

**30<sup>th</sup> November 2023**

***Cllr Baker sends her apologies and is unable to be at Full Council, she has been selected to attend a conference. In Cllr Bakers absence, any questions arising from this report, please direct your queries to [Fiona.Baker@westnorthants.gov.uk](mailto:Fiona.Baker@westnorthants.gov.uk) for an immediate response.***

## **NORTHAMPTONSHIRE CHILDREN'S TRUST**

Our Trust continues on 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.

In October 2023, we had a Focused Visit by Ofsted, this was a 2-day inspection and focused on our front door, multi-agency safeguarding hub and assessment team. The report was published on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2023 and whilst there are some areas for further improvement, which we knew, the focus visit clearly outlines that there is evidence of continued improvement since the ILACs, there is evidence from this inspection activity that our children's services continue to make progress on our improvement journey.

We have also had our Youth Offending Inspection, this inspection is carried out by HMIP and judged the service Good, this is a fantastic achievement for Northamptonshire. Our Youth Offending Service ensure a child first response and are evidencing good impact and improved outcomes for young people.

We continue as a Council to work with and support the Trust around practice, performance, and finances. We have just developed a Transformation and Efficiency Board which is being supported by WNC colleagues but working closely with both North and NCT colleagues. We believe together we can continue to make a difference, continue to improve outcomes for children and ensure we are doing this with transformation and efficiency in mind.,

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 and the recent focused visit by Ofsted will further support any changes needed.

In the last quarter, the Trust continues to improve service, we know ourselves well and aware of the areas which still require further support to embed and achieve further improvement.

## **Children Services**

West Northants Council have recently signed up to the Care Leaver Covenant. As a Council we are passionate about our corporate parenting duties and want to ensure our Care Leavers have the best start possible as they transition into adulthood.

The aim of the Care Leaver Covenant is to provide additional support for those leaving care; making available a different type of support and expertise from that statutorily provided.

The 'Whole Council Approach' created for Local Authorities by the Care Leaver Covenant is the strategic idea that responsibility for being a corporate parent sits across the whole council and not only with those people and departments that have 'care leaver' in their job descriptions. As such, West Northants Council have committed to supporting care experienced individuals across the five key areas of the Covenant which are:

01. Raising Awareness of the Covenant
02. Council Tax Exemption or Reduction
03. Training and Employment Opportunities
04. Social Value Policy
05. Economic Development

We are committed to supporting better outcomes for care experienced people in our community and support the Care Leaver Covenant outcomes which are:

- Care leavers are better prepared and supported to live independently.
- Care leavers have improved access to employment, education and training.
- Care leavers experience stability in their lives and feel safe and secure.
- Care leavers have improved access to health and emotional support.
- Care leavers achieve financial stability.

We are extremely proud to be part of the Care Leavers Covenant.

We have also agreed to change the process around council tax for care leavers, to make sure this is more accessible to ensure our care leavers are further supported as they transition to adulthood. The changes will take effect from 01<sup>st</sup> April 2024.

## **Early Help / Family Hub Development**

One area which continues to be developed is the Early Help Offer, the Trust have built an early help offer at a Targeted level (level 3) and is working with many families which without this would potentially be open to Statutory services.

There is a gap in early help around level 2 level which focuses on vulnerable children with additional needs, who require intervention, and it is this area we are looking to develop further, to support vulnerable children, young people and families to prevent escalation of needs and risks.

We are working together to explore the development of Family Hubs to support this area further. Family hubs will be locality based and will enable more support at Level 2 (based on the threshold document) giving families the right help, at the right time, by the right service.

We are looking at our first hub to be in Towcester, with a venue in Northampton to be next. As we develop Towcester, there will a focus on 0-5s and 1001 days to ensure families have the

right start and then explore services and support for children, young people and families 6yrs-19yrs.

Family Hub development is aligned with our Public Health 0-19 Services to enable services to be further integrated, which will support families in getting the help and support they need.

Our Family Hub proposals are still in the developmental stage, but we are very pleased to be exploring and developing this, as we know this is where we can have the most impact on supporting children, young people, and their families.

## **EDUCATION**

You will be aware that the DfE and School Trustees at Southfields Primary school have made the decision to close the school from August 2024 due to a significant shortfall of pupil numbers which has made the school financially and educationally unviable. This decision comes with deep frustration and disappointment, despite many efforts to prevent this. As an academy, the responsibility for the leadership and management of Southfield Primary School is for the school trustees and the DfE.

The Council continues to support all families who will need to move schools before September 2024, and to develop plans to explore the use of the Southfield site to meet local needs.

Our Schools Forum met on 18 October to review and agree how funding is allocated to all schools and early years providers. The group focussed on the financial pressures facing all schools, especially around meeting vulnerable children's needs. This group recognised the significant pressure on Council and school budgets and will write to the Department for Education and Secretary of State to share the impact of a lack of funding for education in West Northants.

Earlier this month, the Council ran two training sessions for school leaders to promote Therapeutic Thinking – an evidence-based model of supporting children to promote inclusion in schools and reduce suspensions and exclusions. This is the start of an exciting journey that will help provide a consistent approach to supporting children and improving outcomes.

The local SEND Improvement Board has reviewed the feedback from the SEND Strategy launch in September and has developed further plans to co-produce with local parents and young people with SEND to address the ongoing concerns about the timeliness and quality of provision. The Council has commissioned additional support to accelerate improvements in this area, including commissioning expert advice from a current SEND OFSTED inspector and by securing additional DfE support.

Priorities for the SEND Improvement Board include the development of the new Local Offer; the website that contains information, advice and guidance for parents and partners; commissioning additional Education Psychologists; and the creation of new specialist education places to meet the needs of children with additional needs locally, with the formal opening of the Hunsbury Park unit at Chiltern school which took place in October. This programme continues with another 205 places across 7 schools to be created before the end of 2024.

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