

POLICY DIGEST, February 2016

This digest presents a summary of the latest policy developments at a national and regional level of strategic relevance to Northumberland and highlights Government announcements of relevance to local government. This issue covers period from Monday 1 February to Friday 26 February. Previous and subsequent editions are available at www.northumberland.gov.uk/policy.

Policy Development	Action	Lead
PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY		
<p>Greg Clark confirms historic 4-year settlement for local government (8 February 2016)</p> <p>Greg Clark has confirmed an historic settlement for town halls, paving the way for councils to have greater financial freedom from Whitehall, while at the same time responding to calls from local government to make funding adult social care a key priority. The 4-year financial settlement transforms the relationship between central and local government – this is something councils have been calling for over a number of decades. By the end of this decade, councils will be funded from revenues they raise locally, rather than central government grants. To help councils transform from dependence on central government grants to greater financial autonomy, local government will receive £300 million transitional funding over the next 2 years, after which other resources will grow. The settlement also recognises the importance of funding adult social care, with up to £3.5 billion of additional funds being made available to local government for these services by 2019 to 2020.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/greg-clark-confirms-historic-4-year-settlement-for-local-government</p>	For information	Alison Elsdon, Director of Corporate Resources
<p>Invigorating the public sector revolution</p> <p>This report published by Solace and Civica reveals that only 7% of public sector employees at middle manager level and below views the public sector as an empowering environment. It explores how a public sector cultural revolution is essential to lead a progressive workforce to empower the digital citizen and discusses how people, culture and leadership are not only key barriers but also enablers of wholesale change. The sector’s imperative to balance the books is still driving significant spending cuts across the majority of services. Although the public sector has started to make some head-way in its journey to deliver re-designed and integrated services in the run up to 2025 and beyond, this latest Solace and Civica report identifies a need for leaders to empower the wider workforce and create an organisational culture and structure that supports and drives transformation. Civica research found that 34% of public sector employees at middle manager level and below believe leaders need to alter the entire organisational structure, with 30%</p> <p>https://www.civica.co.uk/articles/910-Public-sector-transformation-demands-greater-focus-on-leadership-and-culture</p>	For information	Kelly Angus, Director of Human Resources

PLACE SHAPING		
<p>Self-build and custom housebuilding: draft planning practice guidance (4 February 2016)</p> <p>This Government guidance advises on the requirements in the Self-build and Custom Housebuilding (Register) Regulations 2016 made under the Self-build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015. It should be used by relevant authorities in designing the register they are required to keep under the Act, of individuals and associations of individuals, who are seeking to acquire serviced plots of land in their area in order to build homes for those individuals to occupy (referred to in this guidance as self-build and custom housebuilding registers). It should be read alongside the current guidance on the housing and economic development needs assessment and the housing and economic land availability assessment available on the planning practice guidance portal. On 1 April 2016 the statutory duties under the 2015 Act to keep a register and to have regard to it will come into force and this guidance will be published on the government's planning practice guidance portal. This guidance applies to England only.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/self-build-and-custom-housebuilding-draft-planning-practice-guidance</p>	For information	Geoff Paul, Director of Planning and Economy
<p>Heseltine launches panel of experts to kick-start estates regeneration (9 February 2016)</p> <p>New tenants rights will be at the heart of the regeneration of some of the country's most deprived estates, Lord Heseltine has confirmed. A new panel will look at how the layout of estates can be best used to deliver more quality homes that people can buy and rent. The experts will also ensure that there are strong protections in place for existing residents so they will always be given the right to return to their communities. The 17-strong group, co-chaired by Lord Heseltine and Housing Minister Brandon Lewis and reporting to the Prime Minister and Communities Secretary Greg Clark, will develop a national estate regeneration strategy and work with up to 100 estates to tackle deprivation and transform them into vibrant communities. The Prime Minister announced last month that £140 million would be made available to jump-start the regeneration. The loan funding will allow communities to lever in investment from the public and private sector to deliver ambitious projects that local people can be proud of.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/heseltine-launches-panel-of-experts-to-kick-start-estates-regeneration</p>	For information	
<p>New Buses Bill to deliver a better deal for the public (11 February 2016)</p> <p>Bus travel is to be made more passenger-friendly as councils will be given more freedom to improve services, under measures set out by Roads Minister Andrew Jones, as he delivered a keynote speech at the UK Bus Summit. Under the changes in the Buses Bill, councils will be given the choice to franchise services and enter into new partnerships with providers. This will make sure buses run more regularly, to avoid several being timetabled to arrive at once. The new partnerships will also be given the power to set standards for local buses and introduce standard ticketing rules over wider areas, paving the way for Oyster-style schemes. The government will also honour its devolution deal commitment to provide local authorities with bus franchising powers — like those used in London. A Buses Bill to implement these changes will go before Parliament later this year.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-buses-bill-to-deliver-a-better-deal-for-the-public</p>	For information	Geoff Paul, Director of Planning and Economy

<p>Boosting productivity in rural areas (11 February 2016)</p> <p>Rural entrepreneurs and housebuilders in England will have the opportunity to provide ideas on how the planning system can better support rural life, making it simpler for them to expand their businesses and to build much needed new homes. The move comes as the government launches a planning review to reduce regulatory burdens in support of new homes, jobs and innovation. It will also review the rules for converting agricultural buildings to residential use, building on the success of the 2014 changes which have seen more than 2,000 agricultural buildings being allowed to be converted to much-needed homes. The Rural Planning Review, jointly published by the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, is the latest milestone in the delivery of the Government's Rural Productivity Plan, launched last summer by Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, and Environment Secretary, Elizabeth Truss.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/boosting-productivity-in-rural-areas</p>	For information	Geoff Paul, Director of Planning and Economy
<p>Implementation of planning changes: technical consultation (18 February 2016)</p> <p>This consultation is seeking views on the proposed approach to implementation of measures in the Housing and Planning Bill, and some other planning measures. Responses to the consultation will inform the detail of the secondary legislation which will be prepared once the Bill gains Royal Assent. This consultation closes on 15 April 2016.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/implementation-of-planning-changes-technical-consultation</p>	Officers to consider feeding comments into the consultation	Geoff Paul, Director of Planning and Economy

ECONOMIC PROSPERITY		
<p>New body to secure investment for Tees Valley (19 February 2016)</p> <p>Plans to drive growth, create jobs and secure the economic future of Tees Valley have taken a major step forward as local leaders were put in pole position to transform the former SSI steelworks site. Former Deputy Prime Minister Lord Heseltine revealed plans would go full-steam ahead for a new Mayoral Development Corporation – the first of its kind outside of London – to drive forward regeneration and local economic growth in the Tees Valley area. Work will start immediately to form the corporation. This will offer a vehicle for greater powers to be devolved, in areas including regeneration planning and business support. These powers will be available at the new Mayor's disposal so the area can quickly take up economic opportunities as they arise. Since the closure of SSI in October, the government has put in place a multi-million pound package of support for the affected local community. Lord Heseltine has been tasked with encouraging investment to create new job opportunities across the Tees Valley.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-body-to-secure-investment-for-tees-valley</p>	For information	

HEALTH & WELLBEING		
<p>New investment in mental health services (15 February 2016)</p> <p>An extra £1 billion will be invested in mental health care by 2021 and a million more people will get mental health support. The announcement follows the publication of a report by the Mental Health Taskforce, chaired by Paul Farmer, Chief Executive of Mind. The taskforce has reviewed mental health care and has set out its vision for preventative, holistic mental health care and making sure that care is always available for people experiencing a crisis. The recommendations to be delivered by 2021 include: an end to the practice of sending people out of their local area for acute inpatient care; providing mental health care to 70,000 more children and young people; supporting 30,000 more new and expectant mothers through maternal mental health services; new funding to ensure all acute hospitals have mental health services in emergency departments for people of all ages; increasing access to talking therapies to reach 25% of those who need this support; and a commitment to reducing suicides by 10%</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-investment-in-mental-health-services</p>	For information	Jane Bowie, Head of Safeguarding and Strategic Commissioning
<p>Gateway to Affordable Credit</p> <p>This report from the Carnegie Trust outlines how to make cheaper, small, short-term loans available to disadvantaged communities across Scotland. The report sets out eighteen recommendations focused on leadership, partnership, and development and investment. The recommendations are designed to achieve the following outcome statement: "All citizens in Scotland, wherever they live, have access to excellent forms of community lending which helps them to reduce the cost of borrowing and supports their financial inclusion, promotes fairness and reduces inequality".</p> <p>http://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/gateway-to-affordable-credit</p>	For information	Geoff Paul, Director of Planning and Economy
<p>Adult Social Care: capital grant allocations 2016 to 2017 (24 February 2016)</p> <p>This letter clarifies local authority capital funding for the financial year 2016 to 2017, which was subject to the 2015 Spending Review. It confirms that unlike in previous years there will be no special allocation of capital funding for adult social care. Funding is instead being added to the allocation for Disabled Facilities Grants.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/adult-social-care-capital-grant-allocations-2016-to-2017</p>	For information	Jane Bowie, Head of Safeguarding and Strategic Commissioning
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE		
<p>North-east teenager receives award from Education Secretary (2 February 2016)</p> <p>An outstanding teenager who used his online blog to raise awareness about mental health issues has received a prestigious award from Education Secretary Nicky Morgan. Student George Hunter, from Ponteland High School in Northumberland, picked up the annual Lord Glenamara Memorial Prize during a ceremony at King's College, London. George, a straight A and A* student and St John's Ambulance volunteer, was the fourth winner of the annual prize open to high-achieving youngsters in years 11 and 12 across the north-east of England who have made positive civic contributions, often in their spare time. Among George's recent achievements was his 'My Tie Diary' blog that was set up to encourage discussion about mental health and raise awareness on the subject. He had also found the time to run a series of Mandarin classes for year 9 pupils following on from his win in a national Mandarin speaking competition.</p>	For information	

https://www.gov.uk/government/news/north-east-teenager-receives-award-from-education-secretary		
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<p>Thousands of parents benefit from 30 hours' free childcare early (2 February 2016)</p> <p>Childcare Minister Sam Gyimah has announced £13 million, which will allow councils across the country to deliver 30 hours of free childcare for hard working parents of 3- and 4-year-olds - a year ahead of schedule. As a result, some working parents in Wigan, Staffordshire, Swindon, Portsmouth, Northumberland, York, Newham and Hertfordshire will now benefit from the early offer from this September. The extra hours of childcare will make it easier for these parents to work and is another move designed to meet the government's commitment to make work pay. The core group of councils will be supported by 25 others, who will look specifically at innovative ways of making sure childcare is accessible to as many parents as possible. Their experiences will then be used to support the full rollout in 2017, with the aim of removing significant barriers to parents taking up their entitlement.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/thousands-of-parents-benefit-from-30-hours-free-childcare-early</p>	For information	Rachel Farnham, Head of Children's Social Care
<p>Landmark education bill completes passage through Parliament (24 February 2016)</p> <p>New measures allowing swifter intervention where a school is coasting or failing have been approved by Parliament, marking a major milestone in the government's drive to spread educational excellence everywhere. The Education and Adoption Bill has completed its passage through Parliament, sending a clear message that this government delivers on its manifesto commitments. The bill will see more schools becoming academies - transforming the education system by giving power and responsibility to teachers on the front line, empowering schools themselves to spread excellence everywhere. Measures within the bill will speed up the transformation of our worst schools, removing bureaucracy and delaying tactics that have made it difficult for successful, expert sponsors to offer support to underperforming schools. Academies operate under the strictest possible system of oversight and accountability - more robust than in council-run schools - and are challenged to bring about rapid and sustained improvements when they do not reach the high standards we expect.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/landmark-education-bill-completes-passage-through-parliament</p>	For information	Andy Johnson, Director of Education and Skills
<p>Proportion of young people in England NEET plunges to record low (25 February 2016)</p> <p>The proportion of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) in 2015 reached a record low for the time of year, according to the latest official figures. The figures show that almost 100,000 fewer 16 to 24-year-olds were classed as NEET between October and December last year, compared to the same period in 2014. This brought the NEET rate to its lowest for the time of year since comparable records began in 2000, providing further evidence the government is ensuring all young people are earning or learning.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/proportion-of-young-people-in-england-neet-plunges-to-record-low</p>	For information	Andy Johnson, Director of Education and Skills



Policy Digest is produced on 4 to 6 weekly cycle by the Council's Economic and Inclusion Policy Team
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All issues are available at www.northumberland.gov.uk/policy