welcome development. It is of crucial importance that schools and other referrers, including families, are aware of referral pathway and what is available. In the past, pathways were felt to be unclear, and indeed criteria for referral into each service unclear. The website, along with work undertaken internally with health teams means that systems for finding support appropriate to the level of need are more accessible and transparent

1.2 There are a number of routes into services. At the level of early help and intervention, NCC offers a coordinated service via the Early Help Hub whereby families, children and young people themselves, and anyone involved with them can refer, with the aim of children receiving the right help at the right time.

Between September and December 2020, 1624 CYP were referred into the Hub, from 1175 families. 396 were referred by their GP, 373 by schools. Other referrals came from the police, health visitors, social care and health professionals. The Hub ensures appropriate onward referrals based on the presenting need of child and/or family. The pathways are onwards into school-based services including the specialist teaching and advice teams, including Educational Psychology (EP) and the Emotional Wellbeing and Behaviour team (EWB), to Early Help Family Workers and to Health teams such as School Health (Public Health School Nurses), Primary Mental Health Workers (PMHW) and Children and Young People's Service (CYPS).

1.3 In addition to the Early Help Hubs, children and young people requiring higher levels of intervention can be referred directly into the appropriate services, and the system transformation work has led to improvements in access to these services in recent years. Significantly, 3 years ago the average waiting time for appointments was 30 weeks. Currently, approximately 91% of CYP are seen within 4 weeks, with 75% having their second appointments within those 4 weeks. This covers referrals into Children and Young Peoples Service

(CYPS) and Primary Mental Health Worker (PMHW) team combined. This means that children and young people are receiving the help they require significantly more quickly at this level of intervention. Both teams have consultation phone lines and will take calls from parents/carers and schools.

- 1.4 During the pandemic, the services that are part of the universal offer for children and young people in schools have offered a consistent, if adapted, service to children and young people through usual referral pathways. The use of digital technology has enabled ongoing support. For example, PHSNs have continued to promote the school health 'chat health texting service', and PMHWs, PHSNs and CYPS using the 'Attend Anywhere' (virtual consultation) mechanism. The EP and EWB teams have maintained a level of service to schools in support of individual learners, throughout the pandemic period, mainly virtual and in person when required. During this academic school year, EWB team have received referrals for 158 children, and report an increase in the number of cases where anxiety is the prevailing need. There has also been an increase in requests being made by schools for advice on how to support families to meet the emotional wellbeing and behaviour needs of their children at home. 398 individual pieces of work linked to casework were completed by the team between 1st September and the 4th February 2021; 52% of the work was carried out virtually and 48% in person. This constitutes a significant change to service delivery as a direct result of COVID 19.
- 1.5 In 2018 Northumberland CCG was successful in securing funding for the development of Trailblazer projects jointly funded by the DfE and DHSC (Department of Health and Social Care) as part of the 'Future in Mind' initiative. Northumberland was one of only 12 areas across the country who were successful in 2 parameters, the development of Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) around schools and reducing waiting times to appropriate assessment treatment for children and young people to 4 weeks. As previously indicated, there has been a positive impact on waiting times.
- 1.6 MHSTs are operational in the school partnerships of Hexham and Blyth and provide a multi-agency support offer to schools, including via a new workforce, Education Mental Health Practitioners (EMHPs). The offer of service has been consistent through the pandemic period, with all teams adopting a virtual means of delivery. The work of the MHSTs focusses on developing whole school approaches to positive mental health, and also on low level interventions within small groups and on a 1:1 basis.
- 1.7 As part of the focus on whole school approaches to emotional wellbeing and resilience, schools are required to identify a Senior Mental Health Lead. In April 2020, a post was created to coordinate support for these staff by developing a community of practice (Hive) in order to provide opportunities to share best practice, promote whole school wellbeing audits. Schools have all

been invited to receive FRIENDS resilience training, programmes which are cognitive behaviour therapy based (CBT) and endorsed by the World Health Organisation. They are designed to help build the social and emotional development of children, develop coping skills and prevent anxiety. To date 74 schools have taken up the offer of training. This work has been partly funded by Public Health as the initial offer was part of the Trailblazer activity and as such would have been restricted to schools within those partnerships. The Public Health contribution has ensured a whole county offer.

- 1.8 Emotional health support is available to specific cohorts of children and young people through the Virtual school; namely Education Other than at School (EOTAS) for children unable to attend school for medical reasons, and Education Service for Looked After Children (ESLAC). These services have been available throughout the pandemic period, proactively supporting both learners known to them and at the requests of schools, parents/carers.
- 1.9 In June 2020 an online resource for children and young people aged 11-18 years was commissioned jointly between NCC and the CCG. [Kooth](#) is a confidential and anonymous service available on any web enabled, internet connected device including laptop, smart phone, or tablet. It is available 24/7, 365 days a year to provide self-help resources, static forums and magazine articles and links where necessary to crisis support.

Also available is a 1-1 scheduled and drop-in live counselling option with qualified professionals. Children and Young People can receive up to six sessions of counselling support from Kooth, before either moving on, or in some cases being escalated to the CYPS service where needed.

Kooth has been promoted widely with schools via SENCo communications, Headteacher updates and direct marketing by the provider, XenZone. It was also publicised more widely so that parents/carers would be aware of the resource for their young people.

Take up of the service has been good, with many new registrations on a monthly basis. For the period October-December 2020, new registrations were 243, with a total of 2438 log ins. November was the busiest month. Full quantitative analysis of the service use is available but in terms of qualitative feedback provided by service users on the platform, snapshots are:

- 'I tell everyone about Kooth. I love it here.'
- 'I just want to say this app is Amazing talking to someone has been Amazing you bring hope to so many people so from me thank you to all of you and please tell your team this...Thank you ever so much'

- 1.10 Similarly, an online resource with the same functions has been commissioned

for school staff, as a one-year initial pilot, recognising the need for additional focus on staff wellbeing. By supporting staff, this enables them to optimally support children and young people. [Qwell](#) is an early intervention and prevention mental health support platform which enables staff to self-direct to the care they need; from finding out more information and gaining support for dealing with heavy workloads, stress, and sleep issues, through to receiving formal therapeutic support for anxiety, depression, and trauma. Users access articles and peer to peer support and can also opt for asynchronous messaging and synchronous text-based counselling. The site/service is confidential, responsive, flexible and anonymous, allowing safe access without fear or stigma. October – December 2020 saw 89 new registrations with 273 log ins. Of these 85% were return logins. This has been a slower start than for Kooth, as expected due to a recognised sense of initial mistrust of online support by adults. However, registrations are increasing, and Xenzone are actively reaching out to potential service users, with stakeholder events being held within partnerships. The real value is identified within service user comments e.g.

- ‘This place has been an absolute blessing. Hand on heart I don’t know how things would’ve turned out. Thankfully I’m in a better place, it’s a shame that qwell doesn’t offer the option to pay for more as I definitely would. I did for the first time ever open up, maybe too much at times but finally saw that I really needed to make a change. Sure, it’s never easy making that step, being online for me is way easier than face to face.’

- 1.11 Headteacher wellbeing has also been identified as a priority through the period April 2020 to present time. Heads were invited to participate in a working group to coproduce a support offer and work is underway with that group to create a framework of supportive measures
- 1.12 An Education and Skills Staff Wellbeing [online resource](#) has been collated and at the request of Headteachers, shared with them to provide to their staff. It contains practical ideas to support wellbeing, and links to many useful organisations
- 1.13 A number of online resources have been generated and circulated for schools and families around emotional wellbeing and mental health, coproduced by education and health teams (see Appendix 1)
- 1.14 Voluntary sector organisations provide an offer of support commissioned by Public Health, and the CCG eg Barnardos, Cygnus, Talking Matters

Section 2 - Pandemic Response

The impact of Covid on CYP Emotional Health and wellbeing across Northumberland has been significant. There has been:

- Increased rise in presentations of anxiety, followed by depression and low mood.
- Increase in self-harm in particular for those who already self-harm.
- An ongoing increase in referrals to teams e.g., PMHW team whose total referrals in 2019/2020 was 791 have seen 1,177 so far in this academic year.
- Increase in parents accessing telephone consultation lines to services.
- Increase in younger referrals in CYPS predominantly 12-13 yrs.
- Issues with service capacity due to staff absence; sickness from Covid or need to self-isolate due to a family member etc.
- Concerns around staff emotional health and wellbeing in general.
- Break in routines and everyday structures which has an impact on general emotional health and wellbeing and has caused an increase in behavioural issues for those CYP with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) and ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) and a rise in condition-specific coping strategies

Specific and Additional Support Provided in Response to the Pandemic

Services across the system of health education and social care have worked collaboratively and flexibly to provide additional needs led support. The response has included the following activity.

- 2.1 The implementation of a 'Preparation for Return to School' Senior Manager steering group. This group focused after the first lock down on supporting CYP and education settings with their return to school in September. The focus of the steering group was the establishment of the Return to School Pop Up Hub. Whilst it was anticipated that most children and young people would manage this return without difficulty, it was identified that a coordinated temporary system would be needed to support the return to school for the minority of families and children and young people who would find the transition more difficult. Early Help services, education services and early intervention mental health service providers including our school nurses and the primary mental health work team worked in a coordinated way via the return to school pop up hub into which schools and others could refer. The hub was initially expected to run for the first half of the Autumn term but was extended until Christmas due to ongoing levels of need. It was introduced as a temporary addition to and not replacing existing routes to access services.

91 children and young people were referred into the Hub, with the largest number from the 12-16 age group. Each referral was looked at and allocated

to an appropriate service. Through interventions, average attendance increased from 50% (first 48 referrals only) to 52% (total 91 referrals), with 17 of the young people reaching 85% attendance by the end of term from low starting points, and a further 26 reaching attendance over 75%. Of note was that although many referrals were COVID specific, some were more about longer term mental health concerns which had become worse through the COVID situation.

- 2.2 In September 2020, NCC received a grant to support implementation of the government's Wellbeing for Education Return Programme, a nationally developed training package to be delivered to all schools and FE (Further Education) providers before March 2021. The training was designed to cover whole school approaches to wellbeing and resilience, covering whole school/setting communities including staff. It includes awareness building around issues such as bereavement and loss, anxiety, low mood, stress and trauma and aims to enable staff and students alike to recognise early signs of these in themselves and others

A small team of staff from the Educational Psychology and the Primary Mental Health Teams collaboratively commenced the implementation and roll out of the training to Northumberland Schools and settings in November using the recommended cascade model. 103 establishments had received training by December 2020, and further training opportunities and follow up support are being offered to schools/settings this term. The target of all schools/settings will be achieved by April 2021.

- 2.3 The health teams have been able to adopt flexible working to optimise staff resource. The Education Mental Health Practitioners from the trailblazer partnerships (traditionally based in schools in their allocated areas) are being utilised across the county to provide flexible and targeted support where needed. CYPS staff have been moved around to utilise skills best in light of the pandemic, including deploying those with most experience into front facing initial assessment roles
- 2.4 PMHW team has made proactive contact with key schools in order to enquire directly as to whether they require any additional support in the terms and Children and Young People (CYP) returning to school. This has enhanced the usual level of service
- 2.5 The CCG has provided funding to the Psychiatric liaison team at NSECH to enable them to introduce a specialist CYP psychiatric liaison role within the team to target and engage with children and young people more effectively, support capacity and the increasing issues of self-harm potentially associated with COVID

2.6 Successful award of additional funds via a Wave 3 Trailblazer bid. This will see a new MHST Trailblazer team being established in Ashington and Bedlington to provide additional early help and prevention resource into the schools and the communities, supporting with the additional issues and impact of COVID.

IMPLICATIONS ARISING OUT OF THE REPORT

Policy:	Services and connectivity between service providers are outlined within the report, including description of the Council response to 'Future in Mind'. Further detail is included within the Local Transformation Plan.
Finance and value for money:	A number of the initiatives undertaken have been funded from external sources (DfE, DHSC) as part of government focus on transforming services nationally.
Legal:	
Procurement:	N/A
Human Resources:	N/A
Property:	N/A
Equalities: (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	Provision of effective services for children and young people leads to improved life chances and the reduction of any disadvantage gap
Risk Assessment:	There is a risk of poorer long-term outcomes for children and young people with unmet mental health needs, with wide reaching impact on financial wellbeing
Crime & Disorder:	Unmet mental health needs likely lead to an increase in youth offending
Customer Considerations:	Meeting the needs of residents via enhanced services is important in the light of the pandemic
Carbon Reduction:	The use of digital technology will have an ongoing positive impact on carbon reduction
Wards:	

BACKGROUND PAPERS

[Update on Mental Health and Wellbeing in Northumberland](#) – Report written by Yvonne Hush, Public Health Manager for Health and Wellbeing Board, December 2020

[Mental Health Impact Assessment Scoping Paper](#) – Report written by Yvonne Hush, Public Health Manager, for Health and Wellbeing Board, December 2020

Report sign off

Finance Officer	N/A
Monitoring Officer/Legal	N/A
Human Resources	N/A
Procurement	N/A
I.T.	N/A
Executive Director of Children's Services	Cath McEvoy-Carr
Portfolio Holder(s)	Guy Renner-Thompson

Report Author: Nicola Taylor, Head of Inclusive Education Services, NCC

Appendix 1

Digital Resources Available to Schools and Families

https://padlet.com/nies1/return_to_school

Being well back in school. Resources to support wellbeing during a pandemic. Find materials here to support staff, family and child wellbeing.

<https://padlet.com/nies1/parentcarerresources>

A padlet of resources to share directly with parents / carers focussed on wellbeing following the return to school and wellbeing.

https://nlandeducation.padlet.org/gill_finch2/managing_bereavements

A padlet about managing loss and bereavements in schools. Including materials that can be shared with families

<https://padlet.com/nies1/WER>

The padlet provides information and training materials related to the Wellbeing for Education Return (WER) programme. Includes a focus on parents, a focus on SEND and resources to address emotionally based school avoidance.

https://padlet.com/nies1/Emotional_Wellbeing_and_Behaviour_Support_Service

Resource for schools to help support emotional wellbeing and behaviour needs of students including detail of ideas and helpful strategies.