

# Children's Services Committee

## Minutes and Decision Record

1 June 2026

### Meeting commenced

**Time:** 2.00 pm

**Location:** Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Hartlepool

### Present:

Councillor: Jim Lindridge (In the Chair)

Councillors: Nick Anderson, Brian Cowie, Martin Dunbar, Brenda Harrison, Philip Holbrook, and Amanda Napper.

### Schools Heads Representatives

Adam Palmer (Secondary)  
Sue Sharpe (Primary)

### Parent Governor Representative

Martin Pout

Also present: Councillors Scott Gaiety, Adam Gaines and Graham Harrison

Officers: Matt Wilton, Chief Executive  
Alison Sutherland, Executive Director of Children's Services  
Rebecca Stephenson, Assistant Director (Early Intervention, Performance & Commissioning)  
Fiona Stobbs, Interim Assistant Director for Education  
Chris Rooney, Head of Service – Safeguarding, Assessment & Support  
Angela Lucas, Principal Democratic Services and Legal Support Officer  
Jo Stubbs, Principal Democratic Services and Legal Support Officer

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## 1. Apologies for Absence

None.

## 2. Declarations of Interest

None.

## 3. Minutes

Minutes from 10<sup>th</sup> March 2026 – received.

## 4. Foster with North East Expansion (Executive Director of Children's Services)

### Type of decision

Key (tests I and II)

### Purpose of report

To seek Committee approval for the Council to take part in the expansion of the Regional Fostering Hub in line with the Department for Education (DfE) expansion programme. This will build on the Foster with North East (FwNE) pathfinder that has been in operation since 2023, which all North East Councils are part of, however this expansion requires a move to an 'End-to-End' model encompassing all aspects of the Fostering Process.

### Issue(s) for consideration

The Head of Service for Safeguarding, Assessment and Support provided background information regarding the proposals, referring back to the 2022 independent review of Children's Social Care led by Josh McAlister. This review resulted in a number of recommendations aimed at improving children's wellbeing. The reforms described developments to improve the number of foster carers with a target of recruiting 10,000 foster carers by 2029.

Members were informed that "Foster with North East," initially established in 2023, sought to improve regional foster carer recruitment, however, it did not address the full end-to-end journey. The proposed Regional Fostering Hub aims to provide a comprehensive model, covering recruitment through to placement.

The model would bring increased resources, enhanced marketing, and improved financial capacity across participating authorities. The fostering hub will sit within a wider Regional Care Cooperative, designed to streamline commissioning arrangements under a single "customer model," improving accountability and oversight across fostering and residential provision.

Recruitment and retention of foster carers remain a significant challenge, particularly given the increasing complexity of children's needs and the proposed model would provide more consistent and specialised support to promote placement stability and ensure both carers and children receive appropriate support.

Elected Members sought clarification on whether children would be fostered within Hartlepool or placed elsewhere. It was confirmed that wherever possible children would be placed within Hartlepool.

The views of foster parents and children in care would be obtained and considered as part of the design of the expanded service. Members felt that the Committee would also benefit from the inclusion of young people to ensure that their voices were heard in decision-making.

A member asked what the impact would be if the Council did not move forward with this proposal, and it was reported that the Council would need to reassess its current approach and undertake a fundamental review to determine future requirements. If the application was successful there would be significant financial benefits, as well as the opportunity to be part of improving outcomes for some of the most vulnerable children.

## **Decision**

- I. That approval be given for the Local Authority to enter into an agreement to be part of the expanded North East Fostering Hub in line with national policy and guidance.
- II. That it was agreed to allocate the resources (financial and workforce) as required by the regional model as set out in this report.
- III. That approval be given for the Local Authority to support a North East Regional bid to become a 'Wave 2' RCC national pathfinder and support submission of a bid to DfE by 1 June 2026.
- IV. That the Director of Children's Services be authorised, in consultation with the Lead Member for Children's Services, to take all necessary steps to implement the recommendations in line with National Policy.

## **7. Any other business which the Chairman considers urgent**

None

The meeting concluded at 2.35 pm

**H MARTIN**

**DIRECTOR OF LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND HUMAN RESOURCES**

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