

Corporate Scrutiny Committee Tuesday 15th October 2024

Report Title	Children's Trust and Transformation & Efficiency Board Update
Report Author	Colin Foster, Chief Executive, Northamptonshire Children's Trust

Are there public sector equality duty implications?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Applicable paragraph number/s for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972	N/A
Which Corporate Plan priority does the report most closely align with? Our priorities for the future North Northamptonshire Council (northnorthants.gov.uk)	Better, brighter futures

List of Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Key Projects
- Appendix 2 – Valuing Care Assessments
- Appendix 3 – Approved Business Cases
- Appendix 4 – Benefits Realisation Summary

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. The purpose of the report is to provide the Corporate Scrutiny Committee with an update on Transformation and Efficiency activity associated with the Children's Trust and the wider systems improvement approach to delivering better outcomes and achieving better value for money.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. Both North and West Northamptonshire Councils have been committed to ensuring better outcomes and value for money to support families, children and young people. During 2023 there were considerable financial pressures arising from the Children's Trust and spend on increasing demand.

- 2.2. The Department for Education (DfE) met with all parties to agree a way forwards after the challenges in relationships in 2023.
- 2.3. As part of these arrangements and ensure good governance, the Transformation and Efficiency Board was introduced in December 2023 and is chaired by the Chief Executives of WNC and NNC. The remit of the board has three core responsibilities:
 - 2.3.1. Transformation – providing strategic capacity and support to progress core children’s and joint Councils/NCT transformation projects and programme.
 - 2.3.2. Programme Oversight and Management – robust governance, plans and business cases.
 - 2.3.3. Right sourcing – considering/changing the delivery model or commissioning of services.
- 2.4. All are managed with a 3-way shared ownership and oversight of spend, benefits realisation (which is detailed in Appendix 4) and end user experiences and impacts.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 The Corporate Scrutiny Committee is recommended to note the contents of the report and progress made to date.

4. Report Background

- 4.1. North Northamptonshire Council (NNC) and West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) are committed to supporting Northamptonshire Children’s Trust (NCT) to deliver Children’s Social Care and Targeted Early Help services across Northamptonshire. Both take their corporate parenting role very seriously and want to support children, young people and families to thrive in their community.
- 4.2. Children’s Services in Northamptonshire were judged ‘inadequate’ by Ofsted in 2019.
- 4.3. Northamptonshire Children’s Trust (NCT) was partially formed on 1st November 2020 and fully launched on 1st April 2021.
- 4.4. From 1st April 2021, after the abolition of Northamptonshire County Council, North Northamptonshire Council (NNC) and West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) became joint owners of Northamptonshire Children’s Trust (NCT). Whilst NCT is operationally independent of the Councils, the Councils still retain significant control over NCT and are responsible for making decisions on a number of ‘reserved matters’ that are set out in the NCT’s Articles of Association.
- 4.5. The Transformation and Efficiency Board was created in November 2023 and to date has convened on three occasions with monthly meetings booked for the remainder of 2024.
- 4.6. The membership is made of officers from NCT, North and West Northamptonshire Councils and chaired by the Councils Chief Executives (half of the year each). The board also has representation from the Department of Education.

4.7. The objectives of the board are to

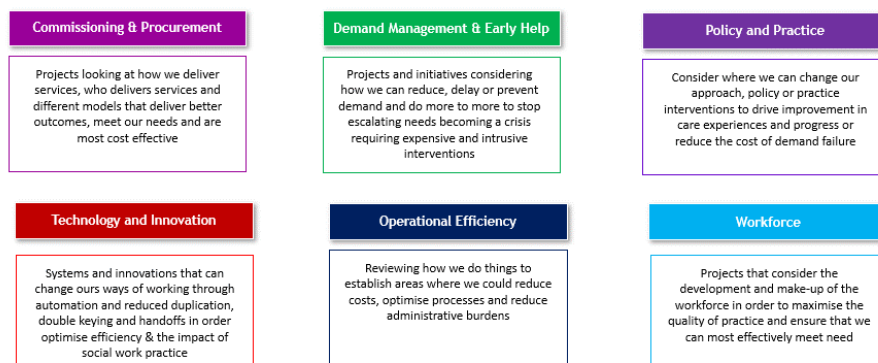
- Create a systemic improvement in services for children in Northamptonshire.
- Address historical structural deficits in services of children.
- Improve partnership understanding of what a 'good' system looks like.
- Improve and drive value for money services that manage demand.
- Currently Ofsted rates both WNC and NNC as "Requires Improvement" a "Good" judgement at ILACS may also lead to removal of DfE statutory intervention notice which could enable a review of options for future delivery.

4.8 The Board also reviews the progress made on financial matters. In terms of spend within the Trust, the key significant areas of spend are Placements (approximately 50% of the Trust's budget) and Staffing (30%) with smaller percentages relations to Children's Homes and Adoption (approximately 6.5%).

4.9. Transformation activity is supported by key themes of improvement.

Transformation By Themes

To assist with oversight and understanding the current and proposed project/transformation initiatives will be split into themes that create clarity on the who, what and how & align to the ILACs framework



4.10. To develop a comprehensive work programme, the work has been split into six key themes and they also align to the inspection framework supporting the improvement plan for both West and North's future Ofsted inspections of Children's Services.

4.11. **Commissioning and Procurement** – projects looking at how we deliver services, who delivers services and different models that deliver better outcomes, meet our needs and are more cost effective. This picks up the highest level of spend relating to placements.

4.12. **Demand Management and Early Help** – projects considering how we can reduce, delay or prevent demand and do more to stop escalating need. This picks up the work to help avoid more children and young people going into the Children's Trust and preventing demand as well as looking at how best to manage demand in NCT from front door to fulfilment of services and advice.

- 4.13. **Workforce** – projects that consider the development and makeup of the workforce. Again, this is one of the higher spending areas.
- 4.14. **Technology and Innovation** - systems and innovations that can support greater productivity through automation and reduced duplication.
- 4.15. **Operational Efficiency** – Reviewing how we do things to establish areas where we could reduce costs, optimise processes and reduce administrative burdens.
- 4.16. **Policy and Practice** - consideration of changes in approach, policy or practice interventions to drive improvement.

5. Progress since November 2023

- 5.1. Following approval of business cases, progress will be monitored by the Transformation and Efficiency Board.
- 5.2. The Transformation and Efficiency Board approved the following business cases as well as ensuring there was sufficient support for a wider set of improvement activity within the Trust, culminating in over 30 key projects. (See Appendix 1)

Operational Efficiency

- Circle to Success Delivery
- Maximising Housing Benefit Subsidy Delivery

Policy and Practice

- Placement Efficiency
- Improving Outcomes for Children – IRO CP Chair Delivery
- Practice Model Delivery
- Improving Engagement for Young People – IV Visitor

Improving Outcomes for Children

- Strategic Manager Delivery
- Family Support Workers Practice

Demand Management

- Exploitation Hub Delivery
- MASH Review Delivery

Workforce

- Workforce Managed Teams

- 5.3. The overall programme has progressed well over the past 10 months and the board has also agreed to further business cases in relation to wider improvements in the overarching systems with work on Early Help and on Leaving Care, which involves both councils.
- 5.4. There has also been a lot of work done looking at “Getting to Good” in terms of the ILACs (Inspections of Local Authorities Children’s Services) and a focus on system improvement with support from other councils (via the SLIP – Sector Led Improvement Programme) and through the LGA.

5.5 There is currently work being undertaken to review the in-house foster care model and the development of an integrated offer around therapeutic support and working with an existing children's home.

5.6 Recent Updates on Commissioning and Procurement

Alternative Residential Accommodation

Both Councils have started to identify alternative residential accommodation for all ages of children and young people, including care leavers, that could be added to the current programme of new provision between the councils and NCT. This supports work on the increasing demands of post 16 and post 18 accommodation needs which has been significant in the past two years. It also looks to provision of high cost and specialist placement alternatives such as mother and baby and provision for individual children with very specific needs and requirements.

West Northants Council has already approved a capital fund of £20m and it is expected that North Northants review a capital programme in autumn 2024. This is in relation to the provision of residential accommodation, including the conversion of current stock and the potential of buying suitable properties from the open market.

Strategic Partnership for Placements

A key strategic consideration is the exploration of a long-term strategic partner for placements rather than use one off spot purchasing or a block contract, over and above the inhouse provision. The Transformation and Efficiency Board agreed for NCT to explore the options to enter a long-term contract (till 2030) with one provider as an opportunity to co-design ways to work together to flexibly provide Ofsted registered homes for children in care and care leavers, and additional services to meet needs of our children and young people, whilst also providing stability through existing arrangements.

This supports the development of a mixed model of provision for residential placements and helps to avoid the number of unregistered placements. More work will need to be done to fully evaluate this approach by both West and North Northamptonshire Councils and Northamptonshire Children's Trust working through the detail.

Circles to Success

Considerable savings have been made through this piece of collaborative work. The work on "Valuing Care", a strengths-based approach including intensive therapeutic support to help step down and at times exit from residential placements continues to make excellent progress.

Over 550 children now have a "Valuing Care" assessment and 63 children and young people this year have been actively worked with to help reduce demand. For both Quarters 1 and 2 of this year the actual turn arounds have exceeded the lower tolerance targets set and the savings this year to date are just under £2m.

Work continues positively with the reduction of placement by stepping children down and reducing the impact of children coming into care. There is currently work being undertaken to develop a model of assessing strengths and capabilities in the wider system (councils,

NCT) to ensure good practice can be embedded and the work continues on “valuing care” assessments. (See Appendix 2)

5.7 Recent Updates on Demand Management and Early Help

Work continues about the design of the **front door and redesign of MASH** and a programme of work has been developed. This is a significant improvement programme that involves the redesign of the front door for the Trust and its inter-relationship with both councils and their early help and family hub work as well as key partners such as health, police and schools.

Early Help - In order to help this arrangement, Transformation and Efficiency Board agreed that money earmarked for transformation at the Trust would be returned to both councils to support their early help offer. This equates to £0.738m for West and £0.584m for North. This remains a key priority for the wider system to help prevent more significant demand resulting in statutory interventions through the Children’s Trust and support family resilience.

5.8 Recent Updates on the Workforce

The Trust has continued to be successful in converting a number of agency workers into permanent workers alongside recruiting to full time members of staff. Work with OPUS has also led to improved rates for temporary direct recruits. The key areas where temporary members of staff are still required are the Safeguarding, Initial Referral and Court teams which is in line with other councils.

Work continues with OPUS to help the drive for more direct recruitment including permanent staff with the net position in July being the reduction of 4 more social work posts. The drive to attract social workers into NCT has resulted in there being 12.9% SW vacancies in July 24, which is lower than 23/24 and 22/23.

The July 2024 turnover percentage is 9.9% (all staff) and this is lower than 23/24 and 22/23

5.9 Recent Updates on Technology and Innovation

There has been a successful procurement of a new case management system for children’s services. The decision has been to award to System C (Liquid Logic).

Once contracts have been signed an agreed implementation plan will be co-produced with System C. In preparation for this, a draft implementation plan based upon a 13-month implementation has been developed, with a potential go-live in July 2025

A contract extension with the incumbent supplier OLM is being sought, as the existing contract ends January 2025. A key element of the work is data migration from the current systems in place.

Through the work done on innovation, the Trust is considering a range of pilots that support greater efficiency including:

Automation of MASH referral forms

Use of Co-pilot to help with minutes in meetings.

Use of Co-pilot to translate notes and documents so families can understand them.

5.10 Recent Updates on Operational Efficiency

Office Optimisation roll out is continuing in both West and North.

The plans for West and the changes to OAS and Towcester have been signed off and the Trust has agreed its interim and final plans for OAS, including a new home for the Social Work Academy and learning and development. The work programme for Towcester has been reprioritised to ensure improvements to the Ground floor commence first.

Accommodation plans are progressing in the North with the development of improved office space across key sites and developing a leaving care site for North.

Legal Services has now transitioned from Pathfinder to both councils and is realising significant costs savings. A lot of work has been done to ensure the smooth transition during the late summer with peer support to review arrangements.

5.11 Recent Updates on Policy and Practice

There are considerable pieces of work associated with improving practice and quality of the offer and ensuring that there is sufficient support for both West and North.

Resources have been agreed by the T and E Board with regard to the **Edge of Care** work (diverting children and young people from care) and the creation of a **Family Drug and Alcohol Court** which helps to prevent children coming into care.

A work programme is being developed with North Yorkshire Council as the councils' SLIP (Sector Led Improvement Partner). There has been a review of Early Help completed by North Yorkshire and support also planned for Leaving Care.

6. Next Steps

6.1. Continue robust monitoring arrangements through transformation and efficiencies board.

7. Implications (including financial implications)

7.1 Resources and Financial

7.1.1. When the Trust was being developed, detailed work was completed to calculate how costs would be split between North and West Northamptonshire Councils. This was based on the relative populations and demand for children's social care services in each council area. It was agreed that WNC would contribute 56% and NNC would contribute 44% exclusive of any specific grants that are given directly to NNC or WNC to passport to the Trust.

7.1.2. To support the Trust to deliver their business plan the Councils and NCT have agreed a provisional Contract Sum of £180.009m made up of block 1 core funding (£177.429m) and Block 2 transformation individual items (2.580m).

7.1.3. Block 2 transformation individual items funding of £2.580m includes £2.363m which is non-recurring.

- 7.1.4. WNC and NNC have made provision for a block 3 transformation costs totalling £3.291m. Use of this funding will be subject to business cases being presented to and approved by the Transformation and Efficiency Board.
- 7.1.5. The initial business cases are aligned to the work done in relation to the negotiation of the contract sum for the Children's Trust, with both councils supporting the arrangements.

7.2. Legal and Governance

- 7.2.1. The relationship between NCT and the Councils is governed by a series of contractual and legal agreements.
- 7.2.2. There are no immediate legal implications arising from the proposals. Consideration for specific legal implications are reviewed as part of the business case development and approval.

7.3. Relevant Policies and Plans

- 7.3.1. NNC has identified 'Brighter, Better Futures' as a key priority in its Corporate Plan recognising that children, young people and their families may need help at different stages in their lives. They will aim to provide help as early as possible and provide the right support, at the right time in the right way to ensure that children are safeguarded and get the best start in life.
- 7.3.2. WNC has identified 'Improved life chances: Best Start in Life' as a key priority of its Corporate Plan, including a focus on early help services to ensure children have the best start in life and parents have the right support at the right time from the right service, to enable families to thrive.
- 7.3.3. Both NNC and WNC's identified priorities will be achieved by supporting NCT to provide higher standards of support.

7.4. Risk

- 7.4.1. Risk summaries have been completed for each project and a programme risk register is being developed.

7.5. Consultation

- 7.5.1. Appendix 3 which details the business cases approved by the Transformation & Efficiencies Board has been reported at both the Children's Trust Operational Group and Strategic Group in February 2024.

7.6. Equality Implications

- 7.6.1. There are no specific equality implications arising from this report.

7.7. Climate Impact

- 7.1.1 There is no specific climate impact arising from this report, however as NNC and WNC committed to considering impact on the environment which is managed via the individual strategic lead partnership organisation via organisational policy and commitments.
- 7.1.2 NNC, WNC and NCT are aware there are emissions associated with publishing web content and will seek to minimise the impact where possible.

7.8. Community Impact

- 7.8.1. There is no specific community impact arising from this report.

7.9. Crime and Disorder Impact

- 7.9.1. There is no specific crime and disorder impact arising from this report.

8. Background Papers

- 8.1. The report has been based on the actions arising from the Transformation and Efficiency Board papers.