



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

Date 21st March 2024

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE CHILDREN'S TRUST

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Our Children's Trust continues their improvement journey.

We had our Fostering Inspection Report published on 17th February, which inspected our fostering service and judged them to be 'good'. This is a great achievement and improvement moving from 'inadequate' to 'good' following the previous inspection. This means that, of the 4 system inspections NCT is commissioned for the following three are now graded 'good': Fostering, Adoption and Youth Offending Service, with the fourth inspection (Children's Services) expected late 2025 or early 2026.

On 2nd March we held our annual celebration of our foster carers, including an award for a family who have been foster carers, looking after children in our care for over 30 years.

We continue to review practice and performance through many lenses, and the established Transformation and Efficiencies Board (West and North) continues to work alongside our Trust to consider how we improve practice further and improve outcomes as well consider efficiencies.

Demand into the service continues to be high and some very complex, we continue to work as a system to find ways of address this further. Development of Family Hubs and Early Help will assist with this.

We continue to work together to procure a new case management system for children's social care which will enable practitioners to record their work more effectively and efficiently.

Children Services

The West Northants Youth Offer Board continues to grow and is supporting the development of a Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) led collaborative approach – now set up as Young Northants and led by South Northants Volunteer Bureau for the VCS.

West Northants is one of three Local Authorities selected by the National Youth Agency to be part of the National Lottery funded, "Routes to Community Success" programme. Delivered by Free2Talk on behalf of Young Northants, as part of the programme we will recruit and train 20 Youth Ambassadors and support them in engaging other young people. The first 10 Youth Ambassadors have been selected and will begin online training followed by in person training delivered by the National Youth Agency on 27th April in London.

Early Help / Family Hub Development

A focus on early help services for children, young people and families

As we shared in a previous briefing. There is a lot of work happening together with partners in the system to review our early help offer for children, young people, and their families, and to look at how we can strengthen this to ensure there is the right, preventative support available to those who need it.

We are about to embark on a consultation, which will ask children, young people, and families, what they would like to see from family hubs and early support. We would like to hear from as many voices as possible to allow us to further build on services to support families with early help, preventing escalation of need, and the need for statutory services.

The consultation will also include 0-19 services to allow us to do a full consultation and review on what our communities feel is needed. The consultation will cover:

- **Questions on establishing local Family Hubs with the aim of ensuring that families, with children, aged between 0 to 19 and or aged up to 25 for SEND children, can access help, advice and support they need for a wide range of services much more easily.** This includes exploring different ways to make services accessible – for example building an informative website and creating in-person ‘hubs’ which look to provide a space where various services are available for families in one place. Family hubs are being considered for the Daventry area, Northampton area and the Towcester area. The planned location of our first Family Hub is The Forum, Moat Lane, in Towcester. The location of the other Family Hubs is yet to be confirmed.
- **Asking residents on a proposal to move activities and services of the Towcester Children’s Centre.** Currently the service is provided at The Community Centre, Islington Road, Towcester, and it is proposed to move the service into a new Family Hub which will be located within The Forum, Moat Lane, Towcester.
- **Seeking to understand from residents further information which will help develop the new delivery model for our 0-19 Public Health Nursing Services.** Building on the recently undertaken needs assessment we want to understand what families and young people would like from these services so that we can develop a local service specification which we will further consult on too. We see the 0 to19 service being delivered hand in hand with our family hubs development programme.

We are also proud to share that we have developed and consulted on our Logo for Family Hubs, we know identity is important and want to ensure children, young people and their families feel included and part of this whole development. The Logo agreed is:



EDUCATION

West Northamptonshire SEND Partnership, received a call on Monday 4th March to announce the SEND Local Area Inspection. This is an inspection of the whole system, not just education, therefore the inspection will cover the whole child's journey across the system.

Inspection commenced on the 4th March which was all about collating information and data and for it to be uploaded to an inspection portal by 5pm on the 8th March. The teams involved did a brilliant job and uploaded over 100 different pieces of documentation and information, including audits, as well as a selection of children and families that inspectors would like to meet with and learn about their experiences.

The 2nd week of the inspection took place week commencing 11th March and officers from across the system worked incredibly hard to ensure inspectors had all the information they need.

The final week of the inspection happened week commencing 18th March, where inspectors were on site throughout the week, with their initial feedback on their findings being given to us on 22nd March. The outcome of the inspection will be embargoed until the report is published which is likely to be mid spring.

SEND continues to be a priority area for us as a Council, and for the partnership. Together, we have worked hard over this last year to address our weaknesses and start to improve outcomes and work better, together as a system, in which progress has been made but we know there is still a lot more to do.

This inspection has come early in our SEND improvement journey; therefore, we recognise that some of the changes made will not yet be embedded, therefore impact may be hard to evidence at this time. We do know ourselves the areas which need improvement, but we remain committed to keep doing all we can to address these challenges, but it will take time.

On 15th March, we had our 'Groundbreaking' ceremony for Tiffield Special School which received the go ahead for planning permission back in January this year. It was positive to see the site and officially 'break ground' into the development. The special school is set to provide 250 places for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities between the ages of four to 18. Specifically catering for those who have autistic spectrum condition and speech, language and communication needs as well as those with severe learning disabilities. The school is set to open in Autumn 2025. We know that this isn't an instant solution, however it is a long-term one that will help us manage the demand we are seeing for placements as we continue our improvement journey.

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