



**Cumberland
Council**

Children and Family Wellbeing Strategic Plan

September 2024 - March 2026

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1. Introduction

We are ambitious for all of our children and families in Cumberland. We want our children to live, work and play in a community where they are able to grow, thrive, be safe, have a voice and flourish.

The Children and Young People's Partnership boards (see governance and partnerships) bring together representatives from the different agencies across Cumberland who work with children, young people and their families. The Partnerships agree the priorities and seek to understand the most important issues and problems faced by children, young people and families in Cumberland. More importantly, we agree how we are going to face the issues and seek solutions by working together through respectful and restorative challenge by holding each other to account.

In Cumberland, we want to ensure we are undertaking our duties and commitments to the best of our abilities. We celebrate success together but when things are not going well, we explore and learn, while seeking to continually improve. The Partnerships think together and act together in order to drive the change that will deliver better outcomes for children, young people and their families.

While all partners have their own statutory duties, we know that by working together in genuine and effective partnership across the whole of our system, we can add significant value to each other's work, resulting in better support for those who need it most. Our Children and Young People's Plan seeks to bring about the strategic changes needed that will enable us to meet the needs of our children and young people.

2. Local context, local voices

About the local area

Cumberland Council was formally incepted as a new unitary authority on 1 April 2023, whereby all services and functions for children, families and communities are now delivered by the one local council, having previously being delivered by Cumbria County Council.

The Cumberland footprint is geographically large with a relatively small population. Cumberland covers an area of 3,012 square km: covering just over one fifth (21%) of the Northwest region. With a population of 273,300 and an average population density of 91 people per square km, Cumberland is much more sparsely populated than the national average (395 people per square km).

Over half (53%) of Cumberland's population live in rural areas, compared to 18% nationally. Fourteen of Cumberland's 177 Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) are classified as being within the 10% most deprived of areas in England. Approximately 72,313 children and young people aged 0-25 (up to 26th birthday) live in Cumberland; this equates to 26.4% of Cumberland's total population.

As a proportion of the 0-25 age population in Cumberland, 3.76% are recorded as having an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) – 2,721 young people (est. March 2023).

Cumberland has a total of 172 Local Authority maintained schools and academies, comprised of:

- Nursery schools - 3
- Pupil Referral Units - 2
- Primary Schools - 145
- Secondary Schools - 19
- Special Schools - 3

Cumberland has 19 Children's Centres (including satellite centres) and currently one Family Hub located in Whitehaven. There are plans to extend the access to services further and introduce a mobile family hub offer to the most rural and hard to reach locations.



Local voices

We aim to continually improve services for our children and families by listening to feedback from those we serve.

We achieve this by working in true collaborative partnership with children and families and through meaningful quality assurance of services - both internal and commissioned.

"My life would be so much easier if we didn't have to fight for every little thing for our son. Nothing comes easy when you have a child with additional needs." - **Parent**

"More support for teens who are struggling emotionally and with their mental health. There is a gap in this area I feel." - **Parent**

"I need someone who can believe in me." - **Young Person**

"It wasn't so long ago that my daughter was refusing to go to school, her mental health was very poor. She was incredibly vulnerable. Her school attendance record is excellent now and she is achieving really well." - **Parent**

3. Our journey so far

- Disaggregation of former Cumbria County Council's Children's Services to Cumberland Council and Westmorland and Furness Council, while ensuring safe service delivery.
- Reviewed how we deliver Family Help in Cumberland, undertaking a strategic analysis of need and subsequently co-designing and launching our Family Help and Preventative Strategy for children and families.
- We have launched our Cumberland Local Area SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy 2024 to 2028.
- Opened our first Family Hub, named by our families as Family Hub on the Harbour, Whitehaven, working with the local community and partners to deliver services that are tailored to local need.
- Led the way nationally in recognising care experience as a protected characteristic. Cumberland Council was the first Local Authority in the country to secure this commitment and recognise the valuable contribution care experienced young adults make to our community and society.
- We have a refreshed and renewed Corporate Parenting Board chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Children and Housing, which ensures Elected Members and stakeholder partners regularly hear feedback directly from our children.
- We have launched our Corporate Parenting strategy and accompanying corporate parenting delivery plan.

- Continually striving for excellence for our children, we have developed a children's Improvement Board, chaired by an independent DfE appointed advisor. We have revised our Improvement and Development Plan which has been developed from external and internal scrutiny through deep dive review, family feedback and audit.
- Secured significant investment in the Children and Family Wellbeing Directorate through additional senior leadership capacity. This includes a new role of Assistant Director for Early Help, Prevention and Youth Justice plus an additional Senior Manager. We have revised the senior management roles within social care, implementing a Senior Manager for Corporate Parenting and Senior Manager for Support and Protection both of whom are permanently in post.
- We have redesigned the Assistant Director role for Safeguarding and Quality Assurance which includes a dedicated Principal Social Worker post and quality assurance lead.
- We have successfully secured DfE support to develop a Regional Fostering and Recruitment Hub and Mockingbird model of support to foster carers.
- We have secured participation in a DfE supported project to support cared for children through a Family Finding project. We have realigned Family Resilience Workers to the project to support cared for children to return to Cumberland - and, where possible, return to the care of their families.
- We have launched a new Quality Assurance Framework and Practice Standards. Feedback from families is now a standard part of our auditing work and is used to ensure that we are learning from what our families tell us.
- Invested in our Social Work Academy and overseas workforce.
- We have established links with research projects. As a council, we have secured £5m in funding to enable our staff to participate in research, which contributes to improving services and their own their continued professional development.

Transforming our services

We have embarked on an ambitious three-year transformation programme for Children, Family and Wellbeing Services:

- Launched a vision for our residential children's homes through our revised sufficiency strategy.
- Created one integrated front door to enable better access to services, now based in Cumberland and co-located with partners.
- We have reviewed our targeted short breaks provision for children with additional needs and disabilities to improve access to and delivery of services.
- Review of home to school transport and traded services to deliver services more effectively and efficiently.
- Supported a number of cared for children to return to Cumberland by more effective commissioning, positive engagement with the local children's home providers - 'Cumberland Children First'.
- Reviewed our offer to kinship carers - securing investment in frontline staffing to enable enhanced support and development of a 'no child disadvantaged SGO policy' recognising the vital role kinship carers play in children's lives.

4. Our approach - the Five Pillars of Excellence

Our vision, strategic priorities and values



5. The Strategic Priorities for the next 18 months

1) A stable workforce

Continue to develop Cumberland as a great place to work, understand our identity and what it means to work within children and families' services.

Launch our workforce recruitment and retention strategy which will support our 'Grow your own' model.

Recognising, embracing, and growing talent, and attracting the best people to Cumberland.

Continue to develop our Academy approach to newly qualified social workers and develop the approach further to extend to all new staff across the directorate. Develop leadership within the Academy ensuring that our staff have access to learning and development which supports a confident workforce with the right skills and knowledge. We will do the 'basics brilliantly' for all our children.

We will further invest in our staff and volunteer pool to ensure a professional, skilled and knowledgeable workforce across all services for children, families and education including our Youth Justice Services. This will be underpinned by a revised and improved core training offer, supplementary training and continued professional development through regular and reflective supervision.

How will we know we have succeeded?

Reduced reliance on interim agency staff - we will have a permanent, confident and skilled workforce and clear development and progression routes to attract and retain the very best.

2) Right services for the right children at the right time

We will deliver on our priorities within the **Family Help and Prevention Strategy** to provide innovative, inclusive and compassionate services that nurture the growth, development and well-being of every child. We will create a community where every child receives the right support at the right time through collaborative partnership working reducing the need for children to become cared for.

We will work together with public health to strengthen our 0-19 strategy- supporting children to have a better start and enabling families access to good quality services.

We will continue to strengthen our partnerships with health, police, education and third sector organisations across Cumberland.

Support the delivery and commissioning of evidence-based programmes and initiatives tailored to the local need of our families.

Review the current access and delivery of services under CA1989 S.17 'Child in Need' to implement the social care reforms – 'Stable Homes built on love'.

Support children to attend good quality schools.

Reviewing our home to school transport policy for more efficient use of resources.

Supporting children's 'belonging' in schools and improved attainment, ensuring children get the support they need when they need it.

We will deliver on our priorities within the Local Area SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy 2024-2028 as we believe children and young people with SEND and young people who are educated in Alternative Provision deserve high quality, local support, services and provision.

Continue to strengthen the Local Area SEND and AP Strategic Partnership. Through collaboration and honesty with all key partners, we will ensure that every child and young person receives the right support at the right time and in the right place to best meet their individual needs.

We will deliver on our priorities within the Early Years Strategy – Giving Every Child the best Start in Life.

Prevent and divert children and young people from anti-social and offending behaviour.

Ensure restorative practice ethos, principles and approaches are embedded in youth justice service delivery in Cumberland.

Continue to work in partnership with North Tyne and Wear, who provide our youth justice psychology led enhanced case management approach.



How will we know we have succeeded?

Reduction in demand for statutory and child protection services through better support at an earlier point.

We will support more children at an early help/child in need level and reduce our numbers of children who are at risk of significant harm, child protection planning and being cared for.

More children will be effectively educated within mainstream schools that can meet their individual needs and aim to reduce children being electively home educated through improved SEND support and good quality alternative provision.

Any first time entrants into the criminal justice system will remain low. Children and young people who come into contact with the youth justice system are supported to improve their behaviour; can integrate back into their communities with ease; and through restorative intervention, are supported to reduce offending and improve their long term aspirational goals for the future.

Increase the number of young children taking up high quality early years provision places within the private voluntary and independent sector and schools.



3) Excellence in practice

Develop practice standards for Family Help and Prevention to compliment the standards in place and launched within children's social care.

Develop our practice model Signs of Safety, further offering trauma informed, and relational and restorative training across all service areas.

Understanding the voice of the child, their lived experience, working with the family networks and support to develop safe plans that manage risk in a sensible and proportionate way, drawing on strength but intervening when required.

Use of complaints, compliments, family feedback to celebrate success together and learn when we need to get better.

Model good practice, and behaviours - be respectful and curious - value each other and celebrate difference.

Better use and development of performance data, to really understand themes, trends and be able to respond quickly, efficiently and intelligently to changing demands on services as social needs change.

Improve our response to poverty and neglect through embedding the neglect strategy and use of diagnostic support tools.

Work collaboratively with partners to better understand and respond to the impact for children of parental domestic abuse, substance and alcohol use and poor mental health.

Understand and respond to harm outside of the home for children who may be at risk of exploitation, radicalisation, trafficking, criminalisation and modern-day slavery. We will do this by developing a multi-agency, all-age strategy and delivery plan that extends beyond childhood years - recognising harm continues beyond 18 years.

How will we know we have succeeded?

Our audits, feedback and engagement with children, families and partners will demonstrate and evidence our collaborative and outstanding work with those in receipt of education, support, and social care services.

4) Innovative and aspirational services - right home right time/ sufficiency strategy

Develop new homes in Cumberland for children whom we care for.

Ensure that our care experienced young adults have access to high quality services, support and access to advice as an extended offer beyond 25 years of age through the development of a dedicated helpline.

Work with the third and private sector to bring children home to Cumberland wherever safe and possible.

Reduce the need for children to live far away from home by improving our sufficiency through a Cumberland first approach to commissioning.

Increase our number of foster carers working creatively and supporting an attractive offer and support package.

Launch of Mockingbird model of fostering support.

Development of regional adoption agency across the Cumbria footprint in partnership with Westmorland and Furness Council that embraces modernity and supports positive adoption outcomes for the child's life course to improve outcomes and reduce the impact of family breakdown.

Working with regional partners, government advisors and our regulators positively - to improve, share and celebrate best practice - building solid relationships within the sector and partners.

How will we know we have succeeded?

More children who are cared for will be living within their Cumberland community; we will be less reliant on the private sector for children who do need to be in our care; and all our children's homes will be good or outstanding.



5) 'Nothing for us without us' - collaboration, lived experience, wishes and views, and co-production of services with children and families/partners

Ensuring that children, young people and their families have the opportunity to actively participate in the decisions that affect their lives, in the delivery of the services they receive, and in the development of the policies that impact on them.

By holding family, child and professional experiences at the centre of the work we do.

Valuing feedback - using compliments and complaints as an aid to learning and genuinely embracing feedback as a tool to develop and grow excellent services.

Development of participation and engagement services for children, young people, their families and carers - being visible to them and creating space for safety and honesty.

Better engagement with the LGBTQ+ community and Black and Ethnic Minority groups; being cognisant to difference and understanding the challenges marginalised communities can face; being agents of change and advocates of challenge by hearing their voices and creating a culture that is open to learning.

Improve our understanding and response to those who are neuro diverse and working across sectors internally and externally to improve responses and support.

How will we know we have succeeded?

Over the next 18 months we will continue to collaborate and review our services. As a new authority we have ambitious plans and intend to extend these plans even further. We will continue to review the impact of service delivery, and will collaborate and coproduce a 5 year Children and Family Plan that is written and led by our Cumberland children and families. We aim to launch this plan in April 2026.

We will endeavour to have:



6. Our Governance and Partnerships

