



Hartlepool
Borough Council

Children's Services Committee Agenda

Tuesday 10 March 2026

Time: 4.00 pm

Location: Council Chamber

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 To receive the Minutes and Decision Record in respect of the meeting held on 3 February 2026 (previously published and circulated).

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.
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4. Budget And Policy Framework Items

4.1 None.

5. Key Decisions

- 5.1 2026-27 Schools' Capital Works Programme – *Executive Director, Childrens Services*
- 5.2 Dedicated Schools Grant – High Needs Block 2026/27 – *Executive Director of Childrens Services and Director of Finance, IT and Digital*

6. Other Items Requiring Decision

- 6.1 Carers Strategy 2026-2031 – *Executive Director of Childrens Services*
- 6.2 2027-28 School Term and Holiday Dates - *Executive Director, Childrens Services*
- 6.3 Corporate Parent Forum – Proposed Changes – *Executive Director, Children's Services*

7. Items for information

8. Any other business which the chair considers urgent

For Information

Date of next meeting – to be confirmed



Children’s Services Committee

10 March 2026

Report of: Executive Director, Children’s Services

Subject: 2026-27 SCHOOLS’ CAPITAL WORKS PROGRAMME

Decision Type: Key: CJCS 106/26

1. Council Plan Priority

Hartlepool will be a place:
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. The purpose of this report is to seek approval to the 2026/27 Schools’ Capital Works Programme, as detailed in confidential **APPENDIX A**, in order to progress the design and detailed costing exercise in time for the majority of projects to be carried out during the summer holiday period. **This item contains exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006) namely, information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).**

3. Background

- 3.1. Each Spring term, the Department for Education (DfE) announces capital funding allocations, these being School Condition Allocations (SCA) – formerly known as Capital Maintenance - and Devolved Formula Capital (DFC), for the school estate in Hartlepool.
- 3.2. At the time of writing this report, capital funding allocations had not been communicated to the LA, however, the DfE have previously stated that SCA allocations for a current year would be indicative of the funding that responsible bodies will receive in future years and further stated that SCA will be revised annually to reflect any schools moving to a different responsible body e.g. converting to academy status, opening or closing. This financial year, two schools converted to academy status therefore the funding allocation is expected to reflect these conversions.

4. Proposals

- 4.1. The proposed programme of school condition works has been compiled on the basis of those areas/sections of school buildings which are showing clear signs of failure and those aspects which will prevent possible loss of school days due to emergency school closures.

5. Funding

- 5.1. School Condition Allocation is a grant to the LA for all maintained community schools and is aimed at addressing condition needs in existing school premises, but does not include academies who receive funding from a Condition Improvement Fund, direct from the Education & Skills Funding Agency.
- 5.2. Devolved Formula Capital is a relatively limited capital allocation made directly to schools via the LA to support small scale projects and ICT development. Schools often use this allocation to fund their 10% contributions to larger capital schemes
- 5.3. This report is seeking approval for the schemes proposed in confidential **APPENDIX A** and will be funded from all available funding. Schools are also expected to contribute a minimum of 10% towards the condition schemes.
- 5.4. Detailed in Table 1 below is the total funding available for works. Table 2 details the costs of proposed schemes, the contingency sum for 2026/27 and the total funding required. Members are asked to approve the works and contingency sum totalling £956,875. There is still some funding to prioritise and these works will be brought back to Committee for consideration. The

programme will be carefully managed to ensure there is no risk of overspending the funding available.

Table 1

26/27 SCA Funding*	580,000
25/26 Unallocated	362,733
25/26 Unused Contingency	100,000
10% School contributions	83,687
Total Available	1,126,420

Table 2

Condition schemes	836,875
Contingency	120,000
Total Required	956,875

6. Contingency

- 6.1. As in previous years, the overall programme recommended to Committee for approval includes a separate contingency fund which has been allocated from the SCA. This will continue to ensure that urgent but unforeseen items can be addressed, should the need arise.
- 6.2. Other than in response to an emergency situation, there will be no significant variation to the programme of works as detailed in confidential **APPENDIX A**.
- 6.3. There was no call on the 2025/26 contingency, therefore it is added to the 2026/27 funding allocation.

7. Procurement

- 7.1 All works of a non-specialist nature will be offered to the in-house Construction Team. If they decline, then the works will be externally procured in accordance with the Council’s procurement rules.
- 7.2. All in-house work that utilises subcontractors and suppliers or work of a specialist nature will be procured in accordance with the Council’s procurement rules.

8. Other Considerations/Implications

Risk Implications	The proposed programme of school condition works has been compiled on the basis of those areas/sections of school buildings which are showing clear signs of failure and those aspects which will prevent possible loss of school days due to emergency school closures.
Financial Considerations	If the schemes detailed in the attached confidential APPENDIX A are approved, funding can be met

	from the 2026/27 Schools Condition Allocation and current unallocated capital funding.
Subsidy Control	There are none.
Legal Considerations	There are no legal considerations.
Single Impact Assessment	There are none.
Staff Considerations	There are none.
Asset Management Considerations	The report is concerned with the condition, protection and development of Council assets i.e. school buildings.
Environment, Sustainability and Climate Change Considerations	There are none.
Consultation	A draft list of condition priorities were noted at Schools Capital Sub Group meeting of the 29 th January 2026.

9. Recommendations

9.1. Members are recommended to:

- a) Approve the schedule of 2026/27 capital works programme as summarised in confidential **APPENDIX A**, subject to the LA agreeing contributions from schools towards individual schemes in line with the shared funding principles established by the Schools Forum

These items contain exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006) namely, information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

- b) Allow the Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Chair of this Committee, dispensation and discretion to authorise works where an emergency (e.g. risk of school closure) or a significant health and safety risk is exposed.

10. Reasons for Recommendations

10.1. To ensure schools are safe and operational and to enable the majority of works to be carried out during the summer holiday period.

11. Background Papers

11.1. There are no background papers.

12. Contact Officers

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Sign Off:-

Chief Executive	Date: 11.02.2026
Director of Finance, IT and Digital	Date: 12.02.2026
Director of Legal, Governance and HR	Date: 11.02.2026



Children's Services Committee

10 March 2026

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

Subject: DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT – HIGH NEEDS BLOCK 2026/27

Decision Type: Key: CJCS 174/25

1. Council Plan Priority

Hartlepool will be a place:

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

2. Purpose of Report

- 2.1. The purpose of this report is to provide details of the 2026/27 High Needs Block (HNB) funding allocation within the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and present the draft budget requirement for High Needs Block spending.
- 2.2. For the fourth consecutive year, Members are being asked to approve a budget requirement that exceeds the funding available. Funding available in 2026/27 is £18.954m against a budget requirement of £26.314m, a shortfall of £7.360m.
- 2.3. The report explains the necessity of the expenditure required in order to ensure the Council fulfils its responsibilities in educating pupils with SEND (Special Education Needs and Disabilities).

3. Background

- 3.1. The Department for Education (DfE) published National Funding Formula (NFF) allocations for 2026/27 on 17 December 2025. These included the initial HNB allocation.
- 3.2. Along with many other authorities, Hartlepool is continuing to experience spending pressures against the HNB. Despite significant increases in funding during financial years 2019/20 to 2023/24, meeting the needs of pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) continues to significantly exceed available funding.
- 3.3. From financial year 2023/24, a HNB budget exceeding the funding available was approved by Children's Services Committee. The budget shortfall for 2023/24 was £2.147m, with an actual shortfall of £2.348m. The budget shortfall for 2024/25 was £2.171m, against an actual shortfall of £3.598m. The budgeted shortfall for 2025/26 is £4.257m with a projected shortfall at quarter 3 of £5.416m.
- 3.4. At 31 March 2025, the overall Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit stood at £4.932m. This is expected to increase to £10.348m by this financial year end should the quarter 3 projection of £5.416m materialise. This is before consideration of any Early Year's Block underspend. At quarter 3, an underspend of £0.550m is anticipated against the Early Year's Block. Should this materialise at final outturn, the total deficit reserve would be £9.798m. The cost to the Local Authority General Fund from this overspend is circa £0.400m a year in lost investment interest.
- 3.5. Recent statements from government suggest a commitment to "fully fund" the costs of educating pupils with SEND once the statutory override comes to an end in March 2028. Further details are awaited, alongside the SEND White Paper which DfE state is due "early in the new year".
- 3.6. As the Council is now in a DSG deficit position, DfE require regular maintenance of a DSG Management Plan covering a 10-year period. The latest plan update suggests a provisional deficit position of £22m by 31 March 2028, which critically is when the statutory override provided through accounting regulations is scheduled to end.
- 3.7. In the Local Government final settlement issued on 9 February 2026, the government, subject to authorities meeting SEND reform conditions, have committed to fund 90% of the accrued DSG deficit up to 31 March 2026. Based on current projections, the Council would need to fund circa £1m.

- 3.8. For any new DSG debt accruing from 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2028, the government have announced they would take an “appropriate and proportionate approach, though it will not be unlimited”. A prudent estimate of the DSG deficit at 31 March 2028 would be £15m, suggesting the authority would need to fund at further £1.5m.

4. 2026/27 High Needs Block Funding

- 4.1. DfE informed authorities on 17 December 2025 that they have suspended the NFF (National Funding Formula) for High Needs in 2026/27. This information was not shared in advance. Instead, funding for this one financial year is effectively frozen at 2025/26 levels, other than the rolling in of separate grants that will need to be passed on to providers. **For clarity, this means that no inflation has been funded against the HNB in 2026/27.** Following wider reforms to the SEND system, which the government will set out in early 2026, DfE will review the methodology for allocating high needs funding so that it supports the SEND reforms.
- 4.2. The Hartlepool allocation before recoupment has increased by £1.290m, or 5.98%. However, this increase relates solely to the Core School Budget Grant (CSBG), National Insurance Contributions (NICs) grant and School Budget Support Grant (SBSG) being included. These separate grants were paid in addition to the High Needs Block allocation in 2025/26. Grant funding must be passed on to providers, meaning that none of the increased funding is available for growth or financial pressures in 2026/27.
- 4.3. In summary, the 2026 to 2027 high needs allocations will be the total of:
- funding received through the 2025 to 2026 high needs block of the DSG, excluding the import and export adjustments and place funding deductions
 - annualised 2025 to 2026 CSBG funding for independent special schools, specialist post-16 institutions, independent learning providers and hospital education provision, state funded special and AP (Alternative Provision) schools
 - 2026 to 2027 equivalent NICs grant and SBSG funding for places in special units and resource provision in mainstream schools
 - import and export adjustments for 2026 to 2027 (the initial calculation has the 2025 to 2026 import and export adjustment which is updated later in 2026)
 - place funding deductions for 2026 to 2027 (the initial calculation is based on 2025 to 2026 academic year place numbers, which are updated later in 2026)

- 4.4. The following table presents the high needs block allocation for 2026/27 published by DfE on 17 December 2025.

High Needs Block	2026/27 Funding £m
DSG High Needs Block Allocation (before academy place funding is deducted)	22.865
Recoupment for academy place funding	(4.108)
Net High Needs Funding 2026/27	18.760

- 4.5. There are several expected adjustments to the recoupment value of £4.108m shown in the table above. These are:
- Increase of 20 primary ARP places from September 2026;
 - Increase of 37 secondary special school places from September 2026;
 - Increase from 41 to 49 free school places from September 2026 (in line with DfE approved transition plan);
 - Increase of 5 places at post-16 from September 2026.
- 4.6. The revised High Needs funding (after recoupment) for 2026/27 after these adjustments is £18.453m.
- 4.7. At their meeting on 16 September 2025, Schools' Forum agreed to the transfer of 0.5% from Schools Block to the High Needs Block. Forum also agreed to transfer any residual funding from the Central School Services Block once the budget requirement had been met. The two funding transfers can now be confirmed as £0.454m and £0.047m respectively.
- 4.8. Therefore, the updated funding available (after recoupment), including block transfers is **£18.954m**.

5. 2026/27 Budget Requirement

- 5.1. The following table summarises the estimated budget requirement for 2026/27, with a comparison to 2025/26. The budget requirement exceeds available funding by **£7.360m**.
- 5.2. This budget gap would be temporarily funded by the Local Authority General Fund resulting in a further loss of investment interest of c£0.300m a year (total loss of income estimated at c£0.700m).

Budget Area	£m	£m	£m
	2025/26 Budget	2026/27 Proposed 2026/27 Budget	2026/27 Increase (+) / Decrease (-)
	£m	£m	£m
Independent Schools	5.283	5.235	(0.048)
Special Schools	6.136	7.994	1.858
Individual Pupil Support	3.453	4.620	1.167
ARPs Top Ups	2.022	2.685	0.663
Post-16 Top-ups	1.548	1.587	0.039
Horizon, Haven & AP	1.390	1.516	0.126
High Needs Block Services	0.713	0.735	0.022
LA Place Funding	0.696	0.717	0.021
Out of Area	0.442	0.384	(0.058)
HI/VI	0.251	0.251	-
Early Intervention	0.223	0.230	0.007
Strategic Changes	-	0.360	0.360
TOTAL	22.157	26.314	4.157

Block Funding Estimate	17.900	18.954
Funding gap	4.257	7.360

- 5.3. Comparison with regional authorities on funding of SEN top-up rates and annual increases has shown that Hartlepool is an outlier. Firstly, in 2025/26, regional authorities applied a nil increase to their top-up funding, with one exception funding a 0.5% increase. This is compared to Hartlepool's increase of 3%. Information shared across the region for 2026/27 gives a similar picture to 2025/26.
- 5.4. Secondly, benchmarking of Section 251 data using our SEND / AP (Alternative Provision) programme partner authorities has been undertaken to understand Hartlepool's position for top-up spending as a percentage of population. The comparison again shows Hartlepool funds top-ups to a greater extent.
- 5.5. In response to this, the authority is reconsidering its strategy for top-up rate increases from 2026/27. The proposed new strategy for increases would seek to match the increase in Individual School Budgets (ISBs) for 2026/27, ensuring consistency across funding streams and aligning Hartlepool increases to the regional position.
- 5.6. The average increase in ISBs for 2026/27 is 0.37%. Therefore, the authority is proposing a 0.37% increase to top-up rates in 2026/27. This includes all top-ups paid based on the SEND ranges (4i, 4ii, etc), along with special school cost model increases. The 0.37% proposal aligns with the average ISB

increase and with the regional position. As outlined in section 4, even an increase of 0.37% is unfunded by DfE.

- 5.7. The draft budgets included in this report assume the 0.37% increase in affected areas of provision.

6. Assumptions Underpinning the 2026/27 Budget Requirement

- 6.1. Each budget area is outlined in more detail in the paragraphs that follow.

6.2. Independent Schools

This year's budget	£5.282m
Projected Outturn	£5.166m
Next year's budget proposal	£5.235m

Rolling current commitments for placements forward to 2026/27 gives an estimated cost of £4.396m. Increasingly, the commitments against Independent School costs are being driven by social care need. Allowing for 8 new placements and 1 high-cost placement during 2026/27, plus cost inflation of 5% gives a budget requirement of £5.325m. DfE grant funding of £0.090m to support cost inflation is expected in 2026/27 (within the £1.290m increase outlined in paragraph 3.2), resulting in a net budget requirement of £5.235m.

Independent school fees are the key area of mitigation in the DSG Management Plan as we aim to reduce the need for costly placements outside of the town wherever possible. The SEMH (Social, Emotional, Mental Health) Free School has several pupils on roll that would otherwise have been placed in an Independent School at a significantly higher cost. Officers have quantified the estimated total cost avoided by placing pupils at the Free School and this is included in the DSG Management Plan. For 2026/27, the cost avoided is estimated at £1.213m.

The budget requirement assumes a total of 71 placements at an average cost of £75k per placement.

6.3. Special Schools

This year's budget	£6.136m
Projected Outturn	£6.212m
Next year's budget proposal	£7.994m

This budget area includes the cost arrangements for Catcote and Springwell schools that is payable in addition to their place funding recouped by DfE. Additional places have been requested from DfE for Catcote from September

2026 that will increase total places to 217 (including post-16). Admissions expected for September 2026 will further increase Catcote placements to 237. The price for each cost arrangement is already agreed to the end of academic year 2025-26. The new academic year cost arrangements for 2026-27 assumes 22 additional places for Catcote and an overall 0.37% increase. No additional growth funding is included.

This budget area also includes the SEMH Free School. In line with the approved DfE transition plan, places will increase from 41 to 49 from September 2026. As outlined in section 3 of this report, DfE have frozen the HNB formula for 2026/27 at 2025/26 levels. As part of this, DfE have confirmed that there will be no additional funding for new and growing Free Schools. This means that the increased pupils from 30 to 41 as at September 2025 will not be reflected in Hartlepool funding. This is estimated at circa £0.105m.

Top-up rates have been increased by 0.37% within the budget proposal.

DfE have rolled the previously separate CSBG into the HNB funding for 2026/27. The grant is to be passed on to special schools and the free school in full. This change accounts for £0.985m of the budget increase.

6.4. Individual Pupil Support (including Group Funding)

This year's budget	£3.454m
Projected Outturn	£4.384m
Next year's budget proposal	£4.620m

The overall strategy to increase ordinarily available provision and reduce the most expensive placements has resulted in increased spending within the IPS (Individual Pupil Support) budget area in recent years. Despite the introduction of increased scrutiny and peer challenge through the Seeking Support Panels, the cost of financial support through IPS and group funding agreements continues to rise.

Although IPS costs are increasing, Officers have estimated the cost avoided in moving away from IPS banded agreements for individual pupils towards more innovative approaches via group funded arrangements. Had this shift not taken place, the estimated increase in cost could have been circa £0.587m in 2025/26. This cost avoidance is included as a mitigation in the DSG Management Plan.

The budget proposal for 2026/27 assumes growth of 5% in agreements (both individual pupil bandings and group arrangements) plus the 0.37% price increase discussed in section 5 of this report.

6.5. Additionally Resourced Provisions (ARPs)

This year's budget	£2.022m
Projected Outturn	£2.498m
Next year's budget proposal	£2.685m

In line with the SEND strategy, ARPs are increasingly dealing with more complex needs and this has an impact on higher levels of banding for pupils with an associated increase in cost. Total funded ARP places are now 135 primary and 110 secondary. This includes the EBSA (Emotionally Based School Avoidance) and Complex SEMH ARPs established at Horizon School during 2025/26. The new Horizon based ARPs will continue to be funded at cost for 2026/27. Top-up funding is included at a 0.37% increase.

The budget for temporary accommodation for one of our primary ARPs will only be required part year in 2026/27, as their new provision will open in September 2026. This saving has been reflected in the budget proposal.

DfE have rolled the previously separate SBSG into the HNB funding for 2026/27. The grant is to be passed on to ARPs in full. This change accounts for £0.093m of the budget increase.

6.6. Post-16

This year's budget	£1.548m
Projected Outturn	£1.587m
Next year's budget proposal	£1.587m

This budget area funds Catcote post-16 provision, Catcote Futures (post-19), along with places at Hartlepool College of Further Education and several places at other colleges.

6.7. Exclusions, including Alternative Provision

This year's budget	£1.390m
Projected Outturn	£1.428m
Next year's budget proposal	£1.516m

The number of permanent exclusions in 2024-25 reduced from the previous year (66 2023-24 to 53 2024-25) It is hoped that this reduction will continue into the remainder of 2025-26. In 2024-25, 13 young people transitioned back to mainstream schools. It is hoped that this will increase to 18 by the end of 2025-26.

DfE have rolled the previously separate CSBG into the HNB funding for 2026/27. The grant is to be passed to Horizon in full. This change accounts for £0.122m of the budget increase.

The budget proposal for Horizon, Haven and AP in 2026/27 assumes 2025/26 budget levels, the Core School Budget Grant added to the funding formula in 2026/27 and the top-up increase in line with other HNB provision of 0.37%.

6.8. High Needs Block Services

This year's budget	£0.713m
Projected Outturn	£0.713m
Next year's budget proposal	£0.735m

This budget contributes towards the cost of Education services provided into the High Needs Block. This includes central services such as finance and services funded within education such as Commissioning. A small increase of £0.022m is proposed within the 2026/27 budget to cover the cost of staff provision.

6.9. Local Authority Place Funding

This year's budget	£0.696m
Projected Outturn	£0.696m
Next year's budget proposal	£0.717m

This budget relates to place funding for ARP places in maintained schools. The budget increase relates to planned growth of 6 places within primary phase.

6.10. Out of Area Placements

This year's budget	£0.442m
Projected Outturn	£0.386m
Next year's budget proposal	£0.384m

Existing placements rolled forward into 2026/27 give a financial commitment of £0.254m. Provision for 7 new placements and estimated price inflation of 3% have been included in the budget proposal for 2026/27. The Council's Commissioning Team will continue their negotiation with providers to push back on price increases or minimise where feasible. New placements tend to be linked to moves into area where it is more beneficial for an existing placement to continue.

6.11 Early Intervention

This year's budget	£0.223m
Projected Outturn	£0.223m
Next year's budget proposal	£0.230m

This budget funds early intervention strategies – the Small Steps service and the Early Years' Portage Offer. A small increase of £0.007m is proposed in the budget for 2026/27 to fully fund staffing costs.

6.12 Hearing Impaired / Visually Impaired SLA

This year's budget	£0.251m
Projected Outturn	£0.239m
Next year's budget proposal	£0.251m

This budget funds the cost of the service level agreement to Middlesbrough Borough Council. The SLA cost is expected to be £0.251m in 2026/27. The underlying contract is currently being renegotiated so it is possible that costs of the service may change beyond 2026/27.

6.13 Strategic Changes

The upcoming SEND White Paper will provide significant direction for the authority's strategic plans for SEND provision. **The White Paper has such a degree of influence on future plans that the authority does not feel in a position to make firm budget proposals ahead of its publication.** The timing of budget decisions by Committee versus the expected publication date means that the 2026/27 budget for the HNB cannot fully reflect strategic plans.

For that reason, the authority will present strategic proposals in-year during 2026/27 once commitments under the SEND reform are published and reflected on, making a prioritisation of strategic changes possible.

In the meantime, there are two strategic change proposals amounting to £0.360m that have been included in the budget proposal in the table at paragraph 5.2. These proposals are likely to proceed during 2026/27 and are not directly related to the SEND White Paper. The first proposal is the establishment of a primary phase AP unit and the second is to partner with an ASD (Autistic Spectrum Disorder) specialist provider to set up a Hartlepool provision for the growing level of ASD need. The combined cost of proposals is estimated at £0.360m. Both proposals are necessary to avoid the placement of pupils in more costly provision outside of the town.

7. Risk and Financial Implications

- 7.1 Demands on the service to provide education for pupils with SEND are continuing to exceed the financial resources allocated. For the fourth consecutive year, officers are proposing a budget to Committee that exceeds available funding - by £2.146m in 2023/24, £2.171m in 2024/25, £4.257m in 2025/26 and £7.360m in 2026/27. This is despite funding transfers of £0.501m from the School's Block and Central School Services Block in 2026/27.
- 7.2. 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.
- 7.3. Recent statements from government suggest a commitment to "fully fund" the costs of educating pupils with SEND once the statutory override comes to an end in March 2028. Further details are awaited, alongside the SEND White Paper which is due early February. As yet, no information has been provided around dealing with DSG deficits built up to March 2028.
- 7.4. Up until 2022/23, the Council has successfully managed HNB costs within the available annual grant allocation and HNB reserves. This has been achieved despite a significant increase in demand on this service, including the impacts arising from COVID-19.
- 7.5. Since 2023/24, demands on the service have exceeded the grant allocation and this position continues as illustrated in the following table.

FY	Budget Deficit (£m)	Budget Deficit (%)	Actual Deficit (£)	Actual Deficit (%)
2023/24	2.146	11.5	2.348	12.6
2024/25	2.171	10.9	3.598	18.1
2025/26	4.257	19.5	*5.416	24.8

(*) Latest projection (as at quarter 3)

The budget requirement presented in this report shows a fourth-year funding gap of £7.360m in 2026/27 – a deficit of 31.5%.

- 7.6. The increase in cost is considered necessary to invest in Hartlepool provision and so avoid placement of pupils with SEND outside the town wherever possible. Early indications demonstrate that this approach has begun to reduce costs for independent and out of town provision, with a greater level of SEND need being met with Hartlepool provision. Unfortunately, the number of

pupils with SEND, the continued pressure arising from permanently excluded pupils and the increased complexity of need is placing financial pressure on provision for pupils needing Individual Pupil Support within a mainstream setting, or within ARP provision.

8. Consultation

- 8.1. Schools' Forum received HNB budget proposals for 2026/27 at their meetings on 26 January 2026 and 10 February 2026. Other than one abstention, Forum voted unanimously to reject the proposals.
- 8.2. Although Forum fully understand and appreciate the financial position of the local authority, in particular the growing Dedicated Schools Grant deficit, they reject the budget proposals for two key reasons – firstly, on the basis that the proposed 0.37% to top-up ranges is insufficient and conflicts with the SEND strategy to increase provision in Hartlepool. Secondly, with regard to the inconsistency of treatment between top-up increases across mainstream and special school provision (0.37%) in comparison to inflationary increases proposed for Out of Area provision and High Needs Block Services (3%).

9. Other Considerations/Implications

SUBSIDY CONTROL	There are no Subsidy Control Implications.
LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS	The local authority is required to set an annual budget for its High Needs Block.
SINGLE IMPACT ASSESSMENT	No requirement.
STAFF CONSIDERATIONS	There are no staff considerations.
ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS	There are no asset management considerations.
ENVIRONMENT, SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATIONS	There are none.

10. Conclusion

- 10.1. For a fourth consecutive year, the budget requirement for educating pupils with SEND exceeds the funding available. The funding shortfall of £7.360m is after the transfer of an additional £0.501m of funding from other DSG blocks.
- 10.2. All Head Teachers have been consulted on the budget proposals for 2026/27 via Schools' Forum. The feedback from Schools' Forum is outlined in detail, along with a response from Officers at section 8 of this report.
- 10.3. DfE are expected to outline SEND reforms in a White Paper to be published "early in the new year". Owing to the timing of publication, the strategic budget proposals presented to Committee for 2026/27 are limited. The authority's response to the SEND reforms may result in proposals being submitted to Members in-year during 2026/27.

11. Recommendations

- 11.1. It is recommended that Members:
 - a) note the contents of the report;
 - b) note the feedback from Schools' Forum outlined at section 8 of this report;
 - c) Approve the budget proposal for 2026/27 shown in the table at paragraph 5.2 of this report, acknowledging the funding gap of £7.360m.

12. Reasons for Recommendations

- 12.1. To ensure that that we can meet the educational needs of children with Special Education Needs and Disabilities in Hartlepool.
- 12.2. To ensure the local authority establishes an appropriate budget for High Needs in 2026/27 that meets expected demand.

13. Background Papers

- 13.1. Schools' Forum Report and minutes 26 January 2026 and 10 February 2026.

14. Contact Officers

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Sign Off:-

Chief Executive	Date: 12.02.2026
Director of Finance, IT and Digital	Date: 12.02.2026
Director of Legal, Governance and HR	Date: 12.02.2026



Children’s Services Committee

10 March 2026

Report of: Executive Director of Children’s Services

Subject: CARERS STRATEGY 2026-2031

Decision Type: Non Key

1. Council Plan Priority

Hartlepool will be a place:

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

2. Purpose of Report

2.1. Endorse the Carers Strategy 2026–2031, and approve the development and implementation of a dedicated Young Carers Strategy.

3. Background

- 3.1. Carers make a significant contribution to society and yet many still feel invisible, face significant inequalities, and lack adequate support ([Carers Week Report 2025](#)).
- 3.2. It was agreed by partners via the Health & Wellbeing Board in June 2025 that a refreshed Carers Strategy for Hartlepool would ensure that carers living in the borough are recognised, valued and supported in their roles, which are often physically and emotionally demanding.
- 3.3. The Carers Strategy 2026-2031 was approved at the Health and Wellbeing Board in December 2025 where it was also agreed that all partner

organisations needed to agree specific actions for which they were accountable, with an annual progress report presented to the Health and Wellbeing Board.

4. Proposals

- 4.1. The Carers Strategy 2026-2031 is attached as **Appendix 1** and has been developed by the Carers Strategy Group with membership from statutory organisations, the voluntary and community sector and representation from carers via Hartlepool Carers. The group is underpinned by Carer Focus Groups facilitated by Hartlepool Carers involving carers, ex-carers and young carers. The Carer Focus Groups will also play a key role in monitoring delivery of the strategy.
- 4.2. The Carers Strategy has been shaped by the priorities and lived experiences of carers themselves. This approach ensures the strategy is both ambitious and meaningful, reflecting what matters most to those it is designed for. The strategy focuses on eight priority areas:
- Helping carers to be recognised and supported early
 - Carers having a family life and being part of their community
 - Giving carers the right information, advice and support
 - Helping carers stay healthy and well
 - Helping carers have a life outside caring
 - Supporting ex-carers after their caring role ends
 - Making sure carers’ voices are heard in decisions
 - Giving carers time away from caring responsibilities
- 4.3. A Young Carer’s Strategy will be developed to support implementation. This will focus on the specific actions that impact children’s social care and will ensure that there is a focus on continuous improvement in relation to how young carers are supported.

5. Other Considerations/Implications

Risk Implications	There are no risks associated with this report, however the risks of unidentified young carers may impact safety, wellbeing and school attendance.
Financial Considerations	There are no financial considerations associated with this report.
Subsidy Control	Not applicable.

Legal Considerations	<p>As set out in the report, there are requirements under the Children and Families Act 2014, which requires local authorities to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify young carers • Assess their needs for support • Consider the impact of caring on the child's wellbeing, education and development
Single Impact Assessment	<p>There are no equality and diversity implications specifically associated with this report. Carers with protected characteristics can be disproportionately impacted by issues such as social isolation but the services that are provided and commissioned by the Council address equality and diversity considerations so that there is equity of access for all.</p> <p>The 'Caring About Equality' report identifies that all unpaid carers share a common need for equality of opportunity: better recognition, improved identification and support across all aspects of their lives. This includes greater financial assistance, more frequent and accessible breaks, reliable and affordable social care services, time to look after their own health, more workplace flexibility and support, and recognition and support from the NHS. It is our ambition that the Carers Strategy for Hartlepool helps deliver on that vision.</p>
Staff Considerations	There are no staffing considerations associated with this report.
Asset Management Considerations	There are no asset management considerations associated with this report.
Environment, Sustainability and Climate Change Considerations	There are no environment, sustainability and climate change considerations associated with this report.
Consultation	As outlined in the report the Carers Strategy has been shaped by the priorities and lived experiences of carers themselves and focus groups have enabled people with lived experience to be part of its development. We will ensure children and young people are directly involved in shaping the Young Carers Plan, and there will be continued

	engagement with schools, youth groups and Hartlepool Carers' young carers forums.
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6. Recommendations

- 6.1. It is recommended that the Committee notes and endorses the Carers Strategy 2026-2031 and the development of a Young Carer's Strategy.

7. Reasons for Recommendations

- 7.1. Carers make a significant contribution to society and yet many still feel invisible, face significant inequalities, and lack adequate support. The Carers Strategy 2026-2031 and the associated Young Carer's Strategy will help to address these issues within the borough.

8. Contact Officers

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Sign Off:-

Chief Executive	Date: 12.02.2026
Director of Finance, IT and Digital	Date: 12.02.2026
Director of Legal, Governance and HR	Date: 12.02.2026



HARTLEPOOL CARERS STRATEGY

2026 - 2031



Introduction from Chair of Health and Wellbeing Board

TBC

Introduction

Unpaid carers in Hartlepool play a vital role in supporting family members, friends, and neighbours who could not manage without their help. Carers provide care out of love and commitment, but this often comes at a personal cost to their own health, wellbeing, finances and opportunities.

Hartlepool recognises the importance of supporting carers of all ages - young carers, parent carers, working-age carers, ex-carers and older carers, so they can continue to live full and meaningful lives alongside their caring responsibilities.

Whilst not downplaying the impact of caring on all ages, there is no doubt that there are some specific challenges for young carers and it is important that these are considered in the strategy.

Young carers have unique needs that must be recognised, supported and addressed in a coordinated and sustainable way. Young carers often take on significant responsibilities at home, which can impact their education, social development and emotional wellbeing. A clear strategy helps to raise awareness across services, improve access to tailored support and promote early identification and intervention. It also empowers young carers by giving them a voice in shaping the services that affect them, fostering resilience and helping them thrive both now and in the future.

This strategy has been shaped by the voices of carers in Hartlepool. It sets out our shared vision, values and priorities to ensure carers are recognised, valued and supported. Our aim is to ensure carers are not left isolated, unsupported or invisible. Instead, carers should feel recognised, connected and able to balance caring with other aspects of their lives. This strategy applies to carers of all ages and backgrounds and will be delivered through partnership working across health, social care, education, voluntary organisations and local communities.

Background

Carers play an essential role in Hartlepool, supporting family members, friends and neighbours who could not manage without their help. Their contribution underpins the health, wellbeing and independence of many local people. Recognising this, Hartlepool Borough Council and Hartlepool Carers has worked closely with carers to develop this Carers Strategy.

The strategy has been shaped by the experiences and priorities of carers themselves. Over recent months, a programme of engagement and co-production activities has been carried out to ensure that carers' voices are at the heart of local planning. This included:

- Carer surveys circulated through local networks, and community organisations to capture a wide range of views
- Focus groups and listening events where carers shared their day-to-day experiences, challenges and ideas for change
- Targeted conversations with young carers, working carers and carers from diverse backgrounds to ensure inclusion of seldom-heard voices
- Community workshops involving professionals from health, education and social care, enabling carers and practitioners to explore shared priorities and opportunities for joint working

Feedback from these activities highlighted several consistent messages. Carers told us they want:

- To be recognised and valued for the vital contribution they make
- Clear, accessible information and advice at the right time
- Support for their own wellbeing, including opportunities for respite and social connection
- Greater flexibility and understanding from employers, schools and services and:
- To be involved as equal partners in care planning and service development

This strategy reflects what carers in Hartlepool have told us matters most to them. It builds on the strengths of our local community and sets out a shared commitment to ensure that carers are supported, respected and empowered in their caring roles.

How this Strategy was developed

The Hartlepool Carers Strategy has been developed through a partnership approach led by Hartlepool Borough Council and Hartlepool Carers, with support from other local organisations. The process has been evidence-based, using local data, national policy guidance and carers lived experiences to shape shared priorities.

A Carers Strategy Working Group brought together representatives from across health, social care, education and the voluntary sector to review feedback and identify key themes. The result is a strategy that reflects both the unique needs of Hartlepool's carers and our collective ambition to make the borough a carer-friendly community.

Hartlepool Carers - Local Context

According to data, there are approximately 10,000 people in Hartlepool providing care to a family member, friend, or neighbour. Around:

- 1 in 10 residents identifies as an unpaid carer
- Over 1,600 carers provide 50 or more hours of care per week; and:
- A growing number of carers are also in employment, balancing work and caring responsibilities.

These figures highlight the scale and significance of caring within our community, and the need for coordinated support that recognises carers as equal partners in care. The Carers Strategy sets out how local organisations will work together to achieve this.

Vision

That carers in Hartlepool are recognised, respected and supported to live well, stay healthy and achieve their own goals, while continuing in their caring role if they choose.

Values

Our work will be guided by the following values:

- Recognition - valuing carers as experts by experience.
- Respect - listening to carers' voices and treating them with dignity.
- Inclusion - ensuring carers are part of their community and have equal opportunities.
- Support - providing timely, accessible and practical help.
- Partnership - working with carers, families, communities, employers and services.
- Compassion - responding with kindness and understanding.

This Carers Strategy has been co-produced with carers and organisations in Hartlepool. It sets out eight key priorities, each with underpinning ambitions that aim to achieve meaningful change.

Our aim is to ensure carers are not left isolated, unsupported, or invisible. Instead, carers should feel recognised, connected and able to balance caring with other aspects of their lives. This strategy applied to carers of all ages and backgrounds and will be delivered through partnership working across health, social care, education, voluntary organisations and local communities.

Priority 1

Helping carers to be recognised and supported early

We want carers to be seen, heard and supported as soon as possible.

We will do this by:

- Raising awareness of what being a carer means.
- Delivering training in schools, communities, health settings and with emergency services so carers can be spotted and signposted to support.
- Encourage that every school to have a designated Young Carer Lead whose contact details are shared and who fully understands the support mechanisms available for young carers. This individual plays a key role and should be well-known within the school community.
- Including carers in care planning and support them throughout the caring journey, including at end-of-life.
- Supporting carers in employment through awareness of the Carers Leave Act.
- Partnering with charities and community groups to identify and support carers of all ages.

Priority 2

Carers having a family life and being part of their community

We want carers to be able to look after their family, enjoy time with friends and family, be part of their local community and do the things they like doing.

We will help carers do this by:

- Providing activities and support in community locations.
- Supporting young carers in maintaining a balanced life where they can care of their family while also enjoying friendships, participating in community activities, and pursuing their own interests and aspirations.
- Supporting carers to start their own groups.
- Improving access to transport so families can access activities.
- Promote “Carer Friendly Hartlepool.”
- Create more social opportunities for carers to connect.

Priority 3

Giving carers the right information, advice and support

We want carers to be able to easily find information, advice and support at the time they need it in a format that is accessible for them.

We will help carers do this by:

- Making sure that any organisations who come into contact with carers know where to direct carers to for information, advice and support.
- Ensuring young carers can easily access the right information, advice and support when they need it, in ways that are clear, age-appropriate and tailored to their individual circumstances.
- Providing information that is easy to access both online and in person, tailored to individual needs and preferences - including through social media and other adaptable formats.
- Sharing real-life experiences from carers.
- Offering in-person support to reduce isolation.
- Creating peer networks for learning and support.

Priority 4

Helping carers stay healthy and well

We want carers to live healthy lives and to reduce their levels of stress, anxiety and depression.

We will help carers do this by:

- Working with health services and charities to promote self-care.
- Providing wellbeing support, therapies and workshops.
- Recognising the impact caring has on health.
- Ensuring GPs know who their carers are.
- Supporting young carers in maintaining their physical and emotional wellbeing by reducing stress and promoting healthy lifestyles, ensuring they have access to the right support at the right time.
- Ensuring all health professionals are aware of who their young carers are and encourage professionals to make appropriate adjustments to meet their health and wellbeing needs, providing compassionate, accessible and responsive care.
- Offering community health checks and wellbeing sessions.

Priority 5

Helping carers have a life outside caring (work, education, volunteering)

We want carers to have a good life outside of their caring role. Carers should be recognised and supported. They should be able to work, study, or volunteer if they want to - without harming their own wellbeing or the care they give.

We will help carers do this by:

- Ensuring employers understand their responsibilities under the Carers Leave Act.
- Encouraging flexible working and hybrid options.
- Creating varied volunteering opportunities.
- Making sure schools and colleges have Carer Leads.
- Training job coaches to understand carers' needs.
- Supporting young carers to pursue education, training, volunteering and personal interests - ensuring their caring role does not limit their opportunities or wellbeing and that they are recognised and supported to achieve their goals.

Priority 6

Supporting ex-carers after their caring role ends

We want to make sure that people who used to care for someone get the help they need when their caring role ends.

We will help carers do this by:

- Providing local groups and peer support for ex-carers.
- Promoting services that support life after caring.
- Encouraging ex-carers to use their skills to support others.
- Working with community and faith groups to provide support.
- Ensuring young carers are supported when their caring role ends, helping them adjust, rebuild their confidence and access opportunities for personal growth, education and wellbeing.

Priority 7

Making sure carers' voices are heard in decisions

We want carers to be recognised as experts in their own lives and be involved in planning and decision making.

We will help carers do this by:

- Encouraging carers to become Carer Champions and join focus groups.
- Seeking carers opinions by offering surveys and flexible feedback methods.
- Taking focus groups into local venues.
- Ensuring groups are supportive, friendly and inclusive.
- Ensuring young carers are recognised as experts in their own lives and are actively involved in shaping the support, services and decisions that affect them.
- Providing clear information for carers leading groups.

Priority 8

Giving carers time away from caring responsibilities

We want to make sure that carers can take time away from their caring responsibilities whilst knowing that their cared for is being well looked after.

We will support carers to do this by:

- Helping carers maintain social networks, hobbies and interests.
- Coordinating services to give carers breaks.
- Providing peer groups, retreats and flexible respite opportunities.
- Offering subsidised activities to make breaks affordable.
- Providing activities in varied community settings.
- Ensuring young carers have regular opportunities to take time away from their caring responsibilities, knowing that the person they care for is safe and supported - so they can rest, recharge, and enjoy activities that matter to them.

How will we deliver our vision for Carers?

This strategy sets out our vision for carers living in Hartlepool. An action plan for the delivery of this strategy will be developed. A set of measures will be included in the plan to monitor progress and success, and these will be reported annually to the Health and Wellbeing Board. These measures will not just be numbers and outputs, they will also be measures of impact, so we know that we are making a difference and supporting carers, their families and cared for.



Children’s Services Committee

10 March 2026

Report of: Executive Director, Children’s Services

Subject: 2027-28 SCHOOL TERM & HOLIDAY DATES

Decision Type: Non-Key

1. Council Plan Priority

Hartlepool will be a place:
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 obtain the Children’s Services Committee’s approval for the proposed pattern of school term and holiday dates for Community Schools for the 2027–28 academic year.
- 2.2. To seek agreement of the Children’s Services Committee in recommending these dates to governing bodies of Foundation schools and Academies in Hartlepool.

3. Background

- 3.1. As the local authority (LA), the Council has the responsibility for setting the school term and holiday dates for Community schools in Hartlepool. Foundation schools, governing bodies and Academies are responsible for setting their own school holiday pattern within the agreed national framework of working days. Traditionally the LA and the governing bodies of all the

Foundation schools and more recently, Academies, work together to ensure a consistent pattern across the town in respect of school term and holiday dates, although some variation has occurred in the case of Academies.

- 3.2. Five professional development (PD) days are provided for in the teachers' conditions of service and can be taken in combinations, including part-day "twilight" sessions, at the direction of individual schools. The pattern proposed for 2027-28 outlines a total allocation of 195 days.
- 3.3. For a number of years local authorities have, with some degree of success, agreed a unified calendar of term dates across the northern region.

4. Proposals

- 4.1. In the autumn term 2025 the Tees Valley region and a number of other northeast representatives consulted on a pattern for 2027-2028 based on the guiding principles as shown in **Appendix 1**. The proposed pattern enables schools to begin the academic year on Wednesday 2nd September 2027 and end the year on Friday 21st July 2028.
- 4.2. Following discussions, arrangements were made to consult all Headteachers in Hartlepool and also the relevant associations / unions on the school year pattern for 2027-2028. On the completion of local consultation in the region, the general consensus from the local authorities within the Tees Valley and other regional authorities is to adopt the model attached as **Appendix 1**.

5. Other Considerations/Implications

Risk Implications	None.
Financial Considerations	None.
Subsidy Control	None.
Legal Considerations	None.
Single Impact Assessment	None.
Staff Considerations	None.

Asset Management Considerations	None.
Environment, Sustainability and Climate Change Considerations	None.
Consultation	Neighboring local authorities, Hartlepool Headteachers and Unions have been consulted.

6. Recommendations

- 6.1. To approve the scheduled term and holiday dates for the academic year 2027-2028 for Community schools shown in **Appendix 1**.
- 6.2. To recommend the schedule of term and holiday dates for 2027-2028 to governing bodies of Foundation Schools and Academies in Hartlepool.

7. Reasons for Recommendations

- 7.1. The proposals seek to achieve common term dates across the northeast based on guiding principles enabling continuity for parents, carers, other schools, local authority staff and other agencies.

8. Background Papers

- 8.1. There are no background papers.

9. Contact Officers

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Sign Off:-

Chief Executive	Date: 11.02.2026
Director of Finance, IT and Digital	Date: 12.02.2026
Director of Legal, Governance and HR	Date: 11.02.2026

School Holiday and Term Dates 2027 - 2028 HARTLEPOOL APPENDIX 1

	AUGUST 2027							SEPTEMBER 2027							OCTOBER 2027							NOVEMBER 2027							DECEMBER 2027							JANUARY 2028						
Monday								6	13	20	27	4	11	18	25	1	8	15	22	29	6	13	20	27	3	10	17	24														
Tuesday	2	9	16	23	30	7	14	21	28	5	12	19	26	2	9	16	23	30	7	14	21	28	4	11	18	25																
Wednesday	3	10	17	24	31	1	8	15	22	29	6	13	20	27	3	10	17	24	1	8	15	22	29	5	12	19	26															
Thursday	4	11	18	25	2	9	16	23	30	7	14	21	28	4	11	18	25	2	9	16	23	30	6	13	20	27																
Friday	5	12	19	26	3	10	17	24	1	8	15	22	29	5	12	19	26	3	10	17	24	31	7	14	21	28																
Saturday	6	13	20	27	4	11	18	25	2	9	16	23	30	6	13	20	27	4	11	18	25	4	11	18	25	1	8	15	22	29												
Sunday	7	14	21	28	5	12	19	26	3	10	17	24	31	7	14	21	28	5	12	19	26	5	12	19	26	2	9	16	23	30												
	1	8	15	22	29	21					16					22					13					20																

	FEBRUARY 2028							MARCH 2028							APRIL 2028							MAY 2028							JUNE 2028							JULY 2028						
Monday								6	13	20	27	3	10	17	24	1	8	15	22	29	5	12	19	26	3	10	17	24														
Tuesday	7	14	21	28	7	14	21	28	4	11	18	25	2	9	16	23	30	6	13	20	27	4	11	18	25																	
Wednesday	1	8	15	22	29	1	8	15	22	29	5	12	19	26	3	10	17	24	31	7	14	21	28	5	12	19	26															
Thursday	2	9	16	23	30	2	9	16	23	30	6	13	20	27	4	11	18	25	1	8	15	22	29	6	13	20	27															
Friday	3	10	17	24	31	3	10	17	24	31	7	14	21	28	5	12	19	26	2	9	16	23	30	7	14	21	28															
Saturday	4	11	18	25	4	11	18	25	1	8	15	22	29	6	13	20	27	3	10	17	24	3	10	17	24	1	8	15	22	29												
Sunday	5	12	19	26	5	12	19	26	2	9	16	23	30	7	14	21	28	4	11	18	25	4	11	18	25	2	9	16	23	30												
	16							23						19					20					15																		

Bank Holiday	
School Holiday	
PD Days	

The number of term days shown is 195. Up to five of these will be used as professional development (PD) days for teaching staff, pupils will not attend these days. PD days are determined by the individual schools and schools should inform parents accordingly.



Children's Services Committee

10 March 2026

Report of: Executive Director, Children's Services
Subject: Corporate Parent Forum – Proposed Changes
Decision Type: Non-key

1. Council Plan Priority

Hartlepool will be a place:
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. The purpose of this report is to seek the Committee's views on changing the format and frequency of the Council's Corporate Parent Forum (the 'Forum').

3. Background

3.1. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 states that when a child or young person comes into the care of the local authority or is under 25 and spent at least 13 weeks in care after their 14th birthday, the Authority assumes the role of their Corporate Parent. A child remains looked after until they return home, are adopted, or reach the age of 18. Local authorities must also continue to provide support to care leavers up to the age of 25.

3.2. The legislation relevant to this is the Children and Social Work Act 2017 (section 1), Children Act 1989 (part 3), The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010, and The Care Leavers (England)

Regulations 2010. Statutory guidance and corporate parenting principles for looked-after children and care leavers has been issued by the Department for Education.

- 3.3. It is the shared responsibility of the entire Council, elected members, officers, and partner agencies, to ensure that children in our care and care leavers receive the highest standard of support and protection so they can reach their full potential. Our core aim is to ensure these children achieve outcomes comparable to those who do not require our intervention, in line with the statutory corporate parenting responsibilities set out by the Department for Education.
- 3.4. The Forum is a sub-committee of the Children's Services Committee. The Constitution states that:

“Children's Services Committee also has a Sub-Committee 'Corporate Parent Forum' which is made up of the members of Children's Services Committee and other non-voting members, which include foster carers and formerly looked after children. The Corporate Parent Forum is responsible for the development, implementation and review of the Council's Corporate Parent strategies and policies in order to ensure that the Council's duty as a 'Corporate Parent' is discharged properly, effectively and consistently.”

The membership and remit is set out below:

Corporate Parent Forum

Corporate Parent Forum Membership			
Membership	7 Councillors	Quorum	3 Councillors

No	Corporate Parent Forum Function
1	Responsibility for the formulation, development, implementation and review of the Council's Corporate Parent Strategies and policies in order to ensure that the Council's duty as a 'Corporate Parent' is discharged properly, effectively and consistently.
2	To advise and make recommendations to the Authority's decision-making bodies and other partner agencies on any issues that affect children and young people who are Looked After by Hartlepool Borough Council.
3	To oversee the exercise of the Authority's responsibilities as Corporate Parent and ensure that the interests of Looked After Children are appropriately reflected in all the Authority's policies and the work of the Children's Strategic Partnership.

- 3.5. The Corporate Parenting Forum currently meets four times a year and benefits from strong representation from a range of partner agencies. The Forum has made significant progress to date, including securing key assurances from partners and delivering impactful presentations and awareness-raising activities led by the Children in Care Council. However, there is further opportunity to strengthen its effectiveness by introducing several changes to the format and frequency of the meetings.

4. Background

- 4.1. It is proposed that the format of the Corporate Parenting Forum be reviewed and changed, in recognition of the increasing challenges facing Children's Services and partner agencies. These challenges include rising demand and greater complexity of need, issues with placement stability and sufficiency, pressures relating to the recruitment and retention of carers, and the wide-ranging challenges faced by care leavers, particularly around employment, education and training, access to health services, and securing suitable housing.

To support this change, it is proposed that the Forum will retain the functions as set out at section 3.4 but no longer operate as a formal sub-committee of the Children's Services Committee. Instead, it will function as an internal officer- and member-led meeting that reports to the Committee and makes recommendations for consideration and approval.

- 4.2. As part of the review, the terms of reference for the meeting (**Appendix 1**) have been updated, and it is proposed that the Forum be expanded to include a representative from every Council directorate, specifically officers with appropriate decision-making authority. Furthermore, it is proposed that partnership representation be broadened to include colleagues from the Hartlepool Further Education college, wider health services, police and fire, and the voluntary sector. The aim is to develop dedicated Champions for key areas such as Housing and Accommodation, Training and Education, Employment and Apprenticeships, Health, and Leisure, among others with further detail to be developed within the Forum.
- 4.3. The aim is to strengthen the voices of children in our care and care leavers by introducing a co-chairing arrangement, with a young person chairing the meeting alongside the Lead Member (Chair of Children's Services Committee). It is also proposed that we broaden the role of the Children in

Care Council representatives to enable them to speak on behalf of all children in our care, supported through targeted voice and participation activities.

- 4.4. It is further proposed that the meeting frequency increases to six bi-monthly meetings per year to maintain momentum and drive continued progress on agreed actions.
- 4.5. These proposals are recommended to safeguard the children and young people who attend, contribute to, and co-chair the Forum, and to create a setting that better supports their voice, participation, and engagement.
- 4.6. Alternative Options

That the Forum remains a sub-committee of Children's Services Committee. This option is not recommended for the reasons set out above.

5. Other Considerations/Implications

Risk Implications	There are no risks associated with these decisions, they are intended to strengthen the Forum and ensure appropriate safeguards for children and young people who attend.
Financial Considerations	There are no financial considerations. However, wider partners and council officer attendance may have resource implications as we strive to meet our corporate responsibilities.
Subsidy Control	Not applicable
Legal Considerations	There are no specific legal considerations beyond those outlined in this report.
Single Impact Assessment	Not applicable.
Staff Considerations	The additional two meetings will require administrative support and a meeting room. This has already been sourced departmentally.
Asset Management Considerations	There are no asset management considerations.

Environment, Sustainability and Climate Change Considerations	There are no environmental sustainability and climate change considerations.
Consultation	The Corporate Parenting Forum will be consulted on the proposed changes.

6. Recommendations

- 6.1. That the Children's Services Committee approves the proposed changes to the Forum as outlined above and refers to Constitution Committee for further consideration with subsequent referral to Full Council to approve and implement the changes.

7. Reasons for Recommendations

- 7.1. The Forum is a critical body that brings together all relevant partners with the authority to make decisions that improve, promote, and champion the needs and wellbeing of children in our care and care leavers. It is essential that the Forum has the necessary powers to operate effectively and fulfil its responsibilities in line with legislation and in the best interests of children and young people. The proposed changes will provide the framework needed to support this.

8. Background Papers

- 8.1. Terms of Reference (**Appendix 1**)
- 8.2. Hartlepool Borough Council Constitution

9. Contact Officers

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Sign Off:-

Chief Executive	Date: 13.02.2026
Director of Finance, IT and Digital	Date: 15.02.2026
Director of Legal, Governance and HR	Date: 13.02.2026

Corporate Parenting Forum Terms of Reference, January 2026

Date: 10 January 2026

Version: 1, Draft

1. Purpose of the Corporate Parenting Forum

The Corporate Parenting Forum is the principal mechanism through which all corporate parents – which includes elected members, council officers, partner agencies, and commissioned services - demonstrate their commitment to improving outcomes for children and young people in care and for care leavers.

Corporate Parenting is a shared responsibility amongst all partners who hold both a statutory and moral duty to safeguard and support these children.

1.1 The Corporate Parenting Forum ensures that services meet their needs and aspirations by:

- Providing high-quality care and nurturing relationships that build self-esteem, confidence and resilience.
- Ensuring access to excellent education tailored to individual needs and abilities.
- Promoting health, wellbeing, and fitness, alongside opportunities for hobbies and personal development.
- Supporting life skills development, citizenship and preparation for independence.
- Creating pathways to education, employment, and training, including work experience, apprenticeships and mentoring.
- Facilitating a successful transition to adulthood, including suitable accommodation, skills for life and ongoing support.

2. Responsibilities of the Corporate Parenting Forum

2.1 Champion Corporate Parenting

- Ensure all corporate parents understand and actively fulfil their role and responsibilities.
- Organise mandatory annual training for elected members, officers and wider partners on corporate parenting principles, roles, responsibilities and best practice.

2.2 Strategic Leadership & Accountability

- Provide clear strategic direction aligned with the Corporate Parenting Strategy and Hartlepool's Pledge to Children in Care.
- Review and influence policy, commissioning and service delivery to improve outcomes.

2.3 Performance Monitoring & Continuous Improvement

- Receive and scrutinise quarterly performance reports (Corporate Parenting Scorecard) and identify areas for improvement.
- Benchmark against sector-leading practice and learn from other local authorities.
- Measure impact of the forum's impact on outcomes for children and care leavers.

2.4 Voice of Children & Young People

- Engage with the Children in Care Council and with care leavers to ensure their views and lived experiences shape services.
- Establish feedback loops so young people see how their input influences decisions.

2.5 Celebration & Recognition

- Promote achievement and aspirations through celebration events and recognition schemes.
- Deliver an Annual Corporate Parenting Summit bringing together elected members, all associated partners, and young people.

2.6 Workforce & Opportunities

- Champion specialist council-based work placements and apprenticeships for care-experienced young people.
- Provide tailored career guidance, CV writing sessions, and interview preparation support.
- Explore mentoring programmes and partnerships with local businesses.
- Offer guaranteed interviews for care-experienced applicants for council jobs and apprenticeships.

2.7 Inspection & Compliance

- Meet with Ofsted inspectors as appropriate and contribute to inspection readiness.

2.8 Annual Planning & Reporting

- Agree an annual work plan based on strategic priorities and review progress regularly.
- Submit mid-year and an annual report to the Children's Services Committee, Children's Services Strategic Partnership and to full Council.

3. Membership

Membership reflects the principle that Corporate Parenting is a shared responsibility across all statutory partners and relevant stakeholders.

- Chair: Lead Member for Children and Families
- Vice Chair: Appointed by the Forum
- Councillors: Politically proportionate representation
- Executive Director of Children's Services
- Chief Executive, Children's Services Trust
- Assistant Director, Children and Families
- Non-Executive Director(s), Children's Services Trust
- Foster Carer Representative
- Care Leaver Representative
- Children in Care Council Representative
- Housing Representative
- Health Representative
- Virtual School Head
- Head of Service, Children in Our Care
- Police Representative
- Voluntary Sector Representative
- Education Provider Representative

4. Frequency of Meetings

A minimum of 6 meetings per year (bi-monthly) to maintain momentum and oversight.

5. Governance & Accountability

The Forum will hold all Corporate Parents accountable and responsible for their contribution to the Corporate Parenting Strategy and the Hartlepool Pledge.

Regular reports will be presented to the Children's Services Committee, Children's Services Strategic Partnership and full Council.

6. Administration

The agenda will be set by the Lead Member for Children's Services and the Director of Children's Services in line with the Corporate Parenting work plan.

The PA's will provide administrative support, circulate agendas five clear days in advance, and manage minutes. Minutes will be restricted to Corporate Parenting Forum members and stakeholders; and external requests will be considered on a need-to-know basis.

The Terms of Reference will be reviewed annually and approved by full Council.