



Northumberland County Council

Audit Committee

Thursday, 27 March 2025

Review of external inspections in Adults and Children's Services

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

Responsible Officer(s): Neil Bradley, Executive Director for Adults, Ageing & Wellbeing, Audrey Kingham, Executive Director for Children, Young People & Education

1. Link to Key Priorities of the Corporate Plan

This report relates to the Tackling Inequalities priority of the Corporate Plan.

2. Purpose of report

To inform Members of the activity pertaining to Adults Social Care and Children's Services regarding external inspections and associated actions. This covers the period from 1st July 2024 to 31st December, 2024.

3. Recommendations

1. To assess the effectiveness of the actions the Council takes in response to external inspections, and confirm an assurance that the Council is taking appropriate action in respect of any issues.

4. Forward plan date and reason for urgency if applicable

This report does not require a key decision.

5. Background

The report focuses on inspection activity undertaken by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and Ofsted between July 2024 and December 2024.

5.1 Adult Social Care CQC inspection status

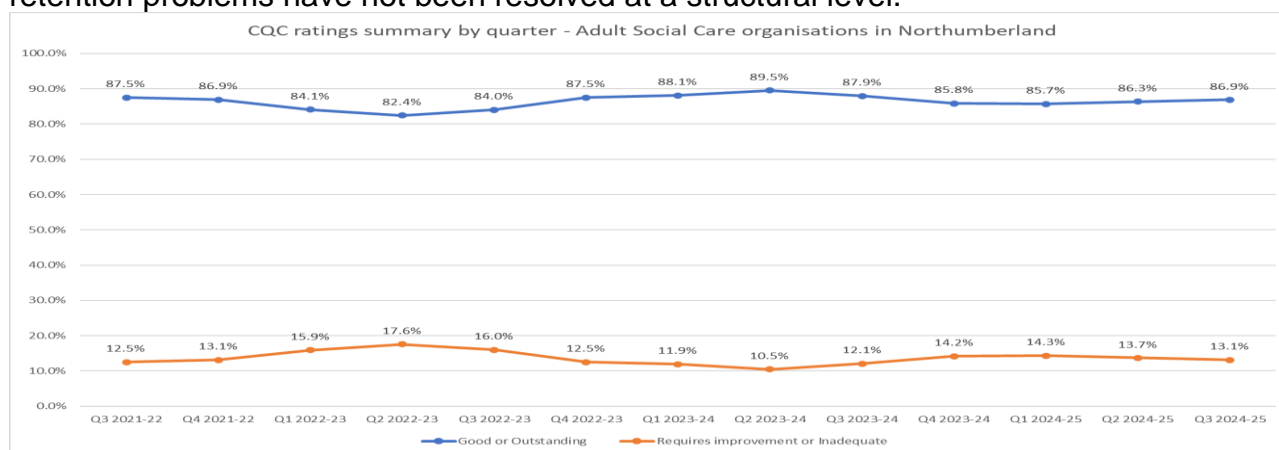
5.1.1 Provider Services

86.9% of all Northumberland-based Adults Social Care providers were rated as Good or Outstanding at the end of December 2024, compared to 85.7% at the end of June 2024. The equivalent figure for national ratings was 80% at the end of December 2024.

The table overleaf describes the new registration and published inspection activity that has taken place in the period. It provides the detail of what settings / services have been inspected so that Elected Members can see where the changes have taken place.

Where ratings have deteriorated from Good to Requires Improvement, the local authority is working with the management of the settings to implement the actions required. This involves Council officers working to support the provider on whatever the issues are that have led to the deterioration in rating. This can be any one of the five domains that CQC inspects although the management of the home and the assessment of whether it is 'well led' is the most common area for care homes to struggle with compliance. There are no current "inadequate" ratings in Northumberland services with the home previously with that rating moving to "good" in December 2024.

The work of Council teams and colleagues in the NHS aimed at improving overall quality is achieving positive results and we can see improvements where the work has been put in to rectify adverse ratings. Council officers continue to monitor services proactively and to provide overall support to the market to maintain positive ratings, although these are independent organisations operated and controlled by their own managers. The recruitment and retention of staff in social care services continues to cause challenges and is a significant drain on provider resources and the Council continues to support with local and national initiatives to resolve this although it remains a problem throughout the country. There have been some signs of the situation improving since April 2023 although there remain concerns that recruitment and retention problems have not been resolved at a structural level.



CQC-registered locations in Northumberland - with an inspection published or registration change in the last 6 months
 Period: July 2024 - December 2024

Status	Location Name	Location Primary Inspection Category	Rating July 24	Rating December 2024	Publication Date
Changed	Elpha Lodge Residential Care Home	Residential social care	Requires improvement	Good	22/10/2024
Changed	Thomas Knight Care Home	Residential social care	Good	Requires improvement	05/11/2024
Changed	Northlands Care Home (Northumberland)	Residential social care	Inadequate	Good	03/12/2024
Changed	Wansbeck Supported Living Service	Community based adult social care services	Requires improvement	Not Rated	
Newly registered	Unity Health Care Solutions	Community based adult social care services	#N/A		
Newly registered	Ponteland Manor Care Home	Residential social care	#N/A		
Deregistered	Miracle Care Centre NLHC	Community based adult social care services	Good	#N/A	05/03/2022
Deregistered	Complete Community Home Care Ltd	Community based adult social care services	Good	#N/A	19/11/2021
Deregistered	Prioritising People's Lives - Alnwick	Community based adult social care services	Good	#N/A	10/03/2022
Unchanged	Waterloo House Rest Home Limited	Residential social care	Good	Good	02/07/2024

Source: CQC Active Locations register dated 01 July 2024/02 January 2025
 (available at <https://www.cqc.org.uk/about-us/transparency/using-cqc-data#directory>)

5.1.2 Local Authority Managed Inspected Services

SERVICE	DATE LAST INSPECTED	INSPECTION OUTCOME
Hatfield Chase	26.6.24	Overall Good
Sea Lodge	14.11.18 31.8.22 (targeted inspection for safe and well led)	Good Inspected but not rated. No areas for concern identified
Shared Lives	23.10.23 (Targeted Inspection)	Overall Good Targeted inspection looking at Safe and Well Led, (both domains received a rating of good), however the Caring domain was also inspected and received outstanding (previous rating was good)
Tynedale House	4.12.19 9.12.20 (Focused Visit)	Overall Outstanding Good practice in Infection, Prevention & Control
STSS - Alnwick	24.11.23 (Targeted Inspection)	Overall Outstanding Targeted inspection looking at Safe and Well Led, (Safe received a rating of good and Well Led received a rating of outstanding)
STSS - Berwick	19.7.23 (Targeted Inspection)	Overall Outstanding Targeted inspection looking at Safe and Well Led, (both domains received a rating of good)
STSS – South / Central	22.11.23 (Targeted Inspection)	Overall Outstanding Targeted inspection looking at Safe and Well Led, (Safe received a rating of good and Well Led received a rating of outstanding)
STSS - West	31.7.23 (Targeted Inspection)	Overall Outstanding Targeted inspection looking at Safe and Well Led, (both domains received a rating of good)

There was no CQC inspection activity for any of our registered services during July – December 2024.

5.1.3 Local Authority Inspection [Northumberland County Council: local authority assessment - Care Quality Commission](#)

Northumberland Adult Services received a 'Good' rating from CQC in their recent inspection (August 2024). This was published on 24th January 2025.

The report advised that overall, Northumberland residents had 'a good experience of adult social care'. It was noted that we, as a local authority 'understand the barriers to accessing care and support, to preventing, reducing, and delaying the needs for care and worked with its partners to ensure that people had good experiences'.

The report detailed that Northumberland had a 'person-centred, strengths-based working ethos' and recognised that our good outcomes were built from 'meaningful relationships with people'.

It also noted that we 'understood the risks and challenges to people within our boundaries', an example of this being, the challenges that the rurality of Northumberland brings when ensuring access to care is equitable for all.

The report recognised our 'good external partnerships' as well as our strategic relationships both internally and externally, citing an 'outstanding' feature in Northumberland was its 'strong and meaningful relationships with statutory partners, and voluntary and community sectors', with our arrangements in delivering Continuing Health Care (CHC) as an example of this.

Northumberland was recognised by CQC as a 'learning organisation', with an 'open and respectful culture, where people felt valued, able to express themselves and had access to senior leaders'. Our recruitment and retention strategies were recognised, specifically our apprenticeships and 'grow your own pathways'.

Some of the key areas for improvement identified by CQC were to improve the experience of unpaid carers in Northumberland; the continued work on access to extra care and general housing; ensuring teams are as fully resourced as they could be; supporting Direct Payments to be used as fully as possible; and to further strengthen co-production with people with lived experience across all areas of our work. An action plan is being prepared for the areas identified for improvement.

At the time of writing this report, of the 22 local authorities that have received their CQC assessment reports, only 3 had been awarded a score higher than Northumberland, and no local authorities to date have received a rating of 'Outstanding'.

5.2 Children's Services

This report features several types of inspection activity in Children's services: notably the Council's residential homes for children; Schools and Early Years settings in the county. It also refers to the inspection of the local authority's Skills service and thematic review of Youth Justice that both took place in January 2025, just outside the time scale for this report.

5.2.1 Children's residential homes

Northumberland County Council continues to demonstrate its commitment to providing high-quality care for children and young people with the opening and registration of a 6th children's home (Pegsworth House). This new home has been successfully registered with Ofsted, marking an important milestone in the council's ongoing efforts to expand and enhance sufficiency in our residential provisions. In addition to the registration of this home, it is notable that its recruitment process won the prestigious Best Creative Concept Recruitment Award at the national People and Culture Awards. This recognition highlights the innovative and forward-thinking approach Northumberland has taken in attracting and retaining high-quality staff to provide exceptional care.

Following its registration, the new home underwent its Ofsted inspection and achieved a Good rating. This result is in alignment with the outcomes of the council's other children's homes, which have been inspected during the current review period. Notably, four other homes received a Good rating at the time of writing, further reinforcing the consistent high standards of care provided across our county.

While Barndale, one of the homes in the county, had not been inspected within this period, it is worth acknowledging that it has consistently maintained a Good or higher rating in previous inspections.

Home Judgement Comments

Home	Judgement	Comments
Kyloe House	Good (Previously Good)	Our secure children's home continues to provide high-quality, holistic care, delivered by a dedicated multi-professional team. This integrated approach ensures strong outcomes for children and young people, addressing their physical, emotional, and educational needs. Notably, the school within the home has made significant progress, moving from Requires Improvement to a Good rating. This achievement reflects the effective collaboration between care and education staff, further enhancing the overall quality of care and support provided to the young people in our care
Barndale	Good (Prev Outstanding)	Have yet to be inspected for the 2024-25 reviewing schedule.
Coanwood	Good (Prev Good)	Our children's homes have recently experienced a significant change in staffing, resulting in a higher number of less experienced staff. Despite this, the achievement of Good outcomes in recent inspections highlights the strength of the high-quality management support in place. This success demonstrates the effectiveness of our leadership in guiding and developing staff, ensuring that the homes continue to provide
Phoenix	Good (Prev Good)	
Thorndale	Good (Prev Good)	
Pegsworth House	Good	

		excellent care and support for the children and young people in our care.
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5.2.2. Youth Justice Service

Just outside the time period in January 2025, the Council's Youth Justice Service was subject to a thematic review by His Majesty's Probation Inspectorate. The subject of the review was our use of Out of Court Disposals. This was an unrated review and as it was the first of eight across the country, feedback will not be received for some months. Once received, it will be shared along with any actions in subsequent editions of this report.

5.2.3 Other Children's Social Care Inspection activity

Other than involvement in a future Area Special Educational Needs (SEND) inspection, the next activity specifically for the Council's Children's Social Care service is likely to be a focused visit under Ofsted's Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services framework (ILACS). The nature of that focused visit could be any one of: Early Help; Children in need / Child Protection, Cared for children and Care leavers.

5.2.4 SCHOOL INSPECTIONS

The gradings for school inspections changed on 1 September 2024. Comparisons between the two grading systems cannot be made.

Between 1 July and 31 August 3 inspections took place:

	Previous Grade	New Grade
Emily Wilding Davison School	Inadequate	Good
Stamfordham Primary School	Outstanding	Good
Ellington Primary School	Good	Good

As of 31st August the overall figure for the percentage of first/primary schools judged by Ofsted as Good or Outstanding was 95%, which is above the national average of 92%. This equates to 120 / 126 schools. One primary school had not been inspected since it opened.

The overall figure for the percentage of secondary schools judged by Ofsted as Good or Outstanding was 87% at the end of August 2024, which is above the national average of 85%. This equates to 26 / 30 schools.

The overall figure for the percentage of special schools judged by Ofsted as Good or Outstanding was 100% at the end of August 2024, which is above the national average of 90%.

Ofsted removed single word judgements from September 2024. Grades are now provided for the 4 key judgements and 2 provision judgements. The key judgements are:

- quality of education (Q of E)
- behaviour and attitudes (B&A)
- personal development (PD)
- leadership and management (L&M)

The two provision judgements are:

- early years provision (EY)

- sixth-form provision. (Post16)

Between 1st September and 31st December 2024, 10 graded inspections took place. Schools that have no previous grade have academised since their last inspection.

2024 - 2025	Previous Grade	Q of E	B&A	PD	L&M	EY	Post16
Choppington Primary School	Good	G	G	G	G	G	N/A
Norham First School	RI	G	G	G	G	G	N/A
NCEA James Knott Primary School	/	G	G	G	G	G	N/A
Rothbury First School	Good	G	O	G	G	G	N/A
Swarland Primary School	Good	G	G	G	G	O	N/A
The King Edward VI School	Outstanding	G	G	O	G	N/A	O
Amble Links Primary School	Good	G	O	O	G	O	N/A
Whitley Chapel CofE First School	Good	G	G	G	G	No grade	N/A
Stobhillgate First School	/	G	O	O	G	O	N/A
Abbeyfields First School	/						N/A

All published judgements for Northumberland schools have been Good or Outstanding in graded inspections.

Between 1st September and 31st December 2024, 1 monitoring inspection took place.

	Current Grade	Inspection Outcome
NCEA Duke's Secondary School	Requires Improvement	Taking Effective Action

There is no change to the school's grade but the inspectorate indicate that progress toward Good is being made.

Between 1st September and 31st December 2024, 3 ungraded inspections took place.

	Current Grade	Inspection Outcome
King Edwin Primary School	Good	Taking Effective Action
Astley Community High School	Good	Evidence gathered during this inspection suggests that aspects of the school's work may not be as strong as at the time of the previous inspection

Kielder Primary School	Outstanding	Evidence gathered during this inspection suggests that aspects of the school's work may not be as strong as at the time of the previous inspection
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The School Improvement Team are supporting both Astley Community High School and Kielder Primary School as they work on the concerns that Ofsted have raised.

5.2.5 EARLY YEARS INSPECTIONS

16 graded Ofsted inspections of early years registered provision in Northumberland were carried out between 1st July and 31st December 2024. Of these:

- 8 were inspections of childminders:
 - 6 Good
 - 1 Requires Improvement
 - 1 Inadequate
- 8 were of private, voluntary or independent (PVI) group settings:
 - 4 Outstanding
 - 2 Good
 - 2 Requires Improvement

The overall figure for the number of early years registered providers that have had a full inspection and are judged as being good or better at the end of December 2024 was 98%. This figure equates to 163 out of 167 providers and is in line with the all-England figure of 98%.

5.2.6 SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities)

The new Area-wide inspection framework was released by Ofsted in November, 2022. It has been shaped by the pilot that Northumberland participated in back in March 2022. It is a graded inspection that focuses on the lived experience of children and young people with SEND, and their families. Five areas within the northeast region have been inspected under this framework, namely Darlington, Durham, Gateshead, Hartlepool and Middlesborough. Preparation for the inspection continues and is overseen through the SEND Partnership Board. The first Annual Engagement Meeting regarding SEND took place with Ofsted and CQC on 3rd March, 2025.

5.2.7 NORTHUMBERLAND SKILLS

Northumberland Skills OfSTED Further Education and Skills Full Inspection occurred between 21st and 24th January 2025 for all those aged 16+.

The areas inspected were 4 key provision types:

- Education Programmes for Young People
- Adult Learning Programmes
- Apprenticeships [at all levels]
- Provision for Learners with High Needs

Additional key judgements on:

- The Quality of Education
- Behaviour and Attitudes
- Personal Development
- Leadership and Management

- Overall Effectiveness

The findings were published in early March and the grades provided by OfSTED are very positive with Grade 2 GOOD for all 4 key provision types, all key judgement areas and Overall Effectiveness. The report can be found [here](#).

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

- 6.1 Regarding the recommendations, the Council can either agree, disagree or request further information. The reason for the recommendation is to confirm or otherwise that elected members are reassured that appropriate actions are being taken following inspections of Adults and Children's Services.

7. Implications

Policy	Raising standards in social care and education are Council priorities.
Finance and value for money	None
Legal	The committee's terms of reference state that it has a function to consider the Council's framework of assurance and ensure that it adequately addresses the risks and priorities of the Council. The results of external inspections are an independent view on an aspect of the County Council's framework of governance and the external inspections referenced in this report are included in the Annual Governance Statement which this committee reviewed in January.
Procurement	None
Human resources	Regulatory inspections assess compliance with HR (Human Resources) policies.
Property	None
The Equalities Act: is a full impact assessment required and attached?	No - not required at this point Click to explain reasons if EIA not required before making the decisions recommended in the report, or to add a summary of and/or reference to the EIA (e.g. an appendix number).
Risk assessment	Audit Committee reviewing a schedule of incoming inspection reports mitigates the risk of the Council not taking appropriate action in respect of such issues.

Crime and disorder	The report refers to the recent review of out of court disposals in relation to Youth Justice
Customer considerations	Ensuring that external inspections are properly followed up provides assurance that service weaknesses are being addressed. Northumberland's residents are protected, cared for and supported by services that external bodies judge to be Good on the whole, and where they fall below that, the Council acts promptly where it is within its powers.
Carbon reduction	More meetings are taking place virtually and hence the need to travel is less.
Health and wellbeing	Inspections take health and wellbeing into account when making judgements about their findings.
Wards	(All Wards);

8. Background papers

Care Quality Commission Active Locations Register
 NCC (Northumberland County Council) list of school inspections

9. Links to other key reports already published

[Northumberland County Council: local authority assessment - Care Quality Commission](#)
[Northumberland County Council inspection of further education and skills](#)

10. Author and Contact Details

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