

WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL COUNCIL

21ST MARCH 2024

CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES & EDUCATION – COUNCILLOR FIONA BAKER

Report Title	Approval of Northamptonshire Children’s Trust Business Plan 2024/25 - 2027/28
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List of Approvers

Monitoring Officer	Catherine Whitehead	11/03/2024
Chief Finance Officer (S.151)	Martin Henry	11/03/2024
Other Director	Rebecca Wilshire, Director of Children’s Services (acting)	11/03/2024
Communications Lead/Head of Communications	Becky Hutson	11/03/2024

List of Appendices

Appendix A – Northamptonshire Children’s Trust Business Plan 2024/25 - 2027/28

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. The Children’s Trust Joint Committee are recommending that Council approve the Northamptonshire Children’s Trust Business Plan 2024/25 – 2027/28.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The contractual agreements between Northamptonshire Children’s Trust (NCT), West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) and North Northamptonshire Council (NNC), including the Service Delivery Contract and the Articles of Association for Northamptonshire Children’s Trust Ltd state that NCT must submit a copy of their Business Plan annually. NCT’s Board are required to submit a Business Plan by 30th November including details of any amendments agreed by the Board and the Councils to the version initially submitted.
- 2.2 The Northamptonshire Children’s Trust Business Plan 2024/25 – 2027/28 sets out the vision and strategic objectives for the Trust as well as their financial strategy. The approval of the Business Plan is a matter reserved for both Councils as owners of the NCT and should be considered alongside the Contract Sum provided by NCT, as set out in the Service Delivery Contract.
- 2.3 The Business Plan builds on the most recent Inspection of Local Authorities Children’s Services (ILACS) inspection in October 2022, which moved both North Northamptonshire (NNC) and West Northamptonshire (WNC) out of the ‘inadequate’ judgement and graded both WNC and NNC ‘requires improvement to be good’.
- 2.4 The Business Plan is set out in three sections and appendices:
- Introduction
 - Who we are
 - Partnerships and Trust Overview
 - Appendices:
 - Outcomes Framework
 - Northamptonshire Children’s Trust Improvement Plan
 - Trust Board Members
 - Trust Executive Management Structure
 - Governance arrangements
 - Contractual Key Performance Indicators
 - Projected Profit and Loss
 - Strategic Risk Register
- 2.5 The foreword of the Business Plan sets out the shared ambition of NCT, NNC and WNC to ‘help children and families stay together, live together, and thrive together where it is safe to do so. Where support is needed, we will work with partners to deliver the right help from the right person at the right time’. It also sets shared commitments to support the delivery of the shared ambition.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Council:
- a) Note that the Business Plan (Appendix A) was completed in line with the Service Delivery Contract and Articles of Association
 - b) Following the recommendation of the Children’s Trust Joint Committee approve the Northamptonshire Children’s Trust Business Plan for the 2024/25 – 2027/28.

4. Reason for Recommendations

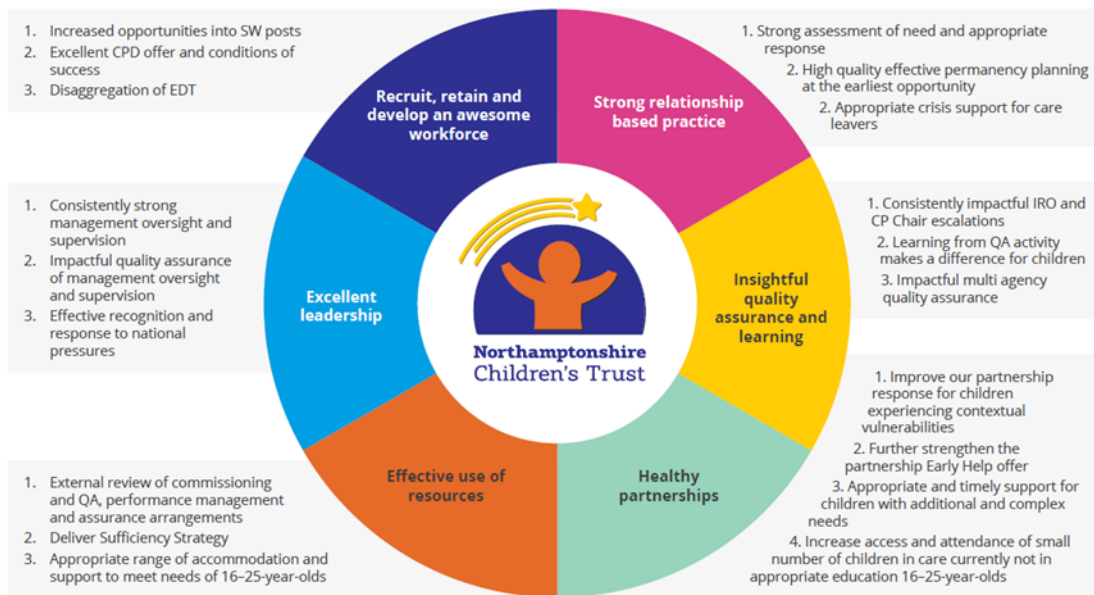
- For the Council to discharge its functions as part owner of NCT and meet the requirements set out in the Service Delivery Contract and Articles of Association regarding approval of the Business Plan as a Reserved Matter by the Council.

5. Report Background

- 5.1 West Northamptonshire Council is committed to supporting Northamptonshire Children’s Trust to deliver children’s social care and targeted early help services. The Council takes its corporate parenting role very seriously and wants to support children, young people and families to thrive in their community.
- 5.2 Children’s Services in Northamptonshire were judged ‘inadequate’ by Ofsted in 2019.
- 5.3 Northamptonshire Children’s Trust was partially formed on 1st November 2020 and fully launched on 1st April 2021.
- 5.4 From 1st April 2021, after the abolition of Northamptonshire County Council, the new local authorities North Northamptonshire Council and West Northamptonshire Council became joint owners of Northamptonshire Children’s Trust. Whilst NCT is operationally independent of the Councils, the Councils still retain significant control over the Trust and are responsible for making decisions on a number of ‘reserved matters’ that are set out in the NCT’s Articles of Association.
- 5.5 Ofsted conducted inspections of West Northamptonshire Local Authority Children’s Services between 3rd-14th October 2022 and were judged as “Requires improvement to be good”.
- 5.6 One of the reserved matters is the annual approval of NCT’s Business Plan. The Articles of Association set out that on or before 15th September, NCT should prepare and submit a draft Business Plan to the Councils for the 3 preceding years. On or before 30th November in each year, NCT should submit a Business Plan for approval by the Councils including any amendments agreed by the Board and the Councils.
- 5.7 The Business Plan should include relevant information under the following headings:
- Introduction
 - Strategic Framework
 - Working with Partners
 - Priorities and Objectives
 - Financial Strategy and Plans
 - Profit and Loss Account
 - Cash Flow Statement
 - Revenue Budget and Working Capital Requirements.

6. Issues and Choices

- 6.1 NCT have provided their Business Plan for 2024/25 - 2027/28.
- 6.2 The overall strategic framework and key priorities remain the same as previous Business Plans, which were developed in consultation with both Councils as well as children, young people, and key partners. The strategic framework and key priorities align with updates to the Social Care Improvement Plan following Ofsted Monitoring Visits.
- 6.3 The Business Plan sets out the shared ambition of NCT, NNC and WNC to ‘Help children and families stay together, live together, and thrive together where it is safe to do so. Where support is needed, we will work with partners to deliver the right help from the right person at the right time’. It also sets shared commitments to support the delivery of the shared ambition.
- 6.4 The Business Plan also states NCT’s strategic priorities which are based on NCT’s vision, ambitions, quality assurance, Ofsted feedback and discussions with children, young people and families. These are contained in the diagram below.



- 6.5 The Business Plan details how the Trust will deliver these priorities and what this will mean for children, young people and families.
- 6.6 It should also be noted that per the terms of the Department for Education intervention, the Secretary of State for Education has consultation rights over the contents of the Business Plan.
- 6.7 At their meeting on the 16th January 2024, the Children’s Trust Joint Committee recommended the approval of the Northamptonshire Children’s Trust Business Plan 2024/25 – 2027/28.

7. Implications (including financial implications)

7.1 Resources and Financial

- 7.1.1 When the Trust was being developed, detailed work was completed to calculate how costs would be split between North and West Northamptonshire Councils. This was based on the relative populations and demand for children's social care services in each council area. It was agreed that WNC would contribute 56% and NNC would contribute 44% exclusive of any specific grants that are given directly to NNC or WNC to passport to the Trust.
- 7.1.2 To support the Trust to deliver their business plan the Councils and NCT have agreed a provisional Contract Sum of £180.009m made up of block 1 core funding (£177.429m) and Block 2 transformation individual items (2.580m).
- 7.1.3 Block 2 transformation individual items funding of £2.580m includes £2.363m which is non-recurring.
- 7.1.4 WNC and NNC have made provision for a block 3 transformation costs totalling £3.291m. Use of this funding will be subject to business cases being presented to and approved by the Transformation and Efficiency Board.

7.2 **Legal**

- 7.2.1 The relationship between NCT and WNC is governed by a series of contractual and legal agreements.
- 7.2.2 The recommendations set out in this report will allow WNC to fulfil its responsibilities as set out in the Articles of Association.

7.3 **Risk**

- 7.3.1 There is a risk that the strategic direction as detailed in the Business Plan becomes misaligned with those of WNC. However, the approval of the Business Plan is a reserved matter for WNC and NNC which gives the chance for both Councils to provide feedback and ensure the strategic direction of NCT is aligned with that of the Council's. Additionally, in developing the Business Plan NCT have engaged with both Councils senior officers and lead members.

7.4 **Consultation and Communications**

- 7.4.1 This Business Plan was considered by the Children's Trust Operational Group and Children's Trust Strategic Group in November 2023. These governance groups are the key contractual review meetings between the NNC, WNC and NCT.

7.5 **Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny**

- 7.5.1 This report has not been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

7.6 **Climate Impact**

7.6.1 There is no specific climate impact arising from this report, however as WNC is committed to considering impact on the environment which is managed via the individual strategic lead partnership organisation via organisational policy and commitments.

7.6.2 WNC and NCT are aware there are emissions associated with publishing web content and will seek to minimise the impact where possible.

7.7 **Community Impact**

7.7.1 There is no specific community impact arising from this report.

8. **Background Papers**

8.1 None