

# CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

## AGENDA



**Tuesday 2 December 2025**

**at 4.00 pm**

**in the Council Chamber,  
Civic Centre, Hartlepool.**

MEMBERS: CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

Councillors Boddy (VC), Buchan, Dunbar, Harrison, Holbrook, Little and Morley (C).

Co-opted Members: Gillian Hood, C of E Diocese and Joanne Wilson, RC Diocese representatives.

School Heads Representatives: Adam Palmer (Secondary), Sue Sharpe (Primary), Zoe Westley (Special).

Parent Governor Representative: Martin Pout

Six Young Peoples Representatives

Observer: Councillor Allen, Chair of Adult Services and Public Health Committee

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

**2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS**

**3. MINUTES**

- 3.1 Minutes of the meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2025 (*previously circulated and published*).

**CIVIC CENTRE EVACUATION AND ASSEMBLY PROCEDURE**

In the event of a fire alarm or a bomb alarm, please leave by the nearest emergency exit as directed by Council Officers. A Fire Alarm is a continuous ringing. A Bomb Alarm is a continuous tone.

The Assembly Point for everyone is Victory Square by the Cenotaph. If the meeting has to be evacuated, please proceed to the Assembly Point so that you can be safely accounted for.

**4. BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK ITEMS**

- 4.1 Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2026/27 to 2029/30 – *Director of Finance, IT and Digital and Executive Director of Children's Services*

**5. KEY DECISIONS**

- 5.1 Special School Growth Proposals Academic Year 2025-26 – *Executive Director of Children's Services and Director of Finance, IT and Digital*

**6. OTHER ITEMS REQUIRING DECISION**

None.

**7. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION**

- 7.1 Sendiass Annual Report - *Executive Director of Children's Services*
- 7.2 Children's Social Care Annual Complaints Report 2024/25 - *Executive Director of Children's Services*
- 7.3 SEND, Inclusion and Alternative Provision – Presentation – *Senior Advisor, Inclusive Learning and SEND*

**8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT**

FOR INFORMATION

Date of next meeting – Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2026 at 4.00pm in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool.



# CHILDRENS SERVICES COMMITTEE

2 December 2025



**Subject:** MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN (MTFP) 2026/27 TO 2029/30

**Report of:** Director of Finance, IT & Digital and Executive Director of Childrens Services

**Decision Type:** Budget and Policy Framework

## 1. COUNCIL PLAN PRIORITY

<b>Hartlepool will be a place:</b>
- where people live healthier, safe and independent lives. (People)
- that is connected, sustainable, clean and green. (Place)
- that is welcoming with an inclusive and growing economy providing opportunities for all. (Potential)
- a place with a Council that is ambitious, fit for purpose and reflects the diversity of its community. (Organisation)

## 2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the MTFP and to enable the Committee to scrutinise / comment on the savings proposals referred from the Finance and Corporate Affairs Committee.

## 3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Comprehensive MTFP reports have been considered by Finance and Corporate Affairs Committee on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2025 and the latest report on 24<sup>th</sup> November 2025, this is attached at **Annex A**. A number of key issues were highlighted within these reports, which are briefly summarised in the following paragraphs.

- 3.2 All councils continue to face significant financial challenges owing to the impact of inflation and demand on services, and historic inadequate increases in government funding over recent decades to meet these challenges. In addition, Hartlepool and other many other northern councils continue to face acute financial pressures within childrens social care. These issues are the key drivers of the budget deficit facing the Council.
- 3.3 The government's Fair Funding reforms (Fair Funding 2.0) will update grant funding distribution methods and reset the business rates system for local authorities for the 2026/27 financial year. 2026/27 will be the first year of a 3-year funding settlement. A number of consultations with the sector have taken place during 2025, to inform the direction of these long-awaited funding reforms.
- 3.4 In terms of funding movements from Fair Funding 2.0, indications are that based on the current interpretation of the changes Hartlepool would be a modest beneficiary, but not to the level a deprived northern town would have expected from a Fair Funding reform package. In part, the increase in funding in 2025/26, particularly through the provision of the recovery grant has resulted in a lower increase for 2026/27. Government are expected to release local authority level allocations, for the 3-year period, late in December.
- 3.5 As outlined in the MTFP report to Finance and Corporate Affairs Committee in November, the Council has a forecast budget deficit (before savings) of £8.572m for 2026/27 and £20.591m over the full MTFP period.
- 3.6 As in previous years, addressing the deficit needs to be managed through budget saving actions and limited use of reserves were deemed necessary. As members will be aware the use of reserves to support the budget position is not sustainable, so must be done in a managed way where needed, to provide time for savings to be delivered or for service transformation to embed.
- 3.7 With regards savings, proposals totalling £4.117m have been proposed for 2026/27, with an additional £0.383m of savings reflected in the Council Tax Base position.
- 3.8 The acceptance of the proposals for 2026/27 would leave a remaining budget gap of £4.300m. At this stage based on the current position presented, it is unlikely that the budget can be signed off as robust, given the requirement to utilise significant reserves, cognisant of the risk around budget volatility and increasing cost pressures facing the council. The increase and sustained nature of social care pressures are a particular concern, including that no growth beyond current years pressures is allowed for in 2026/27, whilst additionally a challenging savings target has been set. To achieve a robust budget the following will be required:
- Significant increased government funding flows from Fair Funding 2.0 and the Local Government Finance Settlement beyond those already forecast; and/or
  - Further significant budget savings or cuts to budgets are agreed; and/or



- Council Tax is increased in 2026/27.

#### 4. ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED BY POLICY COMMITTEES

- 4.1 Finance and Corporate Affairs Committee is seeking comments on the savings proposals, which are summarised by committee in the table below.
- 4.2 Details of the individual savings provided in **Appendix B**.

	2026/27 £m	2027/28 £m	Total £m
Adults Services and Public Health	(0.664)	(0.214)	(0.878)
Childrens Services	(3.000)	0.000	(3.000)
Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services	(0.100)	TBC	(0.100)
Finance and Corporate Affairs *	(0.140)	0	(0.140)
All (linked to Fees and Charges Review)	(0.213)	(0.061)	(0.274)
<b>TOTAL SAVINGS</b>	<b>(4.117)</b>	<b>(0.275)</b>	<b>(4.392)</b>

\* Transformation Savings total adjusted downwards by £0.383m given element achieved through council tax base improvements.

#### 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 As requested by Finance and Corporate Affairs Committee, the Committee is requested to consider the recommended savings proposals detailed in **Appendix B** relating to the services within this Committees portfolio and provide any comments to be reported back to Finance and Corporate Affairs Committee on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2026, including suggesting alternative proposals if Members do not wish to implement these proposals.

#### 6. REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 To fulfil the requirement of the Council's Constitution to seek Policy Committee input on proposed savings.

#### 7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:-

- Finance and Policy Committee – Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2026/27 to 2028/29 – 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2025.
- Finance and Policy Committee – Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2026/27 to 2028/29 - 24<sup>th</sup> November 2025.

**8. CONTACT OFFICER**

James Magog  
Director of Finance, IT and Digital  
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Sign Off:-

Managing Director	Date: 18.11.2025
Director of Finance, IT and Digital	Date: 18.11.2025
Director of Legal, Governance and HR	Date: 18.11.2025

# FINANCE AND CORPORATE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

24<sup>th</sup> November 2025



**Subject:** MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN (MTFP)  
2026/27 TO 2029/30

**Report of:** Director of Finance, IT and Digital

**Decision Type:** Budget and Policy Framework

## 1. COUNCIL PLAN PRIORITY

<b>Hartlepool will be a place:</b>
- where people live healthier, safe and independent lives. (People)
- that is connected, sustainable, clean and green. (Place)
- that is welcoming with an inclusive and growing economy providing opportunities for all. (Potential)
- a place with a Council that is ambitious, fit for purpose and reflects the diversity of its community. (Organisation)

## 2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Council's financial position, the government's Fair Funding reforms and to approve the budget savings proposals to be referred to individual Policy Committees.

## 3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 A comprehensive MTFP update report was presented to the Finance and Corporate Affairs Committee at its meeting in June 2025. The MTFP does not stand still and continuously evolves based on latest information, intelligence, government funding changes and changing circumstances, including the current financial year's forecast budget outturn.

- 3.2 The updated MTFP covers the four financial years 2026/27 to 2029/30. However, in consideration of the position over this period, it is important to recognise that the Council needs to be financially sustainable beyond this 4 year period. Decisions taken should also reflect the position beyond the medium term and into the longer term.
- 3.3 With regards the government's funding reforms, now referred to as 'Fair Funding 2.0', these are currently moving slower than initially indicated. Changes to the Secretary of State for the Ministry for Housing, Culture and Local Government (MHCLG) and the wider ministerial team, alongside significant lobbying on the proposed reforms has delayed the process timescales. Initial indications were that the Local Government Finance Policy Statement would be released in October and the full Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement by late November or early December. Current indications are that the Policy Statement will be released mid to late November and the Provisional settlement in week commencing 15<sup>th</sup> December. The delay in the release of information, on what will be a 3 year funding settlement, continues to hinder budget planning. Further details of the funding reforms consultation and the estimated impact for Hartlepool are included within section 5 of this report.
- 3.4 In addition to the specific local government announcements, the Chancellor will deliver her Autumn budget on the 26<sup>th</sup> November, which is later than in recent years. Speculation of a likely productivity forecast downgrade by the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) is placing further pressure on government finances, with tax increases and spending cuts a possibility in the budget statement. In addition to general tax and spending plans, the Autumn Budget is likely to provide further announcements on areas that impact the Council's budget, for example increases to the National Living Wage from April 2026.
- 3.5 At short notice, the Chancellor delivered a pre-budget statement to the nation on the 4<sup>th</sup> November. In the address the chancellor emphasised the need to responsibly manage the public finances and noted the government's priorities as being: cutting NHS waiting lists, national debt and the cost of living, but not through a return to austerity. Tax increases remain the likely option for the Chancellor to improve the fiscal position, but in response to questions on this, she advised the details of the budget would be provided on the 26<sup>th</sup> November, but she will "do what is right, not popular".

#### **4. BUDGET PRESSURES**

- 4.1 The Council must plan for a range of spending pressures and commitments in setting its budget over the MTFP period. Following the comprehensive update provided to members in June, the forecasts in the table below have been updated where necessary, and commentary on the areas of change provided in the subsequent paragraphs. A number of these changes are in response to additional cost pressures arising during

2025/26, driving a significant forecast overspend, as well as additional pressures forecast from April 2026.

	2026/27 £m	2027/28 £m	2028/29 £m	2029/30 £m	Total £m
<b>Spending Pressures</b>					
Pay and Price Inflation	6.868	4.118	5.270	4.392	20.649
Children's Social Care	6.000	3.120	2.182	1.726	13.028
Waste Disposal	0.500	0.000	0.000	0.500	1.000
Capital Financing	0.000	0.500	0.500	0.500	1.500
Supported Accommodation	0.250	0.255	0.260	0.265	1.030
<b>Total Spending Pressures</b>	<b>13.618</b>	<b>7.993</b>	<b>8.212</b>	<b>7.383</b>	<b>37.207</b>

### **Pay and Price - Pay Award Inflation**

- 4.2 The national pay award for 2025/26 was agreed during July. The agreed pay increase from April 2025 was 3.2% for all employees.
- 4.3 Given the persistence of pay growth in the wider economy, the MTFP continues to include a pay award assumption of 3% for each year. The inflation forecasts and associated pay assumptions in relation to 2026/27 and beyond will be kept under review throughout the budget setting process.

### **Pay and Price - General Price Inflation**

- 4.4 The Consumer Price Index (CPI) measure of inflation rose to 3.8% in July 2025 and has remained at this level in both August and September. This continued elevated inflation rate is nearly double the government's 2% target rate. The Bank of England continue to set their policy approach to support their objective of reducing inflation to their 2% target.
- 4.5 Inflation forecasts and general economic stability continues to be heavily caveated around the potentially volatile impacts of geopolitical factors, namely conflict in the Middle East, Ukraine/Russia conflict and the United States economic policy.
- 4.6 Given funding limitations and a focus on generating efficiencies, general inflation has been allowed for at 2% per year over the MTFP period. Bespoke inflation is included for contracts where specific inflation indices are used.

### **Pay and Price – Adult Social Care Contracts**

- 4.7 The net budget for packages of care is approximately £35m and annual increases to care home fees and home care rates are determined using an established formula. The annual inflation uplift is based on a range of factors and recent increases have been driven predominantly by increases in the National Living Wage (NLW) and the level of non-pay inflation.

- 4.8 The NLW currently stands at £12.21 an hour (April 2025). The Chancellor is likely to confirm the rate from April 2026 in her Autumn budget at the end of November. The independent body who advises the government on the NLW, are the Low Pay Commission (LPC). The LPCs latest projections for 2026/27 were issued in August 2025 and set out an increase to £12.71 from April 2026 (with a range of £12.55 to £12.86).
- 4.9 A prudent, but reasonable assessment of fee uplifts has been included within this MTFP update, this is increased from prior planning assumptions. This remains an area of risk until uplifts are agreed based on confirmed data. Effectively every 1% increase or decrease in fees has a c£0.350m impact on the budget position.

### **Pay and Price - Income**

- 4.10 Historically, for budget planning purposes it has been assumed that all discretionary fees and charges will increase in line with inflation each year. Given the council's financial position and the recent inflationary impact on the council's expenditure budgets, it is proposed to uplift discretionary fees and charges for 2026/27 by a minimum of 5%. Areas with existing income budget shortfalls will still action an increase in charges in April 2026 where appropriate, but prudently the overall income budget target will not be increased, allowing the price increase to address the existing gap.
- 4.11 Following a comprehensive review of fees and charges undertaken during the current year, increased fees and charges will be introduced in a number of areas, and further details are set out within the proposed savings later in the report.

### **Energy Inflation**

- 4.12 Recent years have seen unprecedented market volatility, driven by Covid-19, the Russia-Ukraine war, extreme weather patterns and geopolitical tensions, as well as the UK and Europe's ambitions to move to better security of supply and alternative generation types. This has created a monumental shift in what typical market activity looks like. This movement from traditional market norms has created a market that is very reactive and has the potential to move far more substantially in very short windows of time.
- 4.13 In response to this turbulence, the Council progressed a twofold strategy of increasing the revenue budget for anticipated long term prices, coupled with use of an energy reserve for the shorter term spike. This approach has served the Council well since 2022/23.
- 4.14 The Council purchases its energy via the regional North East Purchasing Organisation (NEPO), which has an agreed Risk and Purchasing Strategy in place to forward buy energy as deemed prudent.

- 4.15 Although energy community pricing is forecast to fall during 2026/27, non-energy costs are forecast to rise at a higher rate. These non-energy related cost rises are driven by the Transmission Network Use of System (TNUoS) tariff. The TNUoS tariff is supporting network upgrades to accommodate increased renewable generation assets and support greater national energy security.

### **Children's Social Care**

- 4.16 The budget pressures in this area continue to be of significant concern for our Council, and many across the region and country. Many areas of expenditure relating to children in our care are experiencing significant and on-going demand and inflationary pressures, these include; increasing numbers of children requiring external placements, independent foster agency (IFA) placements, Connected Care and Special Guardianship allowance payments as well as the associated staffing demands.
- 4.17 As part of the 2025/26 budget setting process additional specific resources of £6.9m were provided into Children's Social Care, given their unprecedented budget pressures. This is in addition to normal inflationary budget increases. Notwithstanding this significant budget increase the 2025/26 projected outturn for Children's Social Care is estimating an overspend of £6.195m.
- 4.18 The main reasons for the overspend continue to be the increase in the numbers and costs of children requiring external residential placements and the associated impacts on social work staffing workloads and budgets. This reflects the increasing complexity of children's needs and the significant fees being charged by the external care market. Overall Hartlepool's Children in Care numbers per 10,000 children, continue to be above regional and national averages. This is because of a number of factors including high levels of poverty.
- 4.19 Between the end of quarters 1 and 2 of 2025/26 financial year there was an increase in the number of children in our care (CiOC), from 345 to 352, and inherent within this an increase in placements required to be made with external providers in order to meet the individual needs of the young people coming into care.
- 4.20 With regard to external provider placement pressures, the current top 25 highest cost external placements are costing in the region of £230,000 per week, which equates to c£12m per year. The average cost of the current 49 external placements is £7,010 per week, with a range of £3,900 to £23,290 per week. There are currently 6 placements in excess of £10,000 per week which is as a result of the complexities of their bespoke needs.
- 4.21 As noted above, CiOC numbers are beginning to increase overall, albeit at a relatively small percentage. Within the overall numbers quoted for CiOC it is important to note that this is not a fixed cohort of children. Some

children positively return home, and some children move into special guardianship order (SGO) or child arrangement order (CAO) arrangements. These SGO and CAO arrangements, although no longer classified as within our care, still retain financial support payments from the Council. This is another area of budget pressure.

- 4.22 To mitigate these cost pressures, 6 key strands of activity are progressing and are being overseen by Senior Management. The activity strands are focused around: edge of care support, prevention and early help, fostering and placement planning, reunification, care leavers support and corporate parenting.
- 4.23 The Council is in the process of opening a new in-house children's home with the possibility of further new homes in the future. In addition, the council is working with a local charity in their development of a children's home in the town, providing more local, lower cost capacity. Both developments will help reduce our exposure to the significant fees being charged by the external care market.
- 4.24 The Council is considering its own local fostering drive and is also included in a large-scale regional recruitment initiative. In addition, increased staffing resources have been provided during 2025/26. The Edge of Care team are providing support to families who are at risk of having children enter the care system. Increased respite support provision has also commenced.
- 4.25 Local case reviews continue to be carried out to ensure care is being provided at the correct level, whilst also challenging costs. Further activity to maximise partner contributions to care costs where appropriate has commenced. Regionally, in the medium-term, partnership working is being considered to try and address care market failures. Following successful pilots elsewhere in the country supported by the Department for Education, a project to consider a North East Regional Care Cooperative has commenced. Further work and consideration of this partnership will be carried out over the coming months.
- 4.26 From national government's perspective 'The Families First Partnership (FFP) Programme' was published earlier in the year. These changes centre around implementing: "Family Help and multi-agency child protection reforms" that make greater use of Family Group Decision Making. The roll-out of these reforms represents a significant step forward in delivering on the government's mission to provide children with the best start in life and break down barriers to opportunity." The approach to meeting the reform requirements, to commence during 2026/27, is currently being developed.
- 4.27 The Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) now provides for £6.0m of budget growth for Children's Services in 2026/27. This is a significant increase on the growth provided for in the June MTFP update (£1.5m) but reflects the current year forecast spending. The service has been tasked



with reducing the overspend, and a £3.0m savings proposal is outlined later in the report. However, it should be noted that the budget for 2026/27 does not allow for any growth in Children in our Care numbers or additional cost associated with complexity. As such this poses a real risk to the robustness of the estimate for 2026/27.

- 4.28 Reflecting the significant and sustained pressures, future years growth has been increased, but with a downward trajectory reflecting the anticipation that local, regional and national initiatives may gain positive traction over the MTFP period.

### **Waste Disposal**

- 4.29 Hartlepool has entered into a partnership with six other Local Authorities in the region to procure a new Energy from Waste facility. The procurement process is on-going, with an anticipated go-live date during 2029. The Council has benefitted from very competitive gate fees with the current incumbent, however, these fees stepped up significantly for 2025/26 as part of the contract extension arrangement.
- 4.30 The financial due diligence work continues in relation to the above. A forecast further budget impact of £1m remains within the MTFP period, and the latest understanding of the phasing is incorporated in the latest budget plans.

### **Capital Financing**

- 4.31 A recurring annual saving of £2m has previously been taken over a 12 year period (2017/18 to 2028/29) following a change to the Council's Minimum Revenue Provision policy. This saving unwinds to £1m, with a reduction in 2029/30 of £0.6m and a further £0.4m in 2030/31. To avoid these cliff edge impacts on the MTFP and following a review on borrowing requirements, an increase of the capital financing pressure from £0.250m to £0.500m per annum was included in the MTFP June update.
- 4.32 A further review of borrowing profile and treasury management investment forecasts has indicated the opportunity to remove the £0.500m budget uplift in 2026/27. The council will continue to progress a Treasury Management Strategy that minimises borrowing costs and as such, this increase to the budget provision over the MTFP period will be kept under review.

### **Supported Accommodation**

- 4.33 Supported, "exempt" accommodation provides invaluable support for a range of vulnerable people. Whilst we work with a number of supported accommodation providers, many of which make a positive contribution, there is a growing concern nationally regarding some of the less

scrupulous providers. In such accommodation, rental levels tend to be far in excess of private sector Local Housing Allowance Rates, merely by such providers meeting a loose regulatory requirement to provide a level of 'care, support or supervision' to claimants. The government is currently reviewing such provision and intends to implement a number of measures to address some of the wider concerns in this area.

- 4.34 Supported, exempt accommodation schemes place an increased burden on Councils as many are delivered by charities or voluntary CIC organisations and not Registered Providers. As such councils can only claim partial subsidy for the Housing Benefit that they pay out. This means that Councils can incur significant costs, and, at times, funding substandard schemes which they do not need or require.
- 4.35 The subsidy loss for the Council was £0.076m in 2021/22. This increased to £0.282m in 2024/25 and is forecast to increase substantially in 2025/26 and over the MTFP period. In order to address this pressure £0.250m is included in each year of the period, but will be kept under review, in conjunction with any legislative changes.

### **Cyber Security**

- 4.36 The growing sophistication and frequency of cyberattacks pose a significant threat to public sector organisations, including councils. Whilst the council has robust arrangements in this regard, the increasing threat requires ever growing diligence amongst our employees, but also on-going and likely increased investment in counter measures. A review of our cyber security arrangements has been carried out and investment in further software and systems is recommended. Provision of £0.200m in 2026/27 and a further £0.200m from 2027/28 has been added to the budget planning.

### **Other Budget Pressure Adjustments**

- 4.37 Other budget pressure changes provided for in 2026/27 include an increase in the concessionary travel budget given in year budget pressures (£0.100m) and the removal of the profit share income budget associated with the Middleton Grange shopping centre given current and forecast lettings performance (£0.196m). A further pressure of £1.0m has been included from 2028/29 for the impact of the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS). The scheme is a mechanism for managing the financial cost of reducing carbon emissions between different sectors of the economy. From January 2028, the ETS will be extended to include emissions from the incineration of waste.

## 5. GOVERNMENT FUNDING

- 5.1 The Local Government Finance Settlement 2025/26 continued the trend of one-year settlements for councils. It provided Hartlepool with a 8.4% increase in Spending Power, against a national average increase of 6.0%.
- 5.2 The above average increase for Hartlepool, and deprived areas like Hartlepool, was the first step of the new national government to begin to reverse the funding cuts of the former government, which disproportionately fell on deprived councils.
- 5.3 The Settlement Policy Statement for 2025/26 confirmed that the additional core national resource (c£1.3bn) into local government, was to be distributed via existing grants but also via the creation of new grants namely the 'Recovery Grant' and 'Children's Social Care Prevention Grant'. The Recovery Grant was noted as being highly targeted towards those authorities with the highest levels of deprivation.
- 5.4 Looking forward to 2026/27, the government has commenced a Local Authority funding reform process (Fair Funding 2.0) including a reset of the business rates system. In addition, a commitment has been made to 3-year settlements from 2026/27, which will aid medium term budget planning.
- 5.5 The first stage consultation on the Funding Reforms was issued by MHCLG in late December 2024 and closed in February 2025. This early stage consultation focused on the underlying principles of local government funding including; review of relative needs formulae which calculate the cost of delivering services, review of area cost adjustments which take into account cost variations across the country, views on council tax equalisation adjustments for those areas which have low council tax bases, views on introduction of deprivation indices and also the period of transition to increased or decreased funding allocations.
- 5.6 Subsequently, in early April 2025, MHCLG published a further consultation paper specifically on, 'Resetting the Business Rates Retention System'. This consultation closed on the 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2025. The processing of 'resetting' the business rates system results in the rates growth currently sitting with those councils able to grow their business rates receipts being redistributed nationally. The current system was introduced in 2013, and under original plans was due to be reset in 2018. The 2018 reset did not take place and continued to be stalled until now (2026/27). Hartlepool is currently a significant loser from this delay, as we are currently c£1m under our business rates base line position, in part due to the reduced valuation of the Nuclear Power Station, whilst other councils are significantly above the baseline. The consultation does confirm the system will be fully reset in April 2026, although transitional arrangements as part

of the wider funding changes will be in place. Hartlepool is a net beneficiary of the resetting of the Business Rates system.

- 5.7 The second round of consultation on the Fair Funding 2.0 reforms was issued by government in June and closed on 15<sup>th</sup> August 2025. This second consultation moved on the 'principles' outlined in the first consultation to a greater level of detail on the direction of travel of the reforms, namely; Relative Need Formulae updates and weightings which drive funding allocations, approach to area cost adjustments which aim to reflect the differing costs of delivery across the country, council tax equalisation approach and lastly and importantly the transition period to the new updated allocations.
- 5.8 Through collaborative working with other local authorities and sector bodies, and engagement with local government funding specialists (Pixel), the information provided through the second round of consultation allowed local authority level, 3-year, funding estimates to begin to be calculated. These estimates continue to be heavily caveated given it is still the consultation stage of the process and MHCLG have not provided full details of the funding quantum available or illustrative examples of distribution, which are needed to provide more certain estimates.
- 5.9 In terms of funding movements, indications were that based on the current interpretation of the changes Hartlepool would be a modest beneficiary, but not to the level a deprived northern town would have expected from a Fair Funding reform package. In part, the increase in funding in 2025/26, particularly through the provision of the recovery grant has resulted in a lower increase for 2026/27.
- 5.10 Based on analysis undertaken by Pixel, the allocation changes currently estimated from Fair Funding 2.0 are particularly unfavourable to the North East, with four NE councils estimated to lose government funding (North Tyneside, South Tyneside, Sunderland and Gateshead). Middlesbrough Council are an outlier where fair funding appears to substantially increase their funding.
- 5.11 Following consultation feedback submissions, ministerial changes and significant and profound lobbying from both expected winners and losers, there are expected to be changes to the detail, but not to the fundamental principles and approach of the funding reforms.
- 5.12 The next step in the process is for MHCLG to issue the Local Government Finance Policy statement, which is expected mid to late November, followed by the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement in week commencing 15<sup>th</sup> December 2025.
- 5.13 The current working funding assumption on what the Fair Funding 2.0, including a business rates reset, will deliver for Hartlepool is shown in the table below. It is important to note that the position estimated as at June 2025 already included an assumed general inflationary uplift on

government grants and also a c£3.4m estimated benefit from the business rates reset.

Forecast total increases from Government Grant Funding reforms including Business Rates reset benefit

	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	TOTAL
MTFP Update – June 2025	(3.691)	(1.040)	(1.064)	(1.090)	(6.885)
Estimate – November 2025	(5.717)	(3.780)	(4.034)	(1.785)	(15.316)
<b>Estimated Improvement</b>	<b>(2.026)</b>	<b>(2.740)</b>	<b>(2.970)</b>	<b>(0.695)</b>	<b>(8.431)</b>

## 6. LOCAL FUNDING

### Business Rates

- 6.1 Under the Business Rates Retention system, the Council retains locally 49% of Business Rate income. Inherent in the system is an annual uplift usually based on September CPI and this has been factored into the position, although this is yet to be confirmed by government. At present all other assumptions impacting Business Rates have remained unchanged i.e. provision for Appeals, uncollectable debt and discretionary reliefs will remain broadly consistent.
- 6.2 From 2026/27, new powers to set differing rates for particular sectors will likely allow permanently lower charges for those businesses in the Retail Hospitality and Leisure (RHL) sector. For 2025/26 the RHL sector has received relief of 40%, which is a reduction from the 75% relief provided in the 2024/25 financial year.
- 6.3 As noted in section 5, the business rates system will be reset and a new baseline rates position assessed for 2026/27. This provides a position from April 2026 whereby Hartlepool's funding from the government is predicated on an up-to-date view of actual business rates being received, which is welcomed.
- 6.4 As is always the case, the impact of inflationary cost pressures and reduced consumer demand in the wider economy may impact on the collectability of business rates.
- 6.5 The recent news that Venator Materials UK limited has entered administration, will result in a circa £0.250m loss to the council during 2025/26 and a full year loss of circa £0.500m in 2026/27. It should be noted that this has not been included in this MTFP position pending any positive news regarding future operation. This will be kept under review and the MTFP position updated in January should the need exist.

## Council Tax

- 6.6 The Council has a track record of Council Tax base growth in recent years. Whilst new build growth continues to be positive, the position continues to be impacted by exemptions and discounts, including the Single Person Discount (SPD). Hartlepool is not unique in facing these pressures. Investment in fraud detection is providing reductions in the SPD claimants, which positively impacts the base position.
- 6.7 Whilst housing growth continues to be positive, there remains a risk that the wider economic environment i.e. interest rates and cost of living, may have a detrimental impact on growth as well as collectability of Council Tax should household incomes continue to be under strain. Growth in the council tax base of 520 per year is now allowed for in the budget model for 2026/27.
- 6.8 The formal Council Tax referendum limits for 2026/27 and beyond, are expected to be confirmed in the Local Government Finance Policy Statement. Consultation documents, briefings and national modelling are all based on the continued assumption of a total 5% increase referendum limit, in line with recent years.
- 6.9 Formal Council Tax decisions will be made in January and February 2026. The Leader of the Council, and the ruling Labour Group, have pledged to freeze Council tax for 2026/27. In doing so, this would limit the funding available for council services by £0.562m for every 1% foregone. Given the anticipated referendum, limit of 5%, this means foregoing £2.804m in 2026/27, equating to circa £30m cumulative impact available to the council budget over the next 10 years.

## 7. RESERVES

- 7.1 The Council holds reserves for a variety of purposes, including those allocated for known commitments and risks, including capital schemes, the MTFP budget position and our insurance fund. The reserve position has been volatile in recent years given the significant inflationary and demand pressures experienced. The only unallocated reserve is our general fund reserve, which serves as a reserve of last resort.
- 7.2 Reserves have fallen over recent years and are forecast to fall further over the short to medium term to concerningly low levels. Details of reserves held and forecast reductions can be found at **Appendix C**.
- 7.3 The use of one-off reserves to balance the on-going revenue budget position is not a financially sustainable basis to set our budget. However, the volatility of local government finances over recent years, combined

with local decisions on not to increase Council Tax by the amount allowable, has necessitated we do so. The Budget Support Fund is available to smooth the budget deficits where possible but must be used in a planned and carefully managed way.

- 7.4 For 2025/26 £1.000m of the Budget Support Fund was used to support the overall budget position. The one-off nature of reserves means that the budget position is detrimentally hit in subsequent years as their use unwinds. Given the in-year (2025/26) forecast overspend the Budget Support Fund is now at a concerning low level.

## 8. STRATEGY FOR BALANCING THE BUDGET POSITION

- 8.1 Based on the position outlined in sections 3 to 7 above, which importantly includes the currently estimated impact of Fair Funding 2.0, the consolidated budget position to be addressed over the 4 year MTFP period is shown below. The gap to be addressed for 2026/27 is currently forecast to be £8.572m, with a four year gap to 2029/30 of £20.591m.
- 8.2 The position presented has both uncertainty and risk regarding spending pressures but also continued uncertainty linked to the government's funding allocations which won't be confirmed until the end of December. **Appendix A** provides greater detail of the main risks and associated sensitivities impacting on the position.

	2026/27 £m	2027/28 £m	2028/29 £m	2029/30 £m	Total £m
<b>Spending Pressures</b>					
Pay and Price Inflation	6.868	4.118	5.270	4.392	20.649
Children's Social Care	6.000	3.120	2.182	1.726	13.028
Waste Disposal	0.500	0.000	0.000	0.500	1.000
Capital Financing	0.000	0.500	0.500	0.500	1.500
Supported Accommodation	0.250	0.255	0.260	0.265	1.030
<b>Total Spending Pressures</b>	<b>13.618</b>	<b>7.993</b>	<b>8.212</b>	<b>7.383</b>	<b>37.207</b>
Government Grant Changes	(3.697)	(3.527)	(3.760)	(1.513)	(12.497)
<b>Gap Before Local Funding</b>	<b>9.922</b>	<b>4.466</b>	<b>4.452</b>	<b>5.870</b>	<b>24.710</b>
Business Rates	(2.020)	(0.253)	(0.274)	(0.272)	(2.819)
Council Tax - Base Increase	(1.083)	(0.625)	(0.656)	(0.689)	(3.054)
Collection Fund (Surplus)/Deficit	0.754	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.754
<b>Gap Before Current Use of Reserves</b>	<b>7.572</b>	<b>3.588</b>	<b>3.522</b>	<b>4.909</b>	<b>19.591</b>
Temporary Use of Budget Support Fund (reversal)	1.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	1.000
<b>Bottom Line Gap to be addressed (before Council Tax increases and Savings)</b>	<b>8.572</b>	<b>3.588</b>	<b>3.522</b>	<b>4.909</b>	<b>20.591</b>
<b>Cumulative Gap (before Council Tax increases and Savings)</b>	<b>8.572</b>	<b>12.160</b>	<b>15.682</b>	<b>20.591</b>	

### Transformation and Efficiency Strategy

- 8.3 A strategic and transformational approach to addressing the MTFP funding shortfall and wider financial planning has been adopted. The Council's Transformation Plan which was approved by the Finance and Policy Committee in June 2024 outlined the approach and principles to achieve the Target Operating Model for the council.
- 8.4 Transformation activity is progressing in the following key areas;
- **Demand Management;**
    - Adult Social Care – Sustainability
    - Childrens Social Care – Sufficiency
    - Waste and Recycling
  - **Service Reviews;**
    - Leisure, Culture and Performance Venues Review
    - Schools Catering and Cleaning Review
  - **Land and Property Review**
  - **Fees and Charges Review**
  - **Digitalisation and Back Office;**
    - Customer Contact
    - Income and Cash Management
    - Revenues collection and maximisation
    - ICT Transformation
    - Digital Blue Print Reviews
- 8.5 Activity is progressing well on these schemes, to deliver service improvement and savings that will be realised over the MTFP period. The latest activity within the Transformation Programme, and target budget savings impacting the 2026/27 and future years budget planning is provided at **Appendix B**. The budget savings total £4.117m in 2026/27, with an additional £383,000 of savings reflected in the Council Tax Base position.
- 8.6 The forecast MTFP position, taking into account the savings associated with the Transformation Programme is shown in the table below. In order to prioritise and accelerate the delivery of transformation savings for future years, a Transformation and Efficiency Board will be established in December.



	2026/27 £m	2027/28 £m	2028/29 £m	2029/30 £m	Total £m
<b>Gap to be Addressed</b>	<b>8.572</b>	<b>3.588</b>	<b>3.522</b>	<b>4.909</b>	<b>20.591</b>
Previously Approved Savings	0.155	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.155
Transformation Savings *	4.117	0.000	0.000	0.000	4.500
<b>Bottom Line Gap to be Addressed (after Savings but before Council Tax increases and use of reserves)</b>	<b>4.300</b>	<b>3.588</b>	<b>3.522</b>	<b>4.909</b>	<b>16.319</b>
<b>Cumulative Gap</b>	<b>4.300</b>	<b>7.888</b>	<b>11.410</b>	<b>16.319</b>	

\* Transformation Savings total adjusted downwards by £0.383m given element achieved through council tax base improvements.

- 8.7 The transformation and savings proposals set out above will be referred to the next meeting of the relevant policy committee. Upon consideration and agreement by the Policy Committee, it is imperative that activity to progress the proposals, to deliver the identified saving, commences immediately. Where policy committees choose not to support a proposal an alternative proposal will need to be provided.

### Council Tax

- 8.8 As noted above, the formal Council Tax referendum limits for 2026/27 and beyond, are expected to be confirmed in the Local Government Finance Policy Statement. Consultation documents, briefings and national modelling are all based on the continued assumption of a total 5% increase referendum limit, in line with recent years. Furthermore, there remains the expectation that the government will assume all councils maximise their Council Tax increases, given the national spending restraints and significant financial pressures all councils are under.
- 8.9 As formal Council Tax decisions for 2026/27 will be made later in the budget setting process, and given the current political direction, the position does not currently include any council tax increase for 2026/27. However, given the continued financial strain the council is facing, the MTFP does assume rises at 4.99% in future years.
- 8.10 The MTFP position after assumed council tax rises at 4.99% from 2027/28 is shown in the table below.

	2026/27 £m	2027/28 £m	2028/29 £m	2029/30 £m	Total £m
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<b>Gap to be Addressed</b>	<b>4.300</b>	<b>3.588</b>	<b>3.522</b>	<b>4.909</b>	<b>16.319</b>
Council Tax increase estimates	<b>0.000</b>	<b>(2.836)</b>	<b>(3.010)</b>	<b>(3.194)</b>	<b>(9.040)</b>
<b>Bottom Line Gap to be Addressed (after Savings and assumed Council Tax increases)</b>	<b>4.300</b>	<b>0.753</b>	<b>0.512</b>	<b>1.715</b>	<b>7.279</b>
<b>Cumulative Gap</b>	<b>4.300</b>	<b>5.053</b>	<b>5.565</b>	<b>7.279</b>	
<b>Use of Reserves</b>					

- 8.11 As previously set out, the use of one-off reserves to balance the on-going revenue budget position is not a sustainable approach to setting the budget. Whilst it shunts some of the budget gap back a year, it presents a danger that the Council simply utilises one-off money on delaying decisions. In addition, this approach reduces the scope for the Council to invest and innovate in order to generate recurring savings.
- 8.12 The aim of setting the Council's budget is that it should be sustainable over the medium term period, with recurring spend funded by recurring income. Decisions on use of reserves should be made consistent with that aim. As such it continues to be proposed that any use of reserves should be done on a prudent basis over the period so that within the current MTFP cycle the budget is fully sustainable.
- 8.13 The Council's Budget Support Fund (BSF) helps to smooth the budget position over the MTFP period as well as meeting any one off costs associated with budget reductions e.g. redundancies. The table below shows the current reserve balance at the end of 2024/25 and forecast, usage to balance the 2025/26 budget. It should be noted that the forecast balance is lower than the forecast gap in 2026/27 alone.

	<b>BSF £m</b>
Balance as at 31 March 2025	7.672
Less	
Use of reserve to support 2025/26 budget (approved)	(1.000)
Use of reserve to support 2025/26 forecast overspend	(3.260)
<b>Forecast uncommitted balance over the period</b>	<b>3.412</b>

- 8.14 As noted in section 7 and shown in detail in appendix C, the council's reserves levels are forecast to dramatically reduce over the short to medium term. There are instances where ringfenced reserves may temporarily improve the position, linked to advanced payment of government grant funding, but these funds are very much linked to specific projects or initiatives. They do temporality support cashflow. In quite contrary fashion the council is currently cash-flowing the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit, which due to temporary accounting regulations currently in place, can be classified as an unusable reserve. This temporary accounting arrangement is scheduled to end in March 2028, at which point, without government support, will be fully chargeable to the council's general fund. This is a real risk and concern to the council's financial position and most other councils across the country.

### Overall Position

- 8.15 The updated MTFP position outlined in this report presents a significant MTFP gap, with a £4.300m gap in 2026/27 and £7.279m over the MTFP period (after assumed council tax rises from 2027/28)

	2026/27 £m	2027/28 £m	2028/29 £m	2029/30 £m	Total £m
<b>Gap to be Addressed</b>	<b>4.300</b>	<b>0.753</b>	<b>0.512</b>	<b>1.715</b>	<b>7.279</b>
<b>Cumulative Gap</b>	<b>4.300</b>	<b>5.053</b>	<b>5.565</b>	<b>7.279</b>	

- 8.16 As previously reported, The Leader of the Council and the Labour Group, have pledged a Council Tax freeze for 2026/27. Statutory Section 25 advice will be provided as part of the MTFP report to the Finance and Corporate Affairs Committee in January 2026, and will be based on the latest information available, including the outcome of Fair Funding 2.0 and the Local Government Finance Settlement.
- 8.17 At this stage, based on the current position presented, it is unlikely that the budget can be signed off as robust, given the requirement to utilise significant reserves, cognisant of the risk around budget volatility and increasing cost pressures facing the council. The increase and sustained nature of social care pressures are a particular concern, including that no growth beyond current years pressures is allowed for in 2026/27, whilst additionally a challenging savings target has been set. To achieve a robust budget the following will be required:
- Significant increased government funding flows from Fair Funding 2.0 and the Local Government Finance Settlement beyond those already forecast; and/or
  - Further significant budget savings or cuts to budgets are agreed; and/or
  - Council Tax is increased in 2026/27.
- 8.18 Based on the current position, unless significant additional government funding is received, setting a budget for 2026/27 without an increase in Council Tax is not recommended.
- 8.19 For information - the additional income which could be generated from an increase in council tax at 2%, 3% and 5%, is shown in the table below:

<b>Increase</b>	<b>2026/27 £m</b>
<b>2%</b>	<b>1.124</b>

<b>3%</b>	1.686
<b>5%</b>	2.804

## 9. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

9.1 The following issues are relevant in relation to this report:

- the Local Government Finance Act 1992 requires local authorities to set a balanced budget – further reports will enable budget proposals to be approved and then referred to Council to meet this requirement;
- the Local Government Act 2003 requires local authorities to consider the advice of their Section 151 Chief Finance Officer (the Director of Finance, IT and Digital) when making budget decisions. This advice must include details of the robustness of the estimates made for the purposes of the calculations and the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves. This requirement will be addressed in the January report.

## 10. SINGLE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 10.1 The savings proposals put forward may impact on the delivery of frontline services or service users to varying degrees. There are some proposals which simply by the nature of the service area that they cover will impact on those with protected characteristics e.g. children's social care relating to children who are in the Council's care. However, owing to the financial challenges facing the Council we have no choice but to change, redesign and potentially close services to reduce costs. Where we need to change, redesign and close services we are working to minimise the impact on those with protected characteristics and will focus on securing services for those who are the most vulnerable within those protected characteristics.
- 10.2 Members are aware from previous MTFP reports that in making financial decisions the Council is required to demonstrate that those decisions are made in a fair, transparent and accountable way, considering the needs and the rights of different members of the community. This is achieved through assessing the impact that changes to policies, procedures and practices could have on different equality groups.
- 10.3 An initial analysis has been undertaken to determine the potential impact of the proposals put forward and these are detailed in the table in **Appendix B**.

- 10.4 Further consideration will be undertaken through policy committees and a cumulative assessment will be included in the MTFP report presented to Finance and Corporate Affairs Committee in January.

## 11. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

<b>RISK IMPLICATIONS</b>	These are outlined in <b>Appendix A</b> .
<b>FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS</b>	As set out in the main body of the report.
<b>SUBSIDY CONTROL</b>	No subsidy control issues are expected to arise from the proposals within this report.
<b>LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS</b>	As set out in the main body of the report
<b>SINGLE IMPACT ASSESSMENT</b>	As set out in the main body of the report
<b>ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS</b>	Asset Management implications of the proposed savings are included, where appropriate, within the Savings detailed in <b>Appendix B</b> .
<b>ENVIRONMENT, SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATIONS</b>	Environmental, Sustainability and Climate Change considerations of the proposed savings are included, where appropriate, within the Savings detailed in <b>Appendix B</b> .
<b>CONSULTATION</b>	Consultation with local business representatives and Trades Unions will be carried out during January.

## 12. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 12.1 It is recommended that Members:

- i) Note the report;
- ii) Note the initial assessment of the forecast budget gap and proposed approach to address this gap in Section 8;

- iii) Note the advice provided at paragraph 8.17 regarding the robustness of the budget.
- iv) Agree the proposals that relate to Finance and Corporate Affairs committee contained within **Appendix B**;
- v) Refer the savings proposals to individual policy committees and instructs them to identify replacement savings if these proposals are not supported;
- vi) Note the risks and scenarios outlined in the report which may impact upon the financial position presented as part of future MTFP updates; and
- vii) Agree that the previously agreed budget timetable may need to be flexed dependent on the position post settlement, but that final approval of the budget must be made by council on the 19<sup>th</sup> February 2026 to ensure annual council tax billing commences promptly.

### 13. REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 13.1 To enable the Finance and Corporate Affairs Committee to approve the proposals to progress the development of the MTFP.

### 14. BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:-

- Finance and Corporate Affairs Committee - Medium Term Financial Strategy 2026/27 to 2029/30 – 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2025.

### 15. CONTACT OFFICER

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Sign Off:-

Chief Executive	Date: 12/11/2025
Director of Finance, IT and Digital	Date: 12/11/2025
Director of Legal, Governance and HR	Date: 12/11/2025



## 4.1 Annex A Appendix A

## MTFP 2026/27 to 2029/30 - Risk Assessment

Key risks or issues that may impact on assumptions made and impact 2026/27.

Issue and Risk	Potential Impact			
	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30
<b>Pay Awards</b> - Provision included in the MTFP based on 3% per annum. No contingency is built in for a higher award should inflation and wage growth remain elevated. Each 1% of pay award in excess of the MTFS provision costs c£675k.	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
<b>Level of Reserves</b> - the MTFP is currently based on using £1.0m of one-off reserves to set the 2025/26 budget and a further £3.260m to fund the forecast overspend. This in effect utilises a significant proportion of the Budget Support Fund. Revenue reserves overall are forecast to drop from £56m to £13m over the coming four years. This would just leave the emergency unallocated general fund, the insurance fund and a small number of earmarked reserves. There would be very limited reserves available should an in year overspend occur. The above position is not inclusive of the significant Dedicated Schools Grant deficit risk.	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative
<b>Childrens Social Care Pressures</b> The updated MTFP includes for £11.5m of budget growth over the period.  It is assumed that the Childrens Social care transformation plans will stabilise and contain pressures and deliver £3m of cost reductions.  At present there is no guarantee that this will be achieved. Cost volatility in this area is extreme with a single child potentially adding £0.500m+ to the budget pressure.  This is considered a significant risk and will be kept under constant review as part of the budget setting process.	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative



<p><b>Government Funding –</b> The delayed release of information to inform 2026/27 to 2027/28 government funding understanding is hampering financial planning.</p> <p>Estimates derived from for the 3 year settlement Fair Funding consultation indicate funding increases at lower levels than were anticipated from the reforms.</p> <p>To compound this shortfall, the move to updated allocation levels will be phased over a likely 3 year transition period.</p>	Positive	Positive	Neutral	Neutral
<p><b>Inflationary Pressures</b> - the risk around inflationary pressures remain, with current CPI inflation of 3.8% being nearly double the government's 2% target. Specific risks remain around the likes of energy prices and certain goods, given the geopolitical environment.</p>	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative
<p><b>One-off Grants</b> - the council relies on a number of one off specific grants to support initiatives and day to day spend on key service areas. A number of these grants are currently scheduled to end at March 2026, with no confirmation of continuation. Should this situation occur a number of preventative schemes will end, capacity across the council will be reduced and potential redundancy costs incurred.</p>	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative
<p><b>Borrowing Costs</b> - interest rates and borrowing costs remain stubbornly high. Whilst this is having a short term positive impact on the budget position, over the medium to long term we will need to borrow to fund the capital programme and as such we will require a reduction in these rates to prevent a shortfall in our debt charge budget. This will need to be kept under close review and may require some additional or temporary funding to smooth this budget.</p>	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative

<b>Council Tax Base</b> - the base position has seen a significant increase in 2026/27 due to a positive year of housebuilding, new premiums for empty, furnished properties and anti-fraud work. A more prudent estimate has been assumed for the remaining years but increased housebuilding could lead to an improved position.	Neutral	Positive	Positive	Positive
<b>Waste pressures</b> - there is current uncertainty regarding a number of waste initiatives, including food waste collection, producer responsibility and the suggestion of increased taxation on Energy for Waste facilities. This area will require close monitoring.	Neutral	Negative	Negative	Negative
<b>DSG High Needs Statutory Override</b> - the council held a negative overspend reserve of £1.589m at the end of 2023/24. A further overspend of £3.343m was recorded in 2024/25 leading to an overall deficit of £4.932 at the end of 2024/25. At this point the statutory override is scheduled to end on 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2028. The forecast position at this point is an overspend in the region of £14m. Should the override end as planned, the council would need to fund the deficit position at that point. Current forecasts we would unlikely have the useable resources to do so and as such may be required to use the council's general revenue reserve or seek Exceptional Financial Support.	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative

Service	Committee	Transformation Theme	Overall Description	MTFS Savings 2026/27 £	MTFS Savings 2027/28 £	Single Impact Assessment (Positive / Neutral / Negative)	Impact Assessment Notes
Adult Social Care	Adult Services and Public Health	Demand Management - Adult Social Care Sustainability	<p><b>Financial Assessment reviews</b></p> <p>To ensure income for the council is appropriately collected by reviewing financial assessments, introducing online financial assessment, accelerating financial contribution and increasing debt recovery.</p> <p>a. Financial Assessment Review - update budgets to reflect the full year impact of the work undertaken during 2025/26 to review financial assessments.</p> <p>b. On-line financial assessments – implement a system module and further review processes to enable quicker indicative assessments, reducing waiting times and thus enabling income collection to commence earlier.</p> <p>c. Debt collection – embed the new strengthened debt collection arrangements via the councils central income and debt management team to sensitively maximise income collection and recovery.</p> <p><b>This is the full year impact of the proposal introduced in 2025/26 and already approved as part of 2025/26 budget setting.</b></p>	250,000	0	N/A	<p>There is no anticipated impact as there is no proposed change to the delivery of the existing service. The proposed change relates to back office processing activities.</p> <p>There is a potential positive impact identified for poverty and disadvantage due to the promotion of welfare benefit maximisation. This should increase the amount of previously unclaimed benefits being accessed by people with social care needs.</p>
Adult Social Care	Adult Services and Public Health	Demand Management - Adult Social Care Sustainability	<p><b>Use of technology to reduce ASC costs</b></p> <p>This project seeks to introduce integrated digital solutions for people with social care needs which will help to manage increasing demand for services and increased costs for people with high levels of need.</p> <p>Using in home digital solutions will allow adult social care teams to better understand the person's behaviours and needs, assess the effectiveness of commissioned support plans and, where appropriate, safely reduce in-person care hours through digital prompts, remote engagement and continuous monitoring.</p> <p>The digital approach will be implemented on a phased approach with the following cohorts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Working-age adults with high-cost support packages</li><li>- Older people in the Discharge to Assess service</li><li>- People requiring unscheduled reviews due to a change in need</li></ul> <p>The project is supported through transformation funding.</p>	250,000	150,000	Positive	<p>The anticipated impact is positive as people with social care needs (primarily working age adults with disabilities and older people) will have another option available that allows them to be supported to live independently in their own homes. This will be based on a comprehensive assessment of needs and remote monitoring. The technology can be adapted to meet the particular communication needs of the person and the support that's offered can be less intrusive than more traditional ways of meeting needs.</p>
Adult Social Care	Adult Services and Public Health	Council Wide Fees and Charges Review	<p><b>Fees and Charges</b></p> <p>This project aims to generate additional charging opportunities for the council and will look to develop and embed a more strategic and policy lead approach to charging. Following an externally commissioned review, utilising national and regional benchmarking information, the following amendments are proposed in relation to financial assessment for Adult Social Care contributions.</p> <p>- Implementing an automatic inflationary uplift in line with published pension and benefit rises and CPI for private income. This means that all contributions will be increased automatically from April each year rather than the current approach which applies an increase at the point of a person's annual review. This is a more equitable approach and will reduce transactions once implemented.</p> <p>- Remove the disregard for the overnight element of higher rate Attendance Allowance / Personal Independence Payment. This element of benefit is currently disregarded in the financial assessment process in Hartlepool, but other Councils have implemented a different approach which increases income. The fees and charges work estimated that 559 Hartlepool residents would be affected and that their contribution would increase by up to £36.50 per week.</p> <p>- Introduce fees for people for whom the Council acts as appointee to offset the costs of providing this service, which is very labour intensive. It is proposed that there will be two levels of fee based on light touch assessment (£55 per month) and comprehensive assessment (£85 per month). These fees are in line with the major national provider of appointeeship support Money Care, a social enterprise working with over 100 Local Authorities and a national partner of the Department of Work and Pensions. Aligning fees in this way ensures a fair and equitable approach and avoids a two-tier fee structure. The proposed future model is that Money Care will support the majority of Hartlepool residents who require an appointee, with the Council maintaining an offer for some existing people and those who have particularly complex needs. A pilot directing new referrals to Money Care will commence in January 2026 prior to the changes being implemented from April 2026 to test the approach and ensure a smooth transition.</p> <p>Introducing these changes will require the Adult Social Care Contribution Policy 'Determining Your Financial Contribution' to be updated and published following the budget consultation.</p>	164,000	64,000	Negative	<p>The proposals will potentially have a negative impact on people with assessed needs for care and support, particularly older people and working age adults with disabilities some of whom will have to contribute more to the cost of their support. The impact will be mitigated by ensuring that the updated Contribution Policy is compliant with the Care Act 2014 and Charging Regulations, the continued use of means testing to assess contributions and adherence to the Minimum Income Guarantee which ensures individuals are left with a minimum income after charges. There is a potential positive impact identified for poverty and disadvantage due to the promotion of welfare benefit maximisation. This should increase the amount of previously unclaimed benefits being accessed by people with social care needs.</p>
Waste Services	Neighbourhood and Regulatory Services	Demand Management - Waste and Recycling	<p><b>Recycling increase and contamination reduction</b></p> <p>Continue the existing project to review options with the aim of increasing recycling rates and associated income and reducing residual waste costs and associated costs. This project will dovetail with the new food waste collection requirements. The project will progress in 2026/27 to more targeted marketing campaigns and on the ground interventions.</p>	100,000	TBC	N/A	<p>The proposals focus on compliance arrangements to reduce contamination. They are not a change in policy or recycling requirement.</p>

Service	Committee	Transformation Theme	Overall Description	MTFS Savings 2026/27 £	MTFS Savings 2027/28 £	Single Impact Assessment (Positive / Neutral / Negative)	Impact Assessment Notes
Childrens Social Care	Childrens Services	Demand Management - Childrens Social Care Sufficiency	<p><b>Service wide demand and cost mitigations</b></p> <p>A comprehensive strategy is being implemented to reduce the number of children entering care, whilst ensuring that those already in care continue to receive the support they need to return home where it is safe to do so. Several key initiatives are being progressed across the service, each designed to address different aspects of the care system, the implementation of social care reforms, and importantly continue to improve outcomes for children and families. Each activity will report into the recently established Children's Services Transformation Board.</p> <p>As an initial priority, the service will conduct a review of the most costly placements to evaluate their effectiveness, ensure best value, and explore alternatives where appropriate. Other activities are listed below.</p> <p>a.Early Help for Families – Review and strengthen our early help offer to families to identify needs early and offer help before issues become more serious and escalate to statutory intervention. The early help team will co-ordinate support across different multi-agency partners to ensure joined-up, consistent support, ensuring children and families get the right support at the right time rather than having less handover points across the system.</p> <p>b.Edge of Care – Provision of an edge of care team to support young people (including those with additional needs) who are at risk of family breakdown, leading to a reduction in the number of children coming into care. The council is also working with Tees Valley councils and the ICB (NHS) to support edge of care for children and young people with complex needs.</p> <p>c. Fostering and Placement Planning – Development of a refreshed model for in-house foster carers that increases capacity of foster placements, including those with higher level of need/complexity. This will be accompanied with a local fostering drive. We will also ensure we fairly maximise Health Funding where appropriate and where the child has a defined health need.</p> <p>d. Reunification – Children have a fundamental right to live with, and be cared for, by their parents so long as this is in a safe environment. Reunification pathways help families to come back together safely and sustainably giving children a chance to grow up with their parents, while making sure that the issues then led to separation do not reoccur. Reunification supports a child's sense of belonging, identity and continuity. Children's services will form a dedicated reunification team to support parents in developing the skills and stability necessary to safely care for their children. This initiative aims to facilitate the return of children from external and foster care placements to their family homes, ensuring reunification is both safe and sustainable.</p> <p>e. Updated Education Strategy and SEND Reforms – Having a clear education strategy that covers SEND reforms within children's services is essential for ensuring that every child, including those with additional needs, receives the right support, at the right time, in the right setting. The Government's SEND and Alternative Provision (AP) reforms require local authorities to continue to: improve consistency, quality and accountability in SEND support; develop local inclusion plans; strengthen early identification and intervention; and ensure better outcomes in preparation for adulthood. An updated education strategy that aligns with these reforms will enable HBC children's services to be fully prepared for any changes reforms may bring, compliant with our statutory duties and strategically align with national policy.</p> <p>To this end, the service will update our education strategy which ensures our local offer is well co-ordinated, transparent and accessible to families, emphasising joint working between education, health, social care and families. Our strategy will promote: inclusive practice in mainstream schools; early help and graduated response models; alternative provision supporting reintegration; and one which champions the wider early intervention and prevention ethos.</p> <p>The updated strategy will be included as part of a suite of documents, including our SEND sufficiency strategy; SEND and alternative provision capital strategy, to improve planning and ensure sufficient local provision for those with SEND and those who are looked after.</p> <p>f. Care leavers support – The care leavers pathway is being refreshed to ensure young people transitioning out of care are supported to become confident and independent adults. The Transitions Operational Group (TOG) has been established to review and enhance our approach to pathway planning. This includes preparing care leavers for adulthood by promoting stable relationships, health and wellbeing, raising aspirations, and providing tailored support to access housing, employment, education and training opportunities. A review of a housing pathway for care leavers will be undertaken.</p> <p>g. Workforce demand and capacity mapping</p> <p>h. Corporate Parenting – Enhance understanding and accountability amongst all corporate parents regarding their roles and statutory responsibilities, to ensure the effective implementation of the seven corporate parenting principles (Children and Social Work Act 2017).</p> <p>The target of £3m is based on the current pressures identified at Quarter 1 of the financial year 2025/26, and the growth allowed within the MTFP. The proposals should be viewed as an all-encompassing package, rather than individual proposals with individual targets.</p> <p>The project will be supported by transformation funding. In order to ensure progress prior to April 2026, some financial commitments have already been entered into.</p>	3,000,000	0	Positive	The proposals focus on prevention, placement breakdown and reunification to best support the needs of children within Hartlepool. It is therefore anticipated that implementation of these strands will, on balance, have a greater positive impact than any potential negative impact which may occur in a minority of individual cases.

Savings Proposals

4.1 Annex A Appendix B

Service	Committee	Transformation Theme	Overall Description	MTFS Savings 2026/27 £	MTFS Savings 2027/28 £	Single Impact Assessment (Positive / Neutral / Negative)	Impact Assessment Notes
Cross Cutting	All	Council Wide Fees and Charges Review	<b>Fees and Charges</b>  This project aims to generate additional charging opportunities for the council and will look to develop and embed a more strategic and policy lead approach to charging. Following an externally commissioned review, utilising national and regional benchmarking information, amendments are proposed in a number of areas to bring the council more into line with charges elsewhere, or to more closely recover costs. In order to limit the impact, some of these proposals cover a number of years. All proposals are individually less than £100,000 in impact and as such are progressing through normal officer delegations. Where service area have operated at a shortfall on existing income targets, savings will be retained by the service to mitigate the existing shortfalls.  Furthermore, fees and charges generally will increase at 5% for the 2026/27 financial year.	213,000	61,000	Neutral	The bulk of the changes to fees and charges relate to charges for third party organisations rather than individual residents. Where changes do relate to individual residents, they are predominantly discretionary services.
ICT / Council Wide	Finance and Corporate Affairs	Digital Reviews	<b>Application Insight and Rationalisation</b>  A review of all software applications in operation within the councils IT estate and their usage to reduce unnecessary applications, avoid future costs, improve procurement and ensure we fully utilise the data held on these systems to inform decision making.  The project will be supported by transformation funding. In order to ensure progress prior to April 2026, some financial commitments have already been entered into.	63,000	0	N/A	There is no anticipated impact, since this is a review of internal software applications.
Accounts Payable / Council Wide	Finance and Corporate Affairs	Digital Reviews	<b>Invoice Payment Processing</b>  This project will improve the efficiency of invoice processing for the Council and generate a new income stream associated with amendments to supplier invoice payment terms. This will be achieved through:  a) E-invoicing - introduction of e-invoicing software to capture information direct from suppliers e-invoices. The software is integrated direct to Integra, the Council's Financial Management System (FMS) and will improve the speed and accuracy of this current manual process and generate staff time savings.  b) Early Payment Solution (EPS) – introduction of an EPS into the current payments process. The EPS allows suppliers to be paid more quickly in return for a discount on the invoice value being paid. This discount generates an income stream into the Council.  Both solutions are widely used by public bodies across the country and councils in the Tees Valley and wider North east region.  The project will be supported by transformation funding. In order to ensure progress prior to April 2026, some financial commitments have already been entered into.	77,000	0	N/A	There is no anticipated impact. The saving arises from more efficient processes and a discount on invoices paid early.
				<b>4,117,000</b>	<b>275,000</b>		

Savings Proposals shown as an Increase in the Council Tax Base

Revenues and Benefits	Finance and Corporate Affairs	Revenues Collection and Maximisation	<b>Council Tax Support accuracy reviews</b>  The Council has the highest proportion of working age Council Tax support claimants in the country. 14.4% of the working age population receive support, compared to the Tees Valley average of 11.0% and the England average of 5.8%. We have the 16th highest claimant count for pensioners with 22.6% receiving support compared to the Tees Valley average of 17.8% and the England average of 12.2%. The cost of the scheme is £13.5m a year for the council. The reasons for the high numbers include deprivation, but also our approach to promoting the scheme to those eligible.  The rest fraud prevention work on Single Person discount has seen the reduction of over 1,000 claimants (circa 5%). During this work, a number of cases where identified that pointed to fraud or out of date eligibility for council tax support.  As such it is proposed to undertake ongoing accuracy and eligibility review of our council tax support caseload.  It is envisaged that this could achieve a 3% reduction in costs of the scheme, equally to £400,000 of annual on-going savings. To do so, two additional benefit officers will be employed and data intelligence will be utilised to prioritise and reviews, thus reducing the net target to £325,000.  It should be noted that those residents remaining on Housing Benefit within Hartlepool, are subject to similar checks instigated by the DWP on Housing Benefit eligibility.  Anti-fraud work on our Single Person discount caseload will continue, and this will support an increase in the target to £375,000.  In order to secure progress prior to April 2026, recruitment has commenced for the two additional posts.	383,000	0	N/A	Accuracy reviews are intended to ensure the right support is provided to those eligible to receive it. Whilst the exercise will result in a reduction in the number of people receiving Council Tax support and/or a reduction in the value of support, it will ensure the appropriate amount of support is provided, and that fraud and error is reduced.
				<b>4,500,000</b>	<b>275,000</b>		

Key - Equality & Poverty Negative Impact Identified Column

Service	Committee	Transformation Theme	Overall Description	MTFS Savings 2026/27 £	MTFS Savings 2027/28 £	Single Impact Assessment (Positive / Neutral / Negative)	Impact Assessment Notes
A - Age		G - Religion and Belief					
B - Disability		H - Sex					
C - Gender Reassignment		I - Sexual Orientation					
D - Marriage and Civil Partnership		J - Poverty and Disadvantage					
E - Pregnancy and Maternity		K - Care Leavers					
F - Race		L - Armed Forces Community					

## RESERVES FORECASTS (EXCLUDING SCHOOL BALANCES, HRA AND UNUSABLE RESERVES)

4.1 ANNEX A

APPENDIX C

	Balance as at 31st March 2025	Forecast Use of Reserves				Forecast Balance as at 31st March 2029
		2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Revenue Reserve	5,500	0	0	0	0	5,500
Budget Support Fund (BSF)	7,672	(4,260)	0	0	0	3,412
BSF - Transformation Costs	2,000	0	(500)	(750)	(750)	0
BSF - Invest to Save	1,400	(700)	(350)	0	0	350
Revenue Grants Unapplied	9,107	(6,266)	(1,257)	(1,003)	(125)	456
Business Rates Risk Reserve	0	0	0	0	0	0
Insurance Fund	2,902	(65)	(65)	(65)	0	2,707
Children in our Care Reserve	1,230	(200)	(1,030)	0	0	0
BSF - Treasury Management Income	650	(650)	0	0	0	0
Asset Management Reserve	840	(840)	0	0	0	0
Earmarked Revenue Reserves under £1m	7,038	(3,028)	(2,401)	(846)	0	763
<b>Revenue Reserves Total</b>	<b>38,339</b>	<b>(16,009)</b>	<b>(5,603)</b>	<b>(2,664)</b>	<b>(875)</b>	<b>13,188</b>
Earmarked Capital Reserves	6,303	(5,940)	(363)	0	0	0
Capital Grants Unapplied	11,680	(11,680)	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>56,322</b>	<b>(33,629)</b>	<b>(5,966)</b>	<b>(2,664)</b>	<b>(875)</b>	<b>13,188</b>
<b>Cumulative Balance</b>		<b>22,693</b>	<b>16,727</b>	<b>14,063</b>	<b>13,188</b>	
<b>DSG Reserve</b>	<b>(4,932)</b>	<b>(4,670)</b>	<b>(3,596)</b>	<b>(5,214)</b>	<b>(6,773)</b>	<b>(25,185)</b>
<b>DSG Reserve Cumulative Balance</b>		<b>(9,602)</b>	<b>(13,198)</b>	<b>(18,412)</b>	<b>(25,185)</b>	

# CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

2 DECEMBER 2025



**Subject:** SPECIAL SCHOOL GROWTH PROPOSALS  
ACADEMIC YEAR 2025-26

**Report of:** Executive Director of Children's Services and Director  
of Finance, IT and Digital

**Decision Type:** Key Decision – CJCS 109/26 (Key Test a) and b  
apply)

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## 1. COUNCIL PLAN PRIORITY

<b>Hartlepool will be a place:</b>
- Where people live healthier, safe and independent lives.

## 2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 This report outlines growth proposals from Springwell and Catcote Special Schools. The growth proposals are outside of the 3% funding increase agreed at the 18 March 2025 Committee.

## 3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Special Schools are funded from the High Needs Block (HNB) that forms part of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). Since September 2023, Springwell and Catcote special schools have been funded based on a cost model. Each school estimates the cost of operating their provision for the Academic Year after receipt of place funding at £10k per place from the Department for Education (94 places Springwell and 180 places Catcote).
- 3.2 The planned cost of operating each school, after place funding, is provided at expense head level detail for review by Council Officers.
- 3.3 A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) underpins special school cost arrangements and has been agreed by all parties.



- 3.4 As part of the High Needs Block budget setting process for 2025/26, Children's Services Committee agreed up to a 3% inflationary increase to special school funding for Academic Year 2025-26.
- 3.5 As part of their cost model proposals, each school identifies any growth in Hartlepool provision, and any agreed growth sits outside of the allowable 3% increase. Growth can be the result of additional pupils, exceptional pupil needs, or other extraordinary factors affecting the operation of the school.
- 3.6 Each special school has produced an updated cost model based on pupil admissions and expected budgets for AY 2025-26. The cost models include proposals for growth in funding outside of the approved 3%.
- 3.7 As a small authority facing rising levels of SEND need, the Council works hard to ensure that education provision is of high quality and meets the needs of the children, young people, and their families. Maintaining the sustainability of Hartlepool's two special schools is essential to meeting the need of pupils with SEND, while keeping children within their local community and avoiding costly out-of-area placements and associated transport costs.

#### 4. **SPRINGWELL SPECIAL SCHOOL – COST MODEL PROPOSAL AY2025-26**

- 4.1 Before proposals for growth, Springwell school is requesting a small reduction from the previous Academic Year cost arrangement (1% reduction, or £0.013m).
- 4.2 Springwell school has asked for the following items to be approved as growth. The school considers these items of expenditure outside their control yet affecting the operating cost of provision in AY2025-26.

Expenditure Growth	Estimated Cost	Rationale
Net cost of pay changes (incl National Insurance increase) after government grant	£0.095m	The school must implement the pay changes, and reduced staffing levels is not a viable option if the local authority intends to commission all 94 places.
Loss of income from Out of Hartlepool placements	£0.058m	The profile of pupil needs across the school cohort has resulted in the need to limit places to 94 pupils. This has reduced the ability of the school to earn income from other authorities (which reduces the cost of provision to HBC). If the local authority commissions 94 places this income will not be achievable.

Revenue contribution to capital schemes	£0.026m	In the first 2 years of operation, the authority did not allow special schools to include a contribution to capital schemes within their cost model proposals. At year 3 of operation, there is recognition that inclusion of such costs is reasonable. The school has included their Devolved Formula Capital Grant before seeking the £0.026m. This funding has been requested to contribute towards replacing the school minibuses and upgrading ICT.
<b>TOTAL GROWTH REQUEST</b>	<b>£0.179m</b>	

- 4.3 The Council's Special Educational Needs (SEN) Team and Commissioning Team have considered the growth requested by the school. There is recognition of the redesignation of the school resulting in a greater proportion of children with more complex needs and the associated requirement for smaller class sizes and the need to invest in transport and ICT.
- 4.4 The school minibuses are ageing and are increasingly requiring repairs. The school is actively exploring options to replace the minibuses to ensure sustainable and safe transport for pupils. The school is contributing their annual capital allocation to this project.
- 4.5 The request for monies to support ICT upgrades follows a report from the school's ICT third party provider detailing areas of concern where without upgrades there may be interruption in the provision of ICT to pupils.
- 4.6 The High Needs Block (HNB) budget for 2025/26 assumes an increase of 3% only (£0.031m) for the period September 2025 to March 2026 – no growth has been included. Therefore, approval of the AY2025-26 cost model (pro-rata) would increase the current outturn projection for HNB spending by £0.066m.

## 5. CATCOTE SPECIAL SCHOOL – COST MODEL PROPOSAL AY2025-26

- 5.1 Catcote Academy educates both pre-16 and post-16 pupils. Post-19 pupils are not funded through this agreement. Before proposals for

growth, Catcote school is requesting an increase of 2.67% (or £0.079m) from the previous Academic Year cost arrangement.

- 5.2 Catcote school has asked for the following items to be approved as growth. The school considers these items of expenditure as outside their control yet affecting the operating cost of provision in AY2025-26.

Expenditure Growth	School Requested Cost	LA Adjusted Cost	Rationale
Growth in pupil volumes	£0.363m	£0.333m	Agreed place numbers are 180. For AY2024-25, the school had 23 places over number. For AY 2025-26, school will be 37 over number. Two additional teachers and 5 learning support assistants are included in the growth request, along with an additional coach. The school is also seeking to fund an additional finance / admin post. Finally, planned improvements to the car park are included at £0.030m.
Growth in pupil need	£0.076m	£0.061m	The school is reporting an increased level of pupil need across their cohort for AY2025-26. The £0.076m reflects the cost of 1 additional teaching assistant, 1 new advanced learning support assistant, enhanced pay for certain staff to be trained in specialist speech and language and complex needs management. Refurbishment of a Life Skills Room at £0.015m is also included.
Revenue contribution to capital schemes	£0.069m	£0.059m	In the first 2 years of operation, the authority did not allow special schools to include a contribution to capital schemes within their cost model proposals.

			At year 3 of operation, there is recognition that inclusion of such costs is reasonable. Funding has been requested to refurbish offices to provide more up to date lighting, four sets of toilets, upgrade the Conservatory Roof which is used in the outdoor curriculum, and upgrade ICT to ensure continuity of provision for students.
<b>TOTAL GROWTH REQUEST</b>	<b>£0.508m</b>	<b>£0.453m</b>	

- 5.3 For such a significant increase, careful consideration has been given by the local authority to any areas of planned spend that could be re-prioritised.
- 5.4 The request for additional staffing to support 37 students, at a cost of £0.330m, has been assessed against the alternative of placing these students in Independent Specialist Provision. The average cost per placement is £0.071m, which would amount to approximately £2.6m, excluding transport costs. This provides a saving of £2.3m to the HNB and importantly keeps students in their local community.
- 5.5 The review undertaken by Council Officers suggests that several reductions in the growth request are feasible. This includes deferral of works to the school car park, creation of a Life Skills Room and refurbishment of offices. This would reduce the overall growth request by £0.055m.
- 5.6 The car park request was reviewed by the authority's transport manager who provides transport for students at Catcote Academy. The assessment was that the £0.030m investment would not rectify current parking issues.
- 5.7 Further review was carried out by our Highways Department; they concluded that the £0.030m requested would not solve car parking issues. The draft SEND and Alternative Provision Capital strategy 2025-2028 has identified that further expansion will be required at Catcote Academy to meet need. The increase in pupil numbers could not be accommodated in the current car park and an alternative access road from Summerhill Lane would need to be considered. This Growth request has therefore been rejected as it will need to be considered as part of a larger project.

- 5.8 The proposal to redevelop an existing Life Skills room into a functional village would provide complex learners with practical, real-world experiences and preparation for adulthood. It was agreed that this should form part of the SEND Capital / Sufficiency Strategy and would not be considered as a growth item.
- 5.9 Schools' Forum supported the reduction in the growth request proposed by the local authority. However, Forum asked that funding of the refurbishment of the Life Skills Room at £0.015m be considered should there be an underspend in AY 2024-25.
- 5.10 The schemes to refurbish four sets of toilets and upgrade of the conservatory roof have been supported by the local authority. The toilets are in a poor state of repair and elements of the floor present as tripping hazards. The conservatory is used as part of the outdoor curriculum for horticulture. Previously, students had to attend East Durham College to access elements of this curriculum. The conservatory is old, the roof leaks and is broken in several areas and requires updating to ensure the horticultural curriculum can continue to be delivered on site.
- 5.11 The High Needs Block (HNB) budget for 2025/26 assumes an increase of 3% only (£0.052m) for the period September 2025 to March 2026 – no growth has been assumed. Therefore, approval of the AY2025-26 cost model (pro-rata) would increase the current outturn projection for HNB spending by £0.259m.
- 5.12 Across the two schools, the overall increase in cost to the High Needs Block (full year impact) would be £0.557m.

## **6. RISK AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 Demands on the service to provide education for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are continuing to exceed the financial resources allocated. The latest spending estimates for financial year 2025/26 suggest an in-year shortfall of £5.030m. This is in addition to the current DSG deficit of £4.932m.
- 6.2 Against this background, government have extended the “statutory override” regulations to 2027/28 which means authorities do not have to charge these deficits to their General Fund budget. This means that where authorities have a HNB deficit, this is carried on the balance sheet as a negative reserve and does not affect the Council's own reserves available to fund local priorities and commitments. The Council is required to “cash-flow” the deficit, leading to loss in potential investment income. A £9.962m deficit would cost the council circa £0.400m in lost investment income on cash balances.

- 6.3 Despite the financial pressure, the ongoing sustainability of Hartlepool's two special schools is critical to meet the need of pupils with SEND. The increase in cost is considered necessary to invest in Hartlepool provision and so avoid high-cost placement of pupils with SEND outside the town wherever possible. The average cost of these placements is £0.071m per place, excluding transport costs.

## 7. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 The local authority is required to set an annual budget for its High Needs Block. The costs of operating special schools will form a key part of budget setting for financial year 2026/27.

## 8. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS/IMPLICATIONS

<b>SUBSIDY CONTROL</b>	There are no subsidy control considerations.
<b>SINGLE IMPACT ASSESSMENT.</b>	<b>Appendix A</b>
<b>STAFF CONSIDERATIONS</b>	There are no staff considerations.
<b>ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS</b>	There are no asset management considerations.
<b>ENVIRONMENT, SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATIONS</b>	There are none.
<b>CONSULTATION</b>	Not required

## 9. CONSULTATION

- 9.1 All schools have been consulted on the special school growth proposals for AY 2025-26 via Schools' Forum.
- 9.2 Schools' Forum supported the proposals after reflecting adjustments from the local authority outlined in paragraph 5.4.
- 9.3 Schools' Forum asked that consideration be given to funding the Life Skills Room refurbishment should the school underspend against the cost model in AY 2024-25.

## 10. RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 It is recommended that Members:

- a) Approve the growth proposals for Springwell school recommended by Schools' Forum for AY 2025-26 of **£0.179m** shown in the table at paragraph 4.2 of this report;
- b) Approve the growth proposals for Catcote school recommended by Schools' Forum for AY2025-26 of **£0.453m** shown in the table at 5.2 of this report.

## 11. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

11.1 To ensure that we can meet the educational needs of children with Special Education Needs and Disabilities in Hartlepool.

11.2 To ensure the local authority appropriately funds special schools and establishes a realistic HNB budget in 2026/27 that meets expected demand.

## 12. BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1 Schools' Forum reports and minutes of

- 14 October 2025 – Special Schools Cost Model Update

## 13. CONTACT OFFICERS

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Sign Off:-

Managing Director	Date: 12.11.2025
Director of Finance, IT and Digital	Date: 12.11.2025
Director of Legal, Governance and HR	Date: 12.11.2025

Guidance for completing this form is available in the “Single Impact Assessment: Toolkit for Officers”, available from the Single Impact Assessment page on the intranet at <https://hbcintranet/Pages/Single-Impact-Assessments.aspx>.

### Section 1 – Details of the proposed action being considered

<b>1.1 Lead Department:</b>	Children’s Services
<b>1.2 Lead Division:</b>	Education
<b>1.3 Title of the proposed action:</b>	
Special School Growth Proposals Academic Year 2025-26	
<b>1.4 Brief description of the proposed action:</b>	
<p>The Council has received growth proposals from Springwell and Catcote Special Schools that are outside of the 3% funding increase already agreed by Children’s Services Committee in March 2025. Children’s Services Committee is being requested to approve the additional funding which is a result of an increase in the number of pupils, increase in need for this cohort of SEND pupils and other extraordinary factors affecting the operation of the school e.g. National Insurance increases, loss of income from out of Hartlepool placements and revenue contribution to capital schemes.</p>	
<b>1.5 Who else is involved:</b>	
Corporate Finance. Springwell and Catcote Special Schools. Schools Forum. Children’s Services Committee.	



# Hartlepool Borough Council – Single Impact Assessment Form

## 5.1 Appendix A

### 1.6 Who will make the final decision about the proposed action:

Children's Services Committee

### 1.7 Which wards will be affected by the proposed action? Tick all that apply

All wards	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Hart	<input type="checkbox"/>	Seaton	<input type="checkbox"/>
Burn Valley	<input type="checkbox"/>	Headland & Harbour	<input type="checkbox"/>	Throston	<input type="checkbox"/>
De Bruce	<input type="checkbox"/>	Manor House	<input type="checkbox"/>	Victoria	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fens & Greatham	<input type="checkbox"/>	Rossmere	<input type="checkbox"/>	N/A - Internal council activities	<input type="checkbox"/>
Foggy Furze	<input type="checkbox"/>	Rural West	<input type="checkbox"/>		

### 1.8 Completed By:

Name	Job Title	Date Completed
Sandra Shears	Head of Finance – Corporate and Schools	21.10.25

1.9 Version	Author	Summary of Changes	Date

### Section 2 – Explaining the impact of the proposed action

#### 2.1 What data and evidence has informed this impact assessment?

- Growth request proposals from the two schools.
- Pupil needs profile and impact on limit to school placement numbers.
- Feedback from Schools Forum on the requests.

#### 2.2 If there are gaps in evidence or not enough information to assess the impact, how have you addressed this or how will you address it?

Gap(s) Identified	How it / they have or will be addressed
N/A	

### 2.3 Risk Score

Impact	Negative Impact Score	Explanation – what is the impact?
<b>Age</b>		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Positive Impact <input type="checkbox"/> Negative Impact <input type="checkbox"/> No Impact	Likelihood score: e.g. Almost certain 4 Impact score: e.g. Major 3 Overall score: e.g. Red 12	Ensuring sufficient funding for our two special schools will enable school age children to be effectively supported in their education.
<b>Disability</b>		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Positive Impact <input type="checkbox"/> Negative Impact <input type="checkbox"/> No Impact	Likelihood score: Impact score: Overall score:	Ensuring sufficient funding for our two special schools will enable children with SEND needs to be effectively supported in their education.
<b>Gender Reassignment</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Positive Impact <input type="checkbox"/> Negative Impact <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No Impact	Likelihood score: Impact score: Overall score:	Gender reassignment is not a relevant factor in the school growth proposals being submitted to the Committee.
<b>Marriage and Civil Partnership</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Positive Impact <input type="checkbox"/> Negative Impact <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No Impact	Likelihood score: Impact score: Overall score:	Marriage and civil partnership are not relevant factors in the school growth proposals being submitted to the Committee.

Impact	Negative Impact Score	Explanation – what is the impact?
<b>Pregnancy and Maternity</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Positive Impact <input type="checkbox"/> Negative Impact <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No Impact	Likelihood score: Impact score: Overall score:	Pregnancy and maternity are not relevant factors in the school growth proposals being submitted to the Committee.
<b>Race (Ethnicity)</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Positive Impact <input type="checkbox"/> Negative Impact <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No Impact	Likelihood score: Impact score: Overall score:	Race is not a relevant factor in the school growth proposals being submitted to the Committee.
<b>Religion or Belief</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Positive Impact <input type="checkbox"/> Negative Impact <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No Impact	Likelihood score: Impact score: Overall score:	Religion or belief are not relevant factors in the school growth proposals being submitted to the Committee.
<b>Sex</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Positive Impact <input type="checkbox"/> Negative Impact <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No Impact	Likelihood score: Impact score: Overall score:	Sex is not a relevant factor in the school growth proposals being submitted to the Committee.

# Hartlepool Borough Council – Single Impact Assessment Form

## 5.1 Appendix A

Impact	Negative Impact Score	Explanation – what is the impact?
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Positive Impact <input type="checkbox"/> Negative Impact <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No Impact	Likelihood score: Impact score: Overall score:	Sexual orientation is not a relevant factor in the school growth proposals being submitted to the Committee.
<b>Care Leavers (Local)</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Positive Impact <input type="checkbox"/> Negative Impact <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No Impact	Likelihood score: Impact score: Overall score:	Care leavers are not a relevant factor in the school growth proposals being submitted to the Committee.
<b>Armed Forces (Local)</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Positive Impact <input type="checkbox"/> Negative Impact <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No Impact	Likelihood score: Impact score: Overall score:	Armed Forces are not a relevant factor in the school growth proposals being submitted to the Committee.
<b>Poverty and Disadvantage (Local)</b>		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Positive Impact <input type="checkbox"/> Negative Impact <input type="checkbox"/> No Impact	Likelihood score: Impact score: Overall score:	Ensuring sufficient funding for our two special schools will enable children with SEND needs to be effectively supported in their education including those from low-income families.

### Section 3 - Mitigation Action Plan or Justification

Group(s) impacted	Proposed mitigation	How this mitigation will make a difference	By when	Responsible Officer
N/A				

<b>Justification</b> If you need to justify your proposed action explain this here
N/A

### Section 4 - Sign Off

<b>Responsible Officer sign off:</b>	
Name	Sandra Shears
Job title	Head of Finance - Corporate & Schools
<b>Assistant Director / Director sign off:</b>	
Name	
Job title	

Once the Single Impact Assessment is completed please send to [impactassessments@hartlepool.gov.uk](mailto:impactassessments@hartlepool.gov.uk).

**Section 5 - Review (To be completed after implementation)**

<b>5.1 Review completed by:</b>		
<b>Name</b>	<b>Job Title</b>	<b>Date review completed</b>

<b>5.2 Did the impact turned out as expected?</b>

<b>5.3 Were the proposed mitigations the correct ones and were they successful in reducing any negative impacts?</b>

<b>5.4 Were there any unexpected outcomes?</b>

### 5.5 Following the review please identify next steps here (Select one)

- ☐ Additional mitigation required (give details below - 5.6)
- ☐ Original proposed course of action needs to be revisited
- ☐ No further action required

### 5.6 Additional mitigation(s) or justification

Group(s) impacted	Proposed mitigation	How this mitigation will make a difference	By when	Responsible Officer

**Justification** If you need to justify your proposed action explain this here

Submit form with completed review to [impactassessments@hartlepool.gov.uk](mailto:impactassessments@hartlepool.gov.uk)



# CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

2 DECEMBER 2025



**Subject:** SENDIASS ANNUAL REPORT  
**Report of:** Executive Director Children's Services  
**Decision Type:** For information

## 1. COUNCIL PLAN PRIORITY

<b>Hartlepool will be a place:</b>
- where people live healthier, safe and independent lives. (People)
- with a Council that is ambitious, fit for purpose and reflects the diversity of its community. (Organisation)

## 2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 To present to members the Annual Report of the Hartlepool Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) for September 2024 - July 2025.

## 3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Hartlepool SENDIASS is an arm's length service which the Local Authority have commissioned in-house, as part of their statutory obligation as defined in Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014, Chapter 2 of the Department for Education Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Code of Practice (2015) and within the Minimum Standards for SEND Information, Advice and Support Services (2018). The purpose of the SENDIASS service is to provide free, confidential, impartial support and advice to children, young people (aged 0 – 25 years) and their parent/carers, about matters related to their own or their child's Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). The service is situated within Children's and Joint Commissioning Directorate.
- 3.2 The SENDIASS Annual Report (**Appendix 1**) provides a key overview of the information, advice and support being offered to children, young people (aged 0 – 25 years) and their parent/carers about matters related to SEND. It

summarises information in relation to the service purpose, aims, offer developments and priorities, during this reporting period.

#### 4. SERVICE ACTIVITY AND PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW

- 4.1 Between September 2024 and July 2025, SENDIASS has provided information, advice and support to **321** Parents/Carers, Children and Young People (previous year was 182). This is broken down into **438** individual enquiries/involvements, with an additional **251** meetings attended.
- 4.2 The service uses the Council for Disabled Children (CDC) intervention levels to help monitor the complexity of casework and the level of support needed, as this can vary greatly. Details of the different intervention levels are included within the annual report.
- 4.3 The Service has a current ringfence budget of £78,263 which is monitored on a monthly basis and reviewed on a yearly basis to ensure the service can continue to meet their statutory legal obligations (under The Children and Families Act 2014 (CFA 2014), The Send Code of Practice 2015 (COP 2015) and The Council for Disabled Children (CDC) national 'Minimum Standards' 2018).
- 4.4 The service made a commitment in our 2023-2024 annual report that for 2024/2025 our developments and priorities would come under 7 commitments which have been achieved. Details and evidence are included within the annual report.
- 4.5 The service has **20** obligations under Children and Families Act 2014 (CFA 2014) and SEND Code of Practice (2015) (COP 201) via the CDC National Minimum Standards 2018. The service is currently compliant with following **15** obligational standards which are fully met and has **5** obligational standards which are in progress. This will inform our service development plan throughout this academic year 2025- 2026. Details of our obligations are included within the annual report.
- 4.6 Over the last 12 months the individual enquiries/involvements from SENDIASS received from parent/carers, children and young people have highlighted following 10 key themes:-
  1. Special Educational Needs (SEN) support / Graduated Approach.
  2. Communication difficulties with services
  3. Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA) Requests
  4. Attendance
  5. Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP's)
  6. SEND placements
  7. SENDIASS Remit
  8. Mediation / Disagreement Resolution and Signposting to other services
  9. Health and Tribunals for Refusal to Assess
  10. Annual Reviews

**5. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS/IMPLICATIONS**

<b>RISK IMPLICATIONS</b>	None
<b>FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS</b>	None
<b>SUBSIDY CONTROL</b>	None
<b>LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS</b>	SENDIASS services are defined in Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014, Chapter 2 of the Department for Education SEND Code of Practice (2015) and within the Minimum Standards for SEND Information, Advice and Support Services (2018).
<b>SINGLE IMPACT ASSESSMENT</b>	None
<b>STAFF CONSIDERATIONS</b>	None
<b>ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS</b>	None
<b>ENVIRONMENT, SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATIONS</b>	None
<b>CONSULTATION</b>	None

**6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 6.1 It is recommended that Members of the Children's Services Committee note the contents of the Annual Report of SENDIASS 2024/25 which will subsequently be published online.

**7. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 7.1 The Annual Report regarding SENDIASS is presented to the relevant Policy Committee and published on the Council's website.

**8. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

8.1 SENDIASS Annual report.

**9. CONTACT OFFICERS**

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Assistant Director Early Intervention, Performance and Commissioning  
Tel: 01429 284134  
Email: [Rebecca.stephenson@hartlepool.gov.uk](mailto:Rebecca.stephenson@hartlepool.gov.uk)

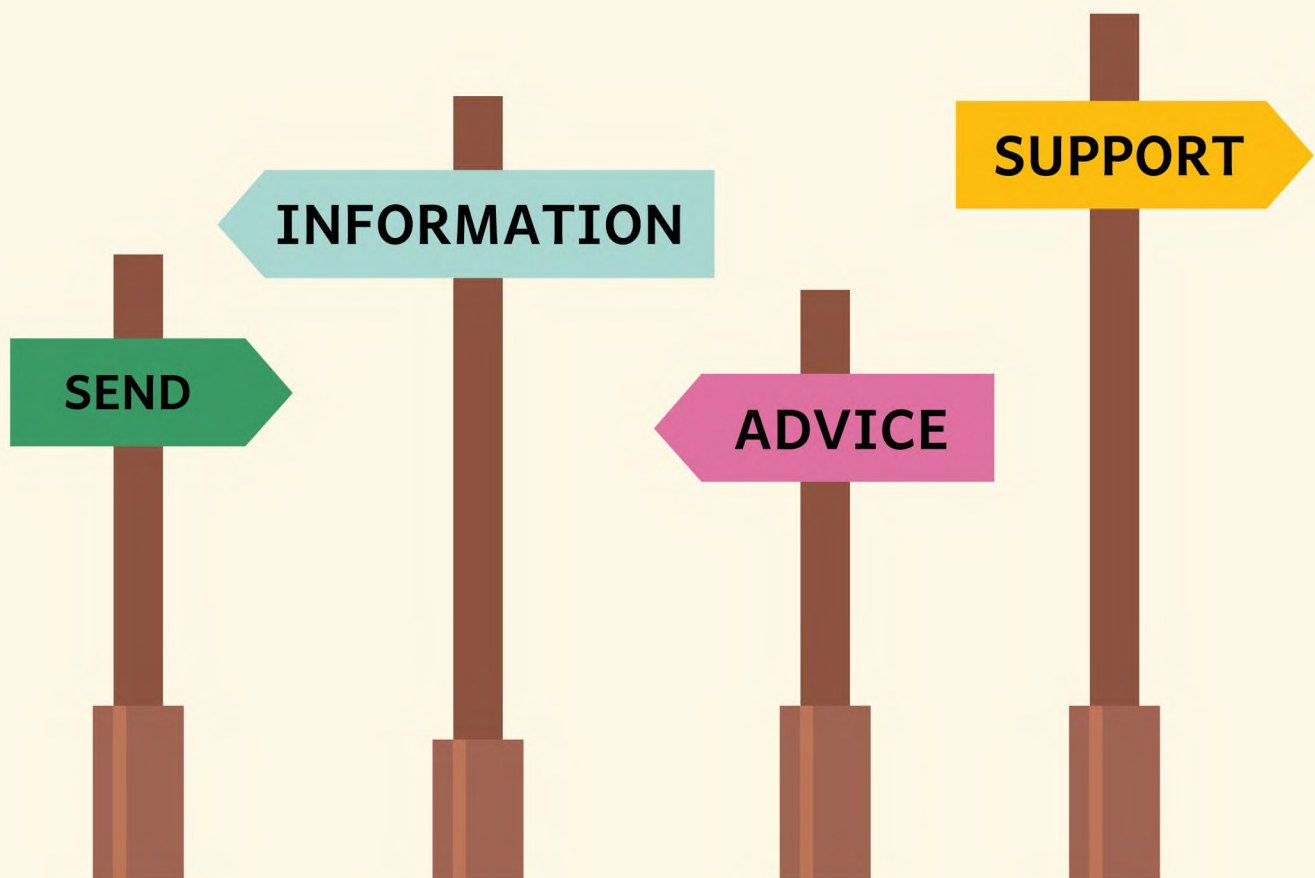
Julie Taylor  
Head of Service Quality and Review/ Principal Social Worker (Children).  
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Micky Froud, SENDIASS Manager  
Tel: 01429 284876  
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Sign Off:-

Managing Director	Date: 13.11.2025
Director of Finance, IT and Digital	Date: 12.11.2025
Director of Legal, Governance and HR	Date: 12.11.2025

# Hartlepool **SENDIASS**



**Annual Report  
September 2024 - July 2025**

# SENDIASS Annual Report 2024-2025

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# SENDIASS Annual Report 2024-2025

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## Introduction

Welcome to Hartlepool Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) Annual Report. This report aims to provide a helpful insight and overview of the service, our work and our developments and priorities.

From 1st September 2014 Parent Partnership Services (PPS) in every local authority became Information, Advice and Support Services (IASS). Each IASS provides support similar to that of a PPS, although the type of support and who is entitled to receive it has been significantly expanded. This now includes young people and children in their own right, along with the additional expectation to provide information and advice on all matters relating to health and social care.

The Children and Families Act 2014 requires local authorities to provide children with information, advice and support relating to their SEN or disability. Many children will access information, advice and support via their parents. However, some children, especially older children and those in custody, may want to access information, advice and support separately from their parents, and local authorities must ensure this is possible.

The Send Code of Practice 2015 in chapter 2 states: 'Local authorities must arrange for children with Special Education Needs (SEN) or disabilities for whom they are responsible, and their parents, and young people with SEN or disabilities for whom they are responsible, to be provided with information and advice about matters relating to their SEN or disabilities, including matters relating to health and social care. This must include information, advice and support on the take-up and management of Personal Budgets. In addition, in carrying out their duties under Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014, local authorities must have regard to the importance of providing children and their parents and young people with the information and support necessary to participate in decision making.

The Council for Disabled Children (co-produced by the Department for Education & Department of Health and Social Care) published a set of national 'Minimum Standards' in 2018 for all SENDIAS services to work towards. The aim is to ensure that there is consistency across all SENDIAS Services, as it takes the legal requirements of both the CFA 2014 and the SEND COP 2015.

# SENDIASS Annual Report 2024-2025

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## Who We Are

Hartlepool Special Educational Needs and Disabilities information, advice and support service (SENDIASS) offers free confidential, impartial information, advice and support to Children, Young People (aged 0 – 25 years) and their Parent/Carers, about matters related to their or their child's Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND), including matters relating to health and social care.

We are a self-referral, in-house statutory service which is funded by Hartlepool Borough Council (HBC), situated within Children's and Joint Commissioning Directorate, who operate 'arm's length' to HBC's Education, Social Care Services, and Health service Integrated Commissioning Board (ICB).

Hartlepool SENDIASS does not work in isolation, we are overseen by a National Co-ordinator within the information, advice support service (IASS) Network under the Council for Disabled Children (CDC) in the National Children's Bureau.

The National Co-ordinator:

- ✓ Liaises with central government, in particular the Department of Education (DFE).
- ✓ Hosts an e-forum for all SENDIASS staff.
- ✓ Gathers and publishes benchmarking data for each SENDIASS service regionally.
- ✓ Provides training on SEND legislation, mediation skills and regular updates on national SEN policy and practice.
- ✓ Provides the National Minimum Standards that all SENDIASS' must adhere to.



# SENDIASS Annual Report 2024-2025

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## How We Operate

**Referrals:** Referrals are made directly by a Parent/Carer, or Child/Young Person themselves. Referrals are made via email, telephone (leaving a message on our 24hr voicemail system and requesting a callback), website or virtual/ face-to-face interactions at a range of drop-ins, events and training sessions.

**Impartial and Informative:** The service will not take sides but instead will offer and provide, Parents/Carers, Children and Young People with factual and impartial information, advice and support, on an extensive range of topics in relation to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), including Health and Social Care. This will be based on SEND legislation and national guidance, which is unbiased and is not influenced by any party's particular point of view or local policy. The aim is to build on Parents/Carers, Children and Young People's knowledge and confidence to promote independence and self-advocacy, so they can feel empowered and enabled to make informed decisions about their next steps.

**Confidential:** The service will not discuss individual Parents/Carers, Children and Young People's personal circumstances or information with anyone unless prior verbal or written consent from the involved individual has been given, or there is a duty of care and legal obligation to do so i.e. safeguarding.

**Accessible:** The service can be contacted via email, telephone (leaving a message on our 24hr voicemail system and requesting a callback), website or virtual/ face-to-face interactions at a range of drop-ins, events and training sessions. The service also provides branded information and promotional materials in a range of accessible formats (upon request).










# SENDIASS Annual Report 2024-2025

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## How We Operate Continued

**Arms-length:** The service must and does legally operate arm's length from HBC Education/ Social Care Services, as well as Health services such as the Integrated Commissioning Board (ICB).

The service maintains an "arm's length" position by:

-  Being measured against The Children and Families Act 2014, The SEND Code of Practice 2015, and The Council for Disabled Children (CDC) National Minimum Standards 2018, and not local parameters or policies.
-  Having an appropriate protected ring-fenced delegated budget recording system (restricted to members of SENDIASS only).
-  Keeping secure all information specifically communicated (either orally or in writing) by Parents/Carers, Children and Young People which is separate from the HBC Education/ Social Care Services and Health services such as the Integrated Commissioning Board (ICB) systems.
-  Having and maintaining its own service website, separate to HBC.
-  Members of SENDIASS staff undertaking nationally provided training which ensures they have knowledge and understanding of SEND legislation and national guidance.
-  Members of SENDIASS staff not joining any LA local decision-making boards/panels or take part in any LA local decision-making processes.
-  Ensuring service confidentiality and impartiality is never compromised and remains a core element of practice.
-  Having good working links and networks with DFE, CDC and other SENDIAS services, both nationally and regionally.
-  Being monitored by an Advisory Group, which is separate from the HBC Education / Social Care Services and Health Services such as the Integrated Commissioning Board (ICB), to monitor and review the service development plan and annual service report requirements including any specific actions and improvement targets.



# SENDIASS Annual Report 2024-2025

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## How We Operate - Advisory Group

The Council for Disabled Children (CDC) co-produced by the Department for Education & Department of Health and Social Care published a set of national 'Minimum Standards' in 2018 for all SENDIAS services to work towards. The aim is to ensure that there is consistency across all SENDIAS Services, as it takes the legal requirements of both the CFA 2014 and the SEND COP 2015.

This includes the following:

*1.7 The Governance arrangements outline a clear management structure, encompassing a strategic manager within the IASS and a steering group or advisory body which includes representatives from service user groups and key stakeholders from education, social care and health.*












*1.8 The IASS has a development plan reviewed annually with the steering group/advisory body, which includes specific actions and improvement targets.*

Hartlepool SENDIASS have formed an advisory group consisting of key stakeholders from Education, Health, Social Care and Parents/Carers. The group meet every academic term to review the progress of Hartlepool SENDIASS and feed into the next priorities.

# SENDIASS Annual Report 2024-2025

## How We Operate - Advisory Group Continued

**The aim of the group is to:**

-  Confidentially take an active role in promoting, developing and influencing the service for Parent/Carers, Children and Young People (aged 0 – 25 years) to ensure they receive the required information, advice and support about matters related to their or their child's Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND).
-  Promote and support the continued development of Hartlepool SENDIASS.
-  Listen to service feedback to ensure the quality and effectiveness of the information, advice and support being provided, continues to be accessible, up to date and meets the needs of Parent/Carers, Children and Young People (aged 0 – 25 years) within Hartlepool.
-  Increase the knowledge of SEND legislation and national guidance to Parent/Carers, Children and Young People (aged 0 – 25 years), Professionals and Services.
-  Act as a 'critical/supportive friend' to Hartlepool SENDIASS to ensure SEND legislation and national guidance is adhered to.
-  Support Hartlepool SENDIASS to continue to meet their statutory legal obligations (under CFA 2014, SEND COP 2015, and The CDC National Minimum Standards 2018).
-  Monitor and review Hartlepool SENDIASS' service development plan and annual service report requirements annually.
-  Identify key gaps/themes, raise issues/concerns and provide person-centred solutions.
-  Support Hartlepool SENDIASS to remain a 'confidential', 'impartial' and an 'arm's length' service which sits outside of Education, Health and Social Care.
-  Monitor the ring-fenced budget and annual cost of Hartlepool SENDIASS delivery to ensure current and future sustainability.
-  Support Hartlepool SENDIASS and Local services to work together to ensure the needs of children, young people, their parent/carers within Hartlepool are met.



# SENDIASS Annual Report 2024-2025

## Our Work

**Staffing and Training:** The service is staffed by 1 full-time SENDIASS Manager, who has successfully completed levels 1-3 of the Independent Parental Special Education Advice (IPSEA) SEN Advisers Legal Training.

The service also had an admin support worker in post for 21Hrs per week until July 2025. Unfortunately, that staff member has since secured a new role and recruitment is now required.

**Contact Involvement:** The service creates a case file and contact involvement record for each Parent/Carer, Child or Young Person who accesses the service. However, under '1 case' there has often been multiple enquiries/involvements which sometimes does not fully reflect the work involved.

### An example of a contact involvement

**First contact** – Parents/carers emailed the service for some generic information to better understand Hartlepool SENDIASS' remit.

**Second contact** – Parents/carers emailed the service to obtain advice around Ordinarily Available Provision (OAP) (Universal offer to everyone), Reasonable Adjustments and SEN Support, so that they could have a greater understanding for their upcoming discussion with the school SENDCo.

**Third contact** – Parent/carer emailed the service to advise that school had agreed that C/YP does require a SEN support plan following their latest conversation. Therefore, requested SENDIASS' attendance at a face-to-face meeting with school to support parent to go through the newly created SEN Support plan and discuss what that will look like in practice daily for the C/YP. SENDIASS attended as agreed and provided some specific information, advice and support for the consideration of all parties.



# SENDIASS Annual Report 2024-2025

## Our Work - CDC Intervention Levels

We use the following Council for Disabled Children (CDC) intervention levels below with provide information, advice and support to parent/carers and children/young people. This also helps us to monitor the complexity of casework, and the level of support needed, as this can vary greatly.

Level 1	Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarification of SENDIASS' remit and offer available.</li> <li>• Providing some general 'generic' information and signposting to enable self-advocacy so informed decisions can be made.</li> </ul>
Level 2	Advice	<p>In additional to level 1, tailored advice/casework is provided on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specific 'SEND' processes, legislation, national guidance and documentation to enable self-advocacy so informed decisions can be made.</li> </ul>
Level 3	Support	<p>In additional to levels 1 and 2, direct advocacy/casework is required to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assist in overcoming serious breakdown in communications with professionals' services (including complaints procedures).</li> <li>• Assist overcoming breaches of specific 'SEND' legislation and national guidance.</li> <li>• Liaise with specific Education, Health and Social Care agencies/professionals.</li> <li>• Assist and support at meetings with professionals/services either virtually or face-to-face.</li> <li>• Provide intensive support due to personal circumstances (e.g. low literacy levels, learning difficulties, or English as an additional language).</li> <li>• Provide information, advice or support to a young person directly which is separate from that given to their parent/carer.</li> </ul>
Level 4	Intensive Support	<p>In additional to levels 1, 2, and 3 increased intensive complex direct advocacy/casework is required to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assist in the preparation of specific legal processes linked to SEND, i.e. Mediation, Complaints, School Exclusions, Ombudsman, Judicial Review, First and Upper Tier appeals (including disability discrimination), etc.</li> <li>• Representation at the above specific legal SEND hearings/meetings.</li> </ul>

# SENDIASS Annual Report 2024-2025

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## Our Work - Service Achievements (2024-2025).

Hartlepool SENDIASS made a commitment in our 2023-2024 annual report that for 2024/2025 our developments and priorities would be to:

- 1) Continue to provide and develop a service that can meet local demand and increase parents/carers, children, young people and professional's knowledge of SEND guidance and legislation.
- 2) Continue to develop and enhance our digital offer and resources to parents/carers, children and young people so appropriate up to date advice, support and information is accessed, in formats which is accessible to all.
- 3) Continue to provide varied drop-ins, events and training to parents/carers, children, young people and professional's about SEND information, advice and topics where further information is beneficial.
- 4) Enhance, obtain and review feedback from parents/carers, children and young people on the service to influence and support service design and delivery.
- 5) Continue to access and attend events and training to further develop knowledge and skills within service to enrich the service offer to parents/carers, children, young people.
- 6) Review data collection methods and analysis in relation to themes around SEND issues and service interventions.
- 7) Continue to benchmark against all of the Minimum Standards for SEND Information, Advice and Support Services as set out by the Council for Disabled Children (CDC).

**Hartlepool SENDIASS feels that we have been able to achieve our 7 commitments as evidenced and reflective throughout this report.**



# SENDIASS Annual Report 2024-2025

## Our Work - Service Annual Data (2024 - 2025)

This academic year the service has provided information, advice and support to **321 Parents/Carers, Children and Young People** (previous year was **182**). This is broken down into **438 individual enquiries/involvements, with an additional 251 meetings attended**.

The service also attended a range of school coffee mornings, multi-agency/training events, drop-in clinics, etc where it wasn't possible to capture all the Parents/Carers, Children and Young People who attended; however, we can factor in that we are delivering information, advice and support to a much wider audience than our records currently demonstrate.

438 case involvements / actions for 321 CYP and their families		
Initial Contact Method	Email	224
	Tel	165
	Face to Face	45
	Web	4
	Virtual	0
Initial Contact Made By	Parent / Legal Guardian	413
	Professional	15
	Parent & Professional	9
	Child / Young Person	1
Known	Not known to SENDI ASS	272
	Known to SENDI ASS	166
SEN Status	SEN Support	278
	EHCP	102
	No SEN	54
	SEN Support -> EHCP	4
Sector	Education	408
	Social Care	17
	Health	13
Service Involvement Level	Level 2	248
	Level 3	103
	Level 1	67
	Level 4	20
Cases Status	Closed	423
	Open	15
Cases by NCY	NCY 8	47
	NCY9	46
	NCY6	44
	NCY5	37
	NCY7	37
	NCY10	31
	NCY11	31
	Reception (NCY 0)	21
	NCY4	21
	NCY2	19
	NCY3	18
	NCY1	17
	Post-16	11
	Early Years	8
	Pre-School	5
	Unknown	45

**These tables breakdown the individual enquiries/involvements and key themes for this academic year.**

Enquiry Areas Covered	
SEN Support / Graduated Approach	190
Communication difficulties with services	147
EHCNA Requests	135
Attendance	70
EHC Plans	67
SEND Placements	54
SENDI ASS remit	53
Mediation / Disagreement Resolution	42
Signposting to other services	42
Health	40
Tribunal Appeal - Refusal to Assess	40
Annual Reviews	28
Complaints	24
Social Care	23
Tribunal Appeal - Combination of B / F /	7
Tribunal Appeal - Section I	5
Transport	3
Disability Discrimination	2
Tribunal Appeal - Section F	2



# SENDIASS Annual Report 2024-2025

## Our Work - With Professionals and Services

**North East SENDIASS Regional Network Group (NEIASS):** The service continues its membership of being a part of the regional SENDIASS group, comprising of the 12 local authorities SENDIASS represented in the region. Managers/Lead representatives from each local authority meet up to 4 times a year. The group provides a confidential and supportive space for the managers/leads to discuss and share issues, national and regional developments, explore new funding initiatives and access tools and resources, as well as to access and develop training opportunities to increase knowledge and skills to enrich the service offers across the region and serves as a link to the National IAS Network.

**Parent Carer Forum and Hartlepool Carers:** The service continues to work in partnership with the Parent Carer Forum - 1 Hart 1 Mind 1 Future (PCF) and Hartlepool Carers to raise awareness amongst Parent/Carers, Children and Young People of the services and support available. We provide SENDIASS drop-in sessions at Hartlepool Carers and attend monthly Multi-agency Parent Carer drop-in sessions arranged by PCF.

Whenever possible, the service also attends regular information days and steering group meetings which are organised by PCF and information shared via the PCF Facebook page.

**SEND, AP & Inclusion Operational Group:** The service attends the Local Authority's SEND, AP & Inclusion Operational Meeting. This is where we continue to engage and contribute to the LA's SEND, AP & Inclusion Operational Plan by working collaboratively with a range of professionals/ services and providing key information, advice and support on known SEND themes, legislation and direct service user experience/feedback. We hope this will help promote positive change for Children, Young People (aged 0 – 25 years) and their Parent/ Carers in respect to SEND. The LA have broken down the SEND, AP & Inclusion Operational Plan into 7 objective areas, with each area having its own individual working group which feedback into the central operational plan. The 7 objective areas are:

**Objective 1: Development of Ordinarily Available Provision.**

Objective 2: Improve our understanding of children's needs when linked to trauma to ensure early identification of need.

Objective 3: Improve our understanding of SEMH to ensure that needs are identified at the earliest opportunity.

Objective 4: Review and ensure appropriate sufficiency of specialist provision.

Objective 5: Development and implementation of AP strategy.

Objective 6: Improve transitions for children with SEND.

**Objective 7: Establish Quality Assurance Framework that allows the system to know what works and what needs improving**

In addition to our service attending the SEND, AP & Inclusion Operational Meetings, we also attend the individual working group for objectives **1 & 7**.



# SENDIASS Annual Report 2024-2025

## Benchmarking Our Service Obligations

Hartlepool SENDIASS has 20 obligations under CFA 2014 and COP 2015 via the CDC National Minimum Standards 2018. The service is currently compliant with the following **15** obligational standards which are fully met as detailed below.

- 1)** 1.3 The IASS provides an all-year-round flexible service which is open during normal office hours and includes a direct helpline with 24-hour answer machine, call back and signposting service, including linking to the national SEND helpline.
- 2)** 1.4 There is a dedicated and ring-fenced budget held and managed by an IAS service manager located within an IASS.
- 3)** 1.5 The IASS is, and is seen by service users to be, an arm's length, and confidential, dedicated and easily identifiable service, separate from the LA, Clinical Commissioning Group and/or host organisation.
- 4)** 1.7 The Governance arrangements outline a clear management structure, encompassing a strategic manager within the IASS and a steering group or advisory body which includes representatives from service user groups and key stakeholders from education, social care and health.
- 5)** 1.8 The IASS has a development plan reviewed annually with the steering group/advisory body, which includes specific actions and improvement targets.
- 6)** 2.1) Each IASS has a manager based solely within the service, without additional LA/CCG or host body roles. They have responsibility for strategic planning, service management and delivery, and quality assurance.
- 7)** 2.2 The IASS engages with regional and national strategic planning and training and demonstrates effective working with other IASSs to inform service development.
- 8)** 2.3 The IASS works with local partners, including local parent and young people forums to inform and influence policy and practice in the local area.
- 9)** 3.1 The IASS provides; Impartial information, advice and support (IAS) on the full range of education, health and social care as defined in the SEND Code of Practice to the following service users a) children, b) young people, c) parents. This support is offered in a range of ways which includes face to face, a telephone helpline, email, website and social media.
- 10)** 3.2 The IASS provides branded information and promotional materials in a range of accessible formats.
- 11)** 3.4 The IASS provides advocacy support for individual children, young people, and parents that empowers them to express their views and wishes and helps them to understand and exercise their rights in matters including exclusion, complaints, SEND processes, and SEND appeals.
- 12)** 3.5 The IASS provides information, advice and support before, during and following a SEND Tribunal appeal in a range of different ways, dependent on the needs of the parent or young person. This will include representation during the hearing if the parent or young person is unable to do so.
- 13)** 4.1 All advice and support providing staff successfully complete all online IPSEA legal training levels within 12 months of joining the service. Volunteers who provide advice and support should complete IPSEAs Level 1 online training within 12 months.
- 14)** 4.2 The service routinely requests feedback from service users and others and uses this to further develop the work and practices of the service.
- 15)** 4.3 All IASS staff and volunteers have ongoing supervision and continuous professional development.



# SENDIASS Annual Report 2024-2025

## Benchmarking Our Service Obligations Continued

Hartlepool SENDIASS has **5 remaining** obligational standards which are in progress and informs our service development plan throughout this academic year 2025- 2026. These are:

<u>Area of work / minimum standard</u>	<u>What is currently in place</u>	<u>Additional comments and what is still required</u>	<u>Time to be completed by</u>	<u>Compliance</u>
<b>16) 1.1</b> The IASS is jointly commissioned by education, health and social care in accordance with the CFA 2014. A formal agreement is set out in writing which refers directly to these Minimum Standards, whilst also considering the need for continuity and stability of the service.	Hartlepool SENDIASS currently has a Framework and Joint Commissioning Agreement in place under the Children's and Joint Commissioning Directorate which includes Education and Social Care.	Hartlepool SENDIASS to work with Health to identify what joint commissioning arrangements can be additionally sourced.	July 2026	<b>In progress</b>
<b>17) 1.2</b> The IASS is designed and commissioned with children, young people and parents, and has the capacity and resources to meet these Minimum Standards and local need. For smaller local authorities (LAs) this may involve commissioning across local areas.	<p>SENDIASS will aim to respond to all enquiries within 5 working days instead of the current 7 working days.</p> <p>SENDIASS to continue its partnership working the Parent Carer Forum (PCF) and Hartlepool Carers and school to seek increased engagement from children and young people directly.</p> <p>SENDIASS will continue to provide CDC quarterly feedback for information, advice &amp; support services network</p>	<p><b>The service were initially able to meet this obligational standard due to having an admin support worker in post for 21Hrs per week. Unfortunately, that staff member has since secured a new role and recruitment is now required.</b></p> <p>Hartlepool SENDIASS will look to recruit a SENDIASS Support officer on an initial 21Hrs per week, 2yr fixed term contract.</p>	July 2026	<b>In progress</b>

# SENDIASS Annual Report 2024-2025

## Benchmarking Our Service Obligations Continued

<u>Area of work / minimum standard</u>	<u>What is currently in place</u>	<u>Additional comments and what is still required</u>	<u>Time to be completed by</u>	<u>Compliance</u>
18) 1.6 LA and IASS ensure that potential service users, Head teachers, FE principals, SENCo, SEND Teams, children's and adult social care, health commissioners and providers are made aware of the IASS, its remit and who the service is for.	<p>Hartlepool SENDIASS continues to attend local partnerships meet and greet, and events.</p> <p>Hartlepool SENDIASS offers a termly information, advice and support drop-in for SENDCo and Headteachers.</p> <p>Hartlepool SENDIASS continues to work in partnership with Parent Carer Forum (PCF), LA departments, schools and external organisations.</p>	<p>Whilst Hartlepool SENDIASS is often promoted and widely recognised. Work is still needed to ensure the service remit and offer is better understood.</p>	July 2026	In-progress
19) 3.3 The IASS has a stand-alone service website that is accessible to all service users. The website includes; Contact details of the service, Opening hours, Response times, Information on a range of SEND topics, Signposting to other useful groups including parent groups and youth forums and national helplines, Signposting to the Local Offer, Key policies including a complaints procedure.	<p>Hartlepool SENDIASS provides a designated standalone website which incorporates: Contact details of the service. Opening hours. Response times. Information on a range of SEND topics.</p> <p>Signposting to the SENDIASS national helpline.</p> <p>Key policies including a complaints procedure.</p>	<p>Hartlepool SENDIASS to look to include:</p> <p>Signposting to other useful groups including parent groups and youth forums.</p> <p>Signposting to the Local Offer.</p> <p>Any key policies such as a complaints procedure.</p> <p>Yearly review of the SENDIASS website.</p>	July 2026	In-progress



# SENDIASS Annual Report 2024-2025

## Benchmarking Our Service Obligations Continued

<u>Area of work / minimum standard</u>	<u>What is currently in place</u>	<u>Additional comments and what is still required</u>	<u>Time to be completed by</u>	<u>Compliance</u>
20) 3.6 The IASS offers training to local education, health and social care professionals, children, young people and parents to increase knowledge of SEND law, guidance, local policy, issues and participation.	Early conversations with the Parent Carer Forum (PCF) and professionals to identify how best the training should be delivered.	<p>Qualitative feedback needed from parent/ carers, children, young people and professionals to determine specific SEND topic/ legislation, how best to be delivered and what resources</p> <p>Review SEND law, national guidance and local policy to ensure training requirements.</p>	July 2025	In-Progress

# SENDIASS Annual Report 2024-2025

## Parents/ Carers, Children & Young People's Service Feedback

We are always looking at ways we can improve the service for Parents/Carers, Children and Young People and feel service feedback is critical in helping us to understand what works, what doesn't and what's missing.

The feedback we have received so far via our website is as followed:

Getting in Touch	
Of 18 parents,	
15	Found it very easy to get in touch with SENDIASS
17	Report that SENDIASS explained who they are and what their role was
2	Heard about SENDIASS from the SENDIASS website
1	Heard about SENDIASS from the Local Offer Webpage
6	Heard about SENDIASS from their school, early years setting or college
6	Heard about SENDIASS from another parent
2	Heard about SENDIASS from Parent Led Forum
1	Heard about SENDIASS from Social Services
2	Heard about SENDIASS from a Health Professional
2	Heard about SENDIASS from CAMHS
2	Heard about SENDIASS from Hartlepool Carers
1	Heard about SENDIASS from Other Drop In

The Future	
Of 18 parents,	
17	Report that they are likely to recommend Hartlepool SENDIASS to others

Support Offered	
Of 18 parents,	
17	Report that the Information, Advice and Support provided was helpful
17	Report that they were satisfied with the service provided
17	Report that the service was very neutral, fair and unbiased
16	Report that the Information, Advice and Support provided has made a lot of difference
8	Report that they now feel that their child's needs are better understood than they were
1	Report that they now have a better relationship with their child's school or setting
1	Report that they now have a better relationship with the Local Authority SEN Team
13	Report that they now feel more confident
8	Report that they now feel more involved in decisions about their child's education
6	Report that they now are happier / less worried about their child's future
11	Report that they feel that their child has benefitted as a result of the service being involved
10	Report that they now have a greater understanding of SEN Law / The SEND Code of Practice 2015 and the arrangements that should be made for me/children and young people with SEN

***I just wanted to thank you again for your continued support :)***

***I genuinely can't express how grateful I am for SENDIASS supporting us. You's genuinely have been, and continue to be, a brilliant support throughout this whole journey. Your advice has been crucial for me, and also for validating I'm not a crazy emotional parent who's asking for too much!***

***You're fantastic at your job! As a parent you can tell that you genuinely care about the children you help us with, and that's more rare than you'd think!***

***Thankyou :)***

***Parent feedback abstract***



# SENDIASS Annual Report 2024-2025

## Parents/ Carers, Children & Young People's Service Feedback Continued

*"Our daughter, has a SEN passport in school and has struggled with various aspects of her disabilities since going into secondary school. As parents we have found trying to ensure she has the same rights to education as her peers in mainstream school extremely challenging.*

*We were informed of the support we could access from SENDIASS and reached out for this. The support we have received from SENDIASS has been exceptional. The service has given us guidance on our rights as parents and our daughter's rights as a young person. They have explained the legalities around EHCP's and supported us with any information, advice, and guidance we have needed throughout the processes of applying for an EHC needs assessment. We have found the EHC needs assessment processes extremely stressful as a family.*

*SENDIASS has supported us through these processes throughout and given us reassurances and guidance whenever we have needed this. This has been at every stage, from reviewing SEN support, submitting the original EHC needs assessment request, mediation and tribunal processes. They have always been very responsive throughout all processes and ensured that we have the correct paperwork needed for the different processes we have gone through, which has helped alleviate stressful situations for us as a family.*

*The LA have agreed to concede both their original decision, and decision at mediation to decline an EHC needs assessment for our daughter without having to continue with the tribunal appeal process. As we are now in the processes of her having an EHC needs assessment. We are hopeful our daughter will be granted an EHCP and SENDIASS continues to support us a family.*

*We would just like to put on record our heartfelt thanks to SENDIASS for the amazing support they have shown us and the support they continue to show."*

*Parent feedback abstract*

**Please contact us** if you need any further information regarding our report **OR** if you need any information, advice and support, **we are here to help!**

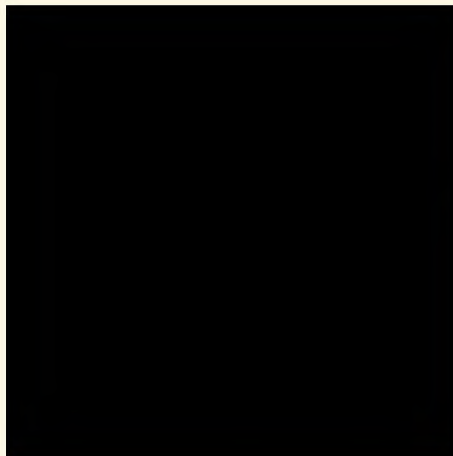
**Opening Times** Monday - Friday from 9:30am - 4:30pm

**Call us** 01429 - 284876

Please leave a message on our 24hr voicemail system with your contact details and request a call-back

**Or Email us** [sendiass@hartlepool.gov.uk](mailto:sendiass@hartlepool.gov.uk)

**Or visit our website (Scan the QR code below)**



We endeavour to respond to all queries as soon as possible, but please be aware this could be up to 7 working days.  
Alternatively, if we are not available you may wish to contact the National Contact Helpline by calling **0808 8083555** or visit their website in our absence.

**Visit [Contact.org.uk](https://www.contact.org.uk)**



# CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

2 DECEMBER 2025



**Subject:** CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT 2024/25

**Report of:** Executive Director of Children's Services

**Decision Type:** For information

## 1. COUNCIL PLAN PRIORITY

**Hartlepool will be a place:**

- where people live healthier, safe and independent lives. (People)

## 2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 To present to members the Annual Report of Children's Social Care Complaints and Compliments 2024/25.

## 3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Annual Complaints and Compliments Report provides information on the complaints for children's social care and public health. It summarises information in relation to complaints that have been received and responded to, as well as compliments received during the reporting period.

## 4. PROPOSALS/OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- 4.1 The report is attached as **Appendix 1** and provides an analysis of complaints and compliments during the reporting period. The report outlines where learning has occurred from complaints and actions implemented as a result.
- 4.2 The report includes:
- Complaints and compliments received in 2024/25;
  - Outcomes of complaints;
  - Actions undertaken following findings; and

- Complaints considered by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman in 2024/25.
- 4.3 During 2024/25, 4 compliments have been recorded relating to children's social care which is a decrease of 6 compliments from the previous year. These range from an expression of thanks and appreciation in the form of a thank-you card to written communication.
- 4.4 A total of 76 complaints were received in 2024/25. Of these, 60 complaints were statutory complaints which was an increase of 2 complaints from the previous year. Of the 60 statutory complaints received, 25 complaints were not considered further leaving 35 for investigation, overall the same number of statutory complaints have been investigated in 2024/25 as in the previous year.
- 4.5 Of the 16 complaints received in 2024/25 which were in the scope of the corporate complaints procedure about children's social care, 4 complaints were not considered further leaving 12 complaints for further consideration. This is an increase of 8 complaints from the previous year.
- 4.6 Details of the different stages of investigation are included within the annual report (Appendix A).

## 5. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS/IMPLICATIONS

<b>RISK IMPLICATIONS</b>	None
<b>FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS</b>	None
<b>SUBSIDY CONTROL</b>	None
<b>LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS</b>	Children's social care complaints are managed in accordance with the Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 and statutory guidance. Public Health complaints are managed in accordance with NHS Bodies and Local Authorities (Partnership Arrangements, Care Trusts, Public Health and Local Healthwatch) Regulations 2012.
<b>SINGLE IMPACT ASSESSMENT</b>	N/A
<b>STAFF CONSIDERATIONS</b>	None

<b>ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS</b>	None
<b>ENVIRONMENT, SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATIONS</b>	None
<b>CONSULTATION</b>	Not required

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 That members of Children's Services Committee note the contents of the Annual Report of Complaints and Compliments 2024/25 and that the report will be published online.

## 7. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 It is a statutory requirement that an Annual Report regarding complaints is prepared and presented to the relevant Policy Committee and published on the Council's website.

## 8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 8.1 None

## 9. CONTACT OFFICERS

Rebecca Stephenson, Head of Service Quality and Review

Tel:01429 284134

[Rebecca.stephenson@hartlepool.gov.uk](mailto:Rebecca.stephenson@hartlepool.gov.uk)

Sign Off:-

Managing Director	Date: 14.11.2025
Director of Finance, IT and Digital	Date: 14.11.2025
Director of Legal, Governance and HR	Date: 14.11.2025



# **Children's and Joint Commissioning Services**

## **Annual Report 2024/25**



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## Executive Summary

In accordance with the Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006, this annual report covers the complaints received about children's social care services during the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025. The Statutory Guidance '*Getting the best from complaints*' sets out which children's social care functions can be considered under the regulations. Those complaints which fall outside of social care functions defined under the regulations, follow the Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure.

To provide a complete picture about the complaints investigated in children's social care during 2024/25, we have included all the complaints received in this annual report regardless of which complaints procedure was followed.

Additionally, in accordance with the statutory requirement to produce an annual report which covers statutory complaints about public health functions, complaints received about public health in 2024/25 are also included within this report.

How children's social care and public health respond to complaints and any learning arising from them is an integral part of service development and continuous improvement. This also aligns with being open, transparent and accountable.

The complaints received in children's social care and public health functions serve to provide wider lessons about the quality of services provided. This annual report will be published on the Council's website.

### Summary for 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 – Children's social care

- 75% of complaints were received electronically in 2024/25.
- 76 complaints were received in 2024/25. Of these, 60 complaints were defined as statutory complaints which is an increase of 2 statutory complaints received from the previous year. The remaining 16 complaints received in 2024/25 were defined as corporate complaints.
- Of the 60 statutory complaints received in 2024/25, 25 statutory complaints were not considered further leaving 35 statutory complaints for investigation. Overall, the same number of statutory complaints have been investigated in 2024/25 as in the previous year.
- Of the 16 corporate complaints received in 2024/25, 4 corporate complaints were not considered further leaving 12 corporate complaints for consideration. This is an increase of 8 compared to the previous year.
- 3 complainants referred their complaint about children's social care on to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman in 2024/25.
- 1 of the 35 statutory complaints investigated in 2024/25 remained ongoing as at 31 March 2025 and has been carried forward to 2025/26.

- 4 compliments were received about children's social care in 2024/25 compared to 10 compliments received in 2023/24.

### **Summary for 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 – Public health functions**

- 4 statutory complaints were received about a public health function in 2024/25 which was an increase of 3 compared to the previous year.
- 75% of complaints were received electronically in 2024/25.
- No contact or enquiry was received from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman about its public health functions in 2024/25.

## Children's Social Care

### 1. Introduction

In accordance with the Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006, this section of the annual report covers the complaints received about children's social care services during the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

The Statutory Guidance '*Getting the best from complaints*' sets out which children's social care functions can be considered under the regulations. When a complaint is received, a decision needs to be taken regarding which part of the Children Act 1989 or the Adoption and Children Act 2002 the service being complained about falls under. If it is decided the service being complained about falls outside of social care functions which can be considered under the regulations, the complaint follows the Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure.

Generally, the following areas should be considered under the children's social care statutory complaints regulations:

- Children in need;
- Children in our care;
- Special Guardianship support; and
- Post-adoption support.

The areas which tend to be exempt from the statutory children's social care regulations are:

- Early Help;
- Child protection (including S47 enquiries and conferences);
- Assessments of potential foster carers and adopters;
- Foster carer registration; and
- Complaints about private law proceedings (Section 7 and Section 37 Court Reports).

If a complaint is received which spans both the included and excluded areas of the children's social care statutory complaint regulations, all elements of the complaint are considered under the statutory complaint regulations. This ensures a complainant is not at a disadvantage in any way between the overlap.

To provide a complete picture about the complaints investigated and, where appropriate, redress made in children's social care, this annual report includes all the complaints received in 2024/25 regardless of which complaints procedure was followed. Complaint outcomes provide evidence of the action taken to learn from the complaints received and drive continuous improvement.

Complaints and compliments are valued as an important source of feedback in helping to improve the quality of children's social care services. The service encourages



complaints as a means of continuous assessment of the quality of services provided. The feedback received from compliments about children's social care services during 2024/25 is also included in this report.

This annual report sets out:

- An overview of the complaints received about children's social care;
- An analysis of the complaints and compliments received by children's social care services during the reporting period;
- An overview of the children's social care complaints adjudicated upon by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman during the reporting period; and
- Highlights the action taken and improvements made to children's social care services following complaint investigations.

### 2. What is a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about any aspect of a service that is being delivered, or the failure to deliver a service. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman define a complaint as *“an expression of dissatisfaction about a council service (whether that service is provided directly by the council or on its behalf by a contractor or partner) that requires a response.”*

### 3. Who can make a complaint about children's social care?

A complaint can be made by:

- A child or young person;
- A parent or carer;
- Special Guardians;
- A person wishing to adopt a child; and
- Any other person who the Council considers has sufficient interest in the child or young person's welfare to warrant their representation being considered.

### 4. How can someone make a complaint about children's social care?

There are a number of ways a person can make a complaint. Children's social care services has a publicly accessible factsheet which outlines the various ways someone can make a complaint together with information about the children's social care complaints procedure. A complaint can be made:

- Verbally in person or by telephone; or
- In writing by letter or by filling in our complaint form and posting it to us;

- Electronically by email or by filling in our online complaint form through the Council's website.

Every effort is made to assist a person in making a complaint and any member of staff can take a complaint.

### 5. Method used to submit a complaint about children's social care in 2024/25

For complaints received about children's social care during 2024/25, 75% were received electronically. The method of contact is broken down as follows:



32% of complaints received were from someone who used the online electronic complaint form.



43% of complaints received were from someone who sent an email to make a complaint.



13% of complaints received were from someone who telephoned to make a complaint.



12% of complaints received were from someone who posted a letter or complaint form to us.

### 6. Children's social care statutory complaints procedure

The children's social care complaint function sits within the Quality and Review Team under the management of the Head of Service (Quality and Review). The remit of the Complaints Manager's function is to:

- Develop, manage and administer the children's social care complaints procedure;
- Provide assistance and advice to those persons who wish to make a complaint;
- Oversee the investigation of complaints;
- Monitor and report on complaints activity; and
- Support and train staff.

The Regulations and Statutory Guidance set out a 12 month time limit for a person to make a complaint from when the subject matter being complained about occurred. After this time, a complaint will not normally be considered although there is discretion to accept a complaint after the 12 month time limit if the Council is satisfied that the complainant had good reason(s) for not making the complaint sooner and it is still possible to investigate the complaint effectively and fairly. If a child or young person makes a complaint, they are offered the services of an advocate to enable their views to be effectively heard and promoted.

There are three stages to the complaints procedure which is fully embedded in practice. These are:

- **Stage 1 – Local Resolution**

The aim of Stage 1 is to sort out the matter as quickly as possible. The complaint will be allocated to a manager who will look into the issue raised and respond to the complaint, in writing, within 10 working days. However, if there are a number of issues to look into, the timescale can be extended up to 20 working days.

- **Stage 2 – Investigation**

If the complainant is unhappy after their complaint has been responded to at Stage 1 or if the Council and the complainant believe it would not be appropriate to consider the complaint at Stage 1, the complaint can move directly to Stage 2. An investigation is conducted by an Investigating Officer who must be independent of the service area or the decision making being complained about. Sometimes, an Investigating Officer external to the Council is appointed when the issues complained about are complex, have a number of elements to them or there is sufficient justification to appoint an Independent Investigating Officer. An Independent Person (who must be external to the Council) is also appointed at Stage 2. This is a statutory role and the Independent Person works alongside the Investigating Officer with a remit to ensure the process is open, transparent and fair. The separate reports completed by the Investigating Officer and Independent Person are submitted to an Adjudicating Officer (usually the Assistant Director) for response. The investigation and adjudication process should be concluded within 65 working days.

- **Stage 3 – Independent Complaint Review Panel**

If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint at Stage 2, they can request the complaint is heard at a Complaint Review Panel. The Panel is made up of an Independent Chair and 2 Independent Panelists. It is their role to:

- consider the investigation and adjudication carried out at Stage 2;
- reach findings on each element of complaint being reviewed; and
- make any recommendations including redress if appropriate.

The Panel should be held within 40 working days from the complainant's request to progress to Stage 3. Within 5 working days of the Panel meeting, the Panel must send their decision and any recommendations to the Executive Director of Children's Services. The Executive Director is then required to make a formal response to the findings and any recommendations made within 15 working days of receiving the Panel's decision.

If at the end of Stage 3 the complainant remains unhappy with the outcome or the way in which their complaint has been handled, they may ask the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO), the independent body who look into complaints about Councils, to investigate their complaint. A complainant can approach the LGSCO at any time about their complaint but in these circumstances the LGSCO usually refer them back to the Council for their complaint to complete the relevant complaints procedure before they intervene. Similarly, the time limit for raising a complaint with the LGSCO is 12 months but, like Councils, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman may choose to waive the time limit if there is good reason to do so.

Learning from complaints is shared and discussed within relevant management forums and continuous improvement group to ensure that the improvements identified are cascaded throughout the workforce.

## 7. Compliments received about children's social care in 2024/25

During 2024/25, 4 compliments were received relating to children's social care services which was a decrease of 6 compliments from the previous year. The compliments are an expression of thanks and appreciation in the form of a thank-you card or written communication. The table below outlines the compliments received during the reporting period.

Additionally, feedback from parents and carers about a service they have received from children's social care is embedded in the routine practice audits conducted as part of children's social care quality framework which drives continuous improvement. The comments received from parents and carers are largely very positive and broadly reflect the work that is being delivered across children's social care.

Service area	Compliment
Independent Reviewing Officer	<i>"thank you for the support and understanding you have given to her ,and that you helped her voice her words..."</i>
Children's Hub	<i>"We just wanted to send an email to say thank you and express our gratitude for all of your help, efficient communication and assessment of a Safeguarding situation. I spoke to 'S' from the CHUB who was extremely helpful and arranged for Social Workers to come to assess the situation. Two of duty social workers came to the department and were amazingly helpful....."</i>
Safeguarding, Assessment and Support Team	<i>"We would like to give 'L' a massive thank you for all of the support our family has received with the care and attention understanding of our difficult case including hours of their time in our home for many hours is unusual but was needed and they provided for us we are so grateful of what we thought were impossible became possible our lives have changed greatly because they listened and took a hard look at who we really are and how great we can be we couldn't of asked for more it is outstanding wish more services were this amazing."</i>
Children's Hub	<i>"just a little thank you note to say I really appreciate you taking the time to listen to my worries and concerns. I am now in a much better place."</i>



## 8. Complaints received about children's social care in 2024/25

A total of 76 complaints were received during 2024/25. Of these, 60 complaints were within the scope of the statutory complaints procedure which is an increase of 2 complaints from the previous year. The remaining 16 complaints received in 2024/25 were within the scope of the corporate complaints procedure which is an increase of 4 complaints from the previous year.

There were 2 statutory complaints that were carried forward to 2024/25 from 2023/24. Of these:

- 1 statutory complaint concluded following the completion of Stage 2; and
- A Stage 3 Complaint Review Panel was held in the case of the remaining statutory complaint. Following the conclusion of Stage 3, the complainant progressed their complaint onto the LGSCO. The LGSCO decided not to investigate the complaint because further investigation would not lead to a different outcome.

### Statutory complaints procedure

Of the 60 statutory complaints received in 2024/25, 25 statutory complaints were not considered further leaving 35 statutory complaints for investigation. Overall, the same number of statutory complaints have been investigated in 2024/25 as in the previous year.

Of the 25 statutory complaints not considered further, this was because:

- 9 statutory complaints received were not accepted because the person making the complaint did not meet the 'who may complain' eligibility set out in statutory guidance. The Council outlined its reason for not accepting the complaint and signposted each complainant to the LGSCO if they remained unhappy with the Council's decision not to accept their complaint.
- 8 statutory complaints related to ongoing or concluded public law court proceedings. Any dissatisfaction about matters before the Family Court cannot be considered within the statutory complaints framework. These should be raised during the court proceedings before decisions are reached by a Judge or, in the case of disagreement with a decision made by the Family Court, via the legal appeal process. Each complainant was informed that their representation could not be considered under the statutory complaints procedure and was signposted to the LGSCO if they remained unhappy with the Council's decision not to investigate their complaint.
- 4 statutory complaints were withdrawn by the complainant who had decided they no longer wished for their dissatisfaction to be addressed within the statutory complaints framework.

- 1 statutory complaint was withdrawn by the Council when the complainant did not communicate further despite repeated efforts by the Council to engage with the complainant.
- 1 statutory complaint was received outside the time limit to make a complaint and there was no justifiable reason to exercise discretion to consider the complaint. The Council outlined its reason for not accepting the complaint and signposted the complainant to the LGSCO if they remained unhappy with the Council's decision.
- 1 statutory complaint was handled within a separate appeal process. This provided a suitable route for reconsideration of the decision being complained about and served to resolve the complainant's dissatisfaction.
- 1 statutory complaint was not accepted because the matters being complained about related to another Council. The complainant was signposted to the correct Council to handle their complaint.

There was 1 complainant from the 25 statutory complaints whose complaints were not considered further who progressed their complaint onto the LGSCO. The LGSCO decided that the Council had considered its discretionary powers to investigate a late complaint and was not at fault when it reached its decision to refuse to investigate it.

Of the 35 statutory complaints investigated in 2024/25:

- The table below outlines the subject matter of the complaint investigated.

Complaint subject matter	2024/25
Quality of service	7
Communication	6
Attitude, behaviour or lack of support by a worker	6
Assessment	4
Inappropriate sharing of information or accuracy of information	4
Care Planning	3
Delay/lack of timely response	3
Family Time	1
Foster Care	1

<b>Total number of complaints investigated</b>	<b>35</b>
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- 30 statutory complaints were received from a parent;
- 5 statutory complaints were received from a grandparent or another relative; and
- There were no complaints received from a child or young person in 2024/25.

Of these, 34 statutory complaints were responded to at Stage 1 in the first instance whereas the remaining 1 statutory complaint progressed directly to Stage 2. Of the 34 statutory complaints which were responded at Stage 1:

- 28 statutory complaints were resolved at Stage 1; and
- 6 statutory complaints progressed to Stage 2.

Of the 7 statutory complaints which were investigated at Stage 2:

- 6 statutory complaints have concluded the Stage 2 process; and
- 1 statutory complaint has not yet concluded the Stage 2 process.

Of the 6 statutory complaints which have concluded the Stage 2 process, 2 complainants requested their complaint progress to Stage 3 Complaint Review Panel. In both cases, the Stage 3 process has fully concluded and the complainants were signposted to the LGSCO if they remain dissatisfied. The 1 statutory complaint that has not yet concluded the Stage 2 process will be carried forward and the outcome reported in 2025/26.

### **Corporate complaints procedure**

Of the 16 complaints received in 2024/25 which were within the scope of the corporate complaints procedure, 4 corporate complaints were not considered further leaving 12 corporate complaints for further consideration. Overall, the number of corporate complaints considered further in 2024/25 has increased by 8 compared to the previous year.

Of the 4 corporate complaints not considered further, this was because:

- 2 corporate complaints received related to ongoing or concluded private law court proceedings. Any dissatisfaction about matters before the Family Court cannot be considered within the corporate complaints framework. These should be raised during the court proceedings before decisions are reached by a Judge or, in the case of disagreement with a decision made by the Family Court, via the legal appeal process;
- 1 corporate complaint received was not accepted because the person making the complaint did not have the consent of the person who was eligible to make the complaint to act on their behalf. The Council outlined its reason for not accepting the complaint and signposted the complainant to the LGSCO if they remained unhappy with the Council's decision; and



- 1 corporate complaint was received outside the time limit to make a complaint and it was determined there was no justifiable reason to exercise discretion to consider the late complaint. The Council outlined its reasons for not accepting the complaint and signposted the complainant to the LGSCO if they remained unhappy with the Council's decision.

There was 1 complainant from the 4 corporate complaints whose complaints were not considered further who progressed their complaint onto the LGSCO. The LGSCO decided that regardless of there being no good reason for the delay in bringing the complaint, the matters were too intertwined with court proceedings and the LGSCO could not achieve the outcome the sought by the complainant.

Of the 12 corporate complaints investigated in 2024/25:

- The table below outlines the service area concerned.

Service area	2024/25
Child protection function (including referral, S47 enquiries and Conferences)	11
Local Authority Designated Officer function	1
<b>Total number of complaints investigated</b>	<b>12</b>

- 10 corporate complaints were received from a parent or carer;
- 1 corporate complaint was received from a grandparent or another relative; and
- 1 corporate complaint was received from a person who may have been affected by a decision made.

Of the 12 corporate complaints investigated:

- 4 corporate complaints were resolved to the complainant's satisfaction without recourse to investigation; and
- 8 corporate complaints were investigated and responded to. In these cases, each complainant was signposted to the LGSCO if they remained unhappy with the Council's response.

## **9. Complaints referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman about children's social care complaints in 2024/25**

The LGSCO is the independent body who looks into complaints about Councils. There were 3 complainants who approached the LGSCO about children's social care complaints in 2024/25 compared to 9 complainants in 2023/24. Of these, 2 complaints were within the scope of the statutory complaints procedure and the remaining complaint was within the scope of the corporate complaints procedure.

The outcome of these 3 complaints considered by the LGSCO has already been reported upon at earlier stages of this report. In summary, the LGSCO was satisfied further investigation was not required in all cases.

## 10. Actions and improvements from children's social care complaints investigated in 2023/24

An integral part of complaints management is ensuring that when service delivery failures are identified, proportionate and timely action is taken to remedy any personal injustice to the complainant and action is taken to improve the quality of service being provided.

The table below provides some examples of the complaints received during the reporting period and the actions taken as a result.

Complaint	Actions taken
<p>The complainant (a parent) expressed their dissatisfaction about family time with their child as well as a lack of communication from the Social Worker despite their frequent contact.</p> <p>The complaint was resolved at Stage 1.</p>	<p>Explanations were provided to the complainant for each area of complaint raised.</p> <p>The Team Manager reviewed the family time arrangements and agreed this could be progressed from indirect to direct contact. An apology was provided for the inconvenience faced around contact with the Social Worker and another telephone number was provided should any further difficulties be encountered in the future.</p> <p>This resolved matters for the complainant.</p>
<p>The complainant (a parent) was unhappy that they were not contacted in a timely manner about a child and family assessment in relation to their child.</p> <p>The complaint was concluded at the Stage 2 process.</p>	<p>Following investigation of the complaint, an apology was provided to the complainant, and a service improvement was made to the case supervision template to include a question about whether all those with parental responsibility for a child had been contacted and, if not, what attempts had been made to do so.</p> <p>The complainant was satisfied with the action taken to address their complaint.</p>
<p>The complainant (a parent) was unhappy about inaccurate information being shared in a meeting and documented within a child-in-need plan.</p> <p>The complaint was resolved at Stage 1.</p>	<p>An explanation was provided to the complainant about how the inaccurate information had happened.</p> <p>An apology was given and action taken to correct the documented information and inform the meeting attendees that the</p>

	<p>information shared had been factually incorrect.</p> <p>This addressed matters to the complainant's satisfaction.</p>
<p>The complainant (a parent) expressed that they had not received the full amount of family time with their children that they were entitled to.</p> <p>The complaint was resolved at Stage 1.</p>	<p>A Team Manager spoke to the complainant and explained how family time during school term time is sometimes shorter but this is extended during the school holidays to enable fun activities with the children.</p> <p>The complainant was satisfied with the explanation given.</p>
<p>The complainant (a relative) expressed their dissatisfaction about care planning options not being fully explored before a decision was reached as well as poor communication with the Social Worker.</p> <p>The complaint concluded the Stage 2 process.</p>	<p>An explanation was provided to the complainant in relation to the care planning and how the decision had been reached which the complainant accepted.</p> <p>Social Workers were reminded to share important information with families within 2 weeks of a decision being reached.</p>

## 11. Conclusion

As part of the complaint handling process during 2024/25, Children's Services have reviewed the number of Officers trained to investigate complaints and will be expanding the training to a wider number of Officers in 2025/26.

The Council's Children's Services will continue to monitor its complaint handling process and performance so that it can further improve the experience for someone making a complaint and continue to make every complaint count as a learning opportunity to improve the quality of Children's Services.

## Public Health Functions

### 1. Introduction

In accordance with the NHS Bodies and Local Authorities (Partnership Arrangements, Care Trusts, Public Health and Local Healthwatch) Regulations 2012, this section of the annual report covers the complaints received about public health functions during the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

The statutory complaints procedure sets out that complaints about public health functions include:

- the Council's public health functions which the Director of Public Health has responsibility for; and
- the provision of services by a service provider for its public health functions.

### 2. What is a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about any aspect of a service that is being delivered, or the failure to deliver a service. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman define a complaint as *“an expression of dissatisfaction about a council service (whether that service is provided directly by the council or on its behalf by a contractor or partner) that requires a response.”*

### 3. Who can make a complaint about a public health function?

A complaint can be made by:

- A person who receives or has received a service;
- A person who has been refused a service for which they think they are eligible for;
- A person who is, or is likely to be, affected by the action, decision or omission of the service which is the subject of the complaint; or
- Someone acting on the person's behalf (including acting on behalf of a child).

#### 4. How can someone make a complaint about a public health function?

There are a number of ways a person can make a complaint. There is a publicly accessible complaint form which outlines the various ways someone can make a complaint.

A complaint can be made:

- Verbally in person or by telephone;
- In writing by letter or by filling in our complaint form and posting it to us; or
- Electronically by email or by filling in our online complaint form through the Council's website.

Every effort is made to assist a person in making a complaint and any member of staff can take a complaint.

#### 5. Public health statutory complaints procedure

The public health complaint function sits within the Quality and Review Team under the management of the Head of Service (Quality and Review).

Good complaint handling involves:

- Keeping the complainant informed and at the centre of the complaint process;
- Being open, accountable and transparent;
- Responding to complaints in a way that is fair and reasonable;
- Being committed to try and get things right when they have gone wrong; and
- Seeking to continually improve services.

Staff will always try to resolve problems or concerns before they escalate into complaints and this ensures that, wherever possible, complaints are kept to a minimum.

The NHS Bodies and Local Authorities (Partnership Arrangements, Care Trusts, Public Health and Local Healthwatch) Regulations 2012:

- Sets a 12 month time limit from when the subject matter being complained about occurred or came to the attention of the person making the complaint, to when a complaint may be made. After this time, a complaint will not normally be considered although there is discretion to accept a complaint after the 12 month time limit if the Council is satisfied that the complainant had good reason(s) for not making the complaint within the time limit and it is still possible to investigate the complaint effectively and fairly.
- Places a duty on the Council's public health functions and NHS bodies to coordinate the handling of complaints received across their respective jurisdictions and provide a joint response;

- Allows for a service provider to respond to a complaint under these regulations;
- Sets a mandatory timescale of 3 working days to acknowledge receipt of a complaint; and
- Allows for a maximum 6 month timescale to investigate and respond to a complaint.

Some complaints can take considerably longer to investigate than others and the statutory timescale provides a flexible approach to complaint response times dependent upon the nature and complexity of the complaint. The person allocated to investigate a complaint usually seeks to negotiate the time period for responding to the complaint with the complainant wherever possible. There are a range of factors that can impact upon a timescale such as whether the complaint spans more than one body, the number of points of complaint for investigation, the availability of key people and conducting interviews, reading material relevant to the complaint, consideration of all available information and writing a report or proportionate response.

If, at the end of the public health complaints procedure, the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome or in the way which their complaint has been handled, they may refer their complaint on to the LGSCO, the independent body who looks into complaints about Councils.

Learning from complaints is shared and discussed within relevant management forums to ensure that the improvements identified are cascaded throughout the workforce.

### 6. Complaints received about public health functions in 2024/25

There were 4 statutory complaints received during 2024/25 about a public health function. This is an increase of 3 from the previous year.

Of these 4 statutory complaints:

- 1 statutory complaint that was sent to the Council as part of a wider complaint made by the complainant to another NHS body, whilst the remaining 3 statutory complaints were received electronically;
- 3 statutory complaints were received from a parent of a child in relation to the Health Visiting/School Nursing services. These functions sit within the Early Help service area. The remaining statutory complaint was received from an individual who was in receipt of a service from the drug and alcohol treatment and recovery service;
- 1 statutory complaint was withdrawn by the complainant who had decided they no longer wished for their dissatisfaction to be addressed within the statutory complaints framework; and
- 1 statutory complaint was resolved to the complainant's satisfaction without recourse to investigation leaving 2 statutory complaints for investigation.

### **7. Complaints referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman about public health complaints in 2024/25**

The LGSCO is the independent body who looks into complaints about Councils. The Council received no contact or enquiry from the LGSCO about its public health functions during 2024/25.

### **8. Conclusion**

The service will continue to promote the statutory public health complaints procedure and make every complaint count as a learning opportunity to improve the quality of our public health functions.