

Children's Services Committee

Minutes and Decision Record

30 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)

Parish Council Representatives:

Chris Robson, Dalton Piercy Parish

Also present: Councillor Mike Young

Officers: Alison Sutherland, Executive Director of Children's Services
Fiona Stobbs, Interim Assistant Director for Education
Kelly Armstrong, Strategic Children Commissioner
Phil Gleaves, Youth Justice Service Manager
Angela Lucas, Principal Democratic Services and Legal Support Officer
Jo Stubbs, Principal Democratic Services and Legal Support Officer

8. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from: Martin Pout (Parent Governor Representative) and Joanne Wilson (Co-opted Member)

9. Declarations of Interest

None.

10. Minutes

Minutes from 1st June 2026 – received.

11. Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2026-27

The Youth Justice Service Manager presented a detailed report outlining the Draft Youth Justice Strategic Plan for 2026-27. The plan set out the strategic objectives and the report outlined the risks associated with delivery of the Strategic Plan such as financial pressures, reoffending performance, serious youth violence, and the potential for policy and legislative change.

A member asked about the increase in Serious Violence and Exploitation and requested clarification of what this had meant in terms of youth justice work: for example, had there been an increase in the number of young people involved, the use of restorative justice approaches, and how effective these approaches had been.

It was explained that each child was assessed individually to identify appropriate support and interventions. Some children had been remanded, while many were diverted from court through alternative measures. Restorative justice approaches were used, including meetings with police officers to help young people understand the impact of their actions.

A query was raised about whether support is provided to young people serving custodial sentences and it was confirmed that support is offered to all children, including those with custodial sentences. This includes support through court, assistance in understanding and managing their sentence, and maintaining monthly contact.

Further information was requested regarding the service's work with schools and how schools are involved in supporting children and young people. It was explained that, in secondary schools, the service works closely with student support staff and school representatives whilst in primary schools restorative approaches were promoted. Strong working relationships are maintained with schools to support individual children.

A member highlighted a section of the report which mentioned the lack of a Probation Officer and asked for clarification of what the role was and how the team worked without one. The Youth Justice Service Manager explained there was a national shortage but although there was no probation officer within the team, the Team did have a designated probation officer.

A member commented on the usefulness of the information provided but requested examples. The Executive Director of Children's Services reported

that a Children's Services Newsletter is in development which will provide examples of the successes achieved.

A discussion took place regarding the need for early intervention and working collaboratively with colleagues in other sectors, as well as engagement with parents and schools. Members felt that the voice of young children needed to be heard and it would be beneficial to have a child representative on the Committee. The Executive Director of Children's Services agreed to follow up on this point.

Decision:

- i) The progress made in delivering the Local Youth Justice Plan (2025–2026) be noted, and
- ii) That the draft of the Local Youth Justice Plan (2026-27) be approved for consultation.

12. Hartlepool Local Area SEND Reform Plan 2026

The Interim Assistant Director – Education reported that on 23 February 2026, the government published two documents - Schools White Paper, 'Every child achieving and thriving', and a consultation on 'SEND reform: Putting children and young people first'.

On 9th March 2026 all Local Authorities received formal notification to formulate a Local Area Reform Plan with a deadline of 19th June 2026. To support this development each authority was allocated two Advisors. Sign off of the plan was required by the following:

- Local Authority Chief Executive
- Executive Director for Children's Services
- Local Authority Chief Financial Officer
- North East & North Cumbria Integrated Care Board Chief Executive
- North East & North Cumbria Integrated Care Board NHS Place Director

The Interim Assistant Director – Education had been appointed as the Senior Responsible Officer for the Council.

Members were advised that if successful, the Council would receive £7.914m in High Needs Stability Grant funding which is 90% of the DSG Deficit as of 31 March 2026. This grant would be applied to offset the Dedicated Schools Grant deficit as of 31 March 2028. The Authority would be required to earmark £0.879m to fund the remaining 10%. The Council is also proposing to earmark sums for 2026/27 and 2027/28 for the equivalent 10% requirement.

Subject to the plan being approved, the Council would also have access to Experts at Hand funding.

Details of the SEND and Alternative Provision (AP) Programme were outlined including the establishment of an Inclusion Service and the pilot of a multi-agency delivery model. The report also outlined the actions undertaken to date including a refined version of a Maturity Matrix previously developed as part of this Programme. It was reported progress had also been made in relation to data and financial planning.

Co-production and stakeholder engagement had included shared delivery across partners such as the ICB as well as engagement activity with young people. 8 co-production sessions had involved over 200 participants and would help contribute to the develop of the plan. The vision was to create a confident, inclusive and sustainable system that supports all Children and Young People (CYP) to achieve, belong and thrive. Over the next three years, three key goals were: improving outcomes for CYP, building trust and confidence in the system and securing value for money.

2026/27 would be a foundation year to strengthen the core of the system with the priority being to create clarity, strengthen governance and embed consistent inclusive practice across the system. Experts at Hand would provide timely, practical support without reliance on diagnosis work which will be delivered through a multi-disciplinary team. The Council is well placed to deliver these reforms building on the strong foundations established through the Change Programme, the effective practice already embedded across schools and settings, and extensive co-production with partners, families and young people.

Members praised the team for the significant work undertaken to develop the SEND strategy and its associated three-year vision. The views and lived experiences of children, young people and families should remain central to the development and evaluation of provision and Members supported the emphasis on co-production and stakeholder engagement.

The importance of building capacity through research-informed practice, specialist expertise, coaching and collaborative support for practitioners was also recognised. The phased approach to implementation was supported, alongside plans to strengthen collaboration between schools, trusts and partners through education partnerships and other initiatives aimed at sharing expertise, improving outcomes and celebrating successful practice.

Decision:

That members note the report and welcome future updates on progress.

13. Ofsted Focused Visit – Verbal Update

The Executive Director of Children's Services provided a verbal presentation regarding an Ofsted focused visit on care leavers which was undertaken on 19–20 May 2026. The visit reviewed the effectiveness of services and support for care leavers aged 18–25. The inspection focused on unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people, care leavers involved in the justice system, those with disabilities, and issues relating to substance use, domestic abuse, and criminal/sexual exploitation.

The feedback reflected solid progress, with clear evidence of a committed leadership, a well-developed care leaver offer, and highly relational practice that was improving outcomes for young people. A broad range of strengths was identified across care leaver services with highly positive feedback from the young people themselves. Children's services was highly ambitious, with a clear vision and direction and providing consistent support. However there was more to do in terms of the numbers in education, employment or training something which was acknowledged by the team.

A link to the report is provided for information (put link here)

The Executive Director of Children's Services expressed her pride in the staff and young people and added her thanks to the staff for their hard work. The Chair added his own thanks to the staff for this positive outcome and the hard work undertaken to achieve it.

14. Any other business which the chair considers urgent

Ward Jackson School

The Executive Director of Children's Services informed Members that Ward Jackson Primary School had achieved international recognition after entering a worldwide competition and being selected as one of only ten schools globally to receive an award for overcoming adversity and its strong commitment to relationship based practice, restorative approaches and inclusion.

The Committee congratulated the school on this significant achievement. It was reported that the Executive Director of Children's Services and the Chair would be visiting the school, and members expressed their pride in the school's success and in the positive recognition it had brought to the area. Details of the achievement will be published on social media.

Corporate Parent Summer BBQ

The Chair reminded members of the Corporate Parent BBQ on 9th July and encourage all Members to attend.

The meeting concluded at 5.40 pm

H MARTIN

DIRECTOR OF LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND HUMAN RESOURCES

PUBLICATION DATE: