



Report of Councillor Fiona Baker Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education

March 2023

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE CHILDREN'S TRUST

The Trust continue their Improvement Journey.

Ofsted Inspection ILACS (Inspection of Local Authority Children Services) – Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services), was completed at the end of last year and the report was [published](#) in November 2022. The Inspection noted improvement around leadership, help and protection of children and families, and improvement for those children who are in our care. The judgment moved from 'Inadequate' to 'Requires Improvement to be Good.' This is a positive trajectory for children and families in Northamptonshire.

We continue as a Council to work with and support the Trust around practice, performance, and finances, there are some focus areas currently around the effectiveness of the Corporate Parenting Board and how we might improve this further, including splitting this so West Northants Council have their own Board, this would enable West Northants Council to further uphold and develop their Corporate Parenting Duties. There is also work in the Trust around the review of the Quality Assurance Framework, which will support oversight of practice and enable outcomes for children to be seen and measured.

The Trust are working hard to continue to make a difference to Children's Lives and develop a service whereby children and their families are at the centre of all they do, they are safe and have the right support and opportunities to reach their full potential.

The Trust continues to see high demand coming into their front door, a high number of referrals that do not meet their Threshold, and this diverts the front door from other work. This continues to be explored with partners to address the demand. However, whilst several referrals do not meet the threshold, there are many that do, and many of these remain extraordinarily complex, we are seeing a variety of complexities, from sexual abuse, neglect, and exploitation, we have some young people who are misusing substances and whilst agencies are working together much more, the risks for children remain high.

In the last quarter, there has been good practice seen, it is clear the Trust are working hard on recruitment and retention of practitioners, but also working hard to recruit more foster carers. The Trust is revising its support to foster carers, and how they improve this area even further as there is a universal understanding that to enable those children who enter care to remain close to their families, friends, and people that matter, there is a need for more foster carers in West Northamptonshire.

In the last quarter, there are also some challenges, demand in the front door has led to timescales being impacted upon, the Trust ensure safe practice at the front door, and are now focusing on getting responses completed timelier. Although the area of focus due to performance is number of children requiring a child protection plan, again some timeliness has dipped, but this is being addressed by the Trust.

One area in development is the Early Help Offer, the Trust have built a good early help offer at a Targeted level and is working with many families which without this would potentially be open to Statutory services. This area we need to develop further, and West Northants Council and Public health are working together to explore the development of family hubs. Family hubs will be locality based and will enable a more universal offer of support to children and their families preventing them from requiring high services from the Trust.

Development of Family Hubs it is in its initial stages, but the development of this will start to support families at the earliest opportunity, whereby the biggest impact can be achieved. This is being explored and a Best Start in Life Board will be developed to enable this to be delivered.

EDUCATION

The Council has reviewed the published education performance across all schools and all ages within West Northants. A detailed report that provides an overview of performance, highlighting areas for concern and good practice, will be presented to the People Overview & Scrutiny Committee in the summer.

We continue to work with our partners to further progress our SEND improvement approach and will be updating our local plans to reflect the recently announced Green Paper – ['Special Educational Needs and Disabilities \(SEND\) and Alternative Provision \(AP\) Improvement Plan Right Support, Right Place, Right Time'](#), announced on 2 March 2023.

Following the decision at cabinet in November 22, new officers have been recruited to lead the improvement journey; key areas are highlighted below;

- A programme of events is being developed for the summer to co-produce the new Joint SEND Strategy with all partners and stakeholders. These events will take place across WNC and will capture the views of children, young people and their families as well as partners who work with children with SEND.
- The Council is expanding the role of the SENCO advisers and providing further support to embed the 'Ranges' – our local guide that provides expert advice about assessing children's needs and providing suitable education and support.
- As part of our commitment to expand specialist education places, several new provision schemes have been created or are now under way since late last year including:
 - November 2022: the opening of 20 places at Hunsbury Park primary school as part a new autism spectrum disorder (ASD) unit for children in foundation stage, early years and key stage 1.
 - January 2023: 10 places created at Hardingstone Academy for pupils in key stage 2 with autism spectrum disorder. This department is for children who need mainstream curriculum and provides that access to this provision as and when they are ready.
 - February 2023: 10 places provided at Castle Academy for pupils in key stage 1 and foundation / early year pupils.
 - February 2023: building work started at Moulton School and Science College for pupils with ASD and will provide an additional 30 places in January 2024.
 - Autumn 2023: phase two of Hunsbury Park primary school to be completed which will see an additional 30 places for primary aged children with ASD
 - The plans to open the new Special school in Tiffield are progressing with detailed design work started between the Council, Greenwood Multi Academy Trust and developers.

The Council has worked with the early years sector to agree a new focus on support early years provision across WNC. We will be creating a new team, including specialists in early years teaching, assessing and meeting children's individual needs and safeguarding. This new team will work closely with the early years sector and other education partners to improve early identification of children's needs and improve their transition into statutory education.

The Council will also be investing in new Safeguarding in Education and School Effectiveness staff to work with all schools to promote good safeguarding practice and improve standards across all Key Stages.

Councillor Fiona Baker
(Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education)