

POLICY DIGEST, January 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 4 January to Friday 29 January. Previous and subsequent editions are available at www.northumberland.gov.uk/policy.

Policy Development	Action	Lead
PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY		
<p>Radical shake-up of power puts communities in control (28 January 2016)</p> <p>New laws have come into force paving the way for the most radical decentralisation of power in generations. The devolution revolution is already in full swing with local leaders up in the North East and Tees Valley all the way down to Cornwall in the South West having signed landmark agreements with government. The Cities and Local Government Devolution Act, which has now received Royal Assent, paves the way for the creation of metro mayors and the handing down of powers so local leaders can be in control of their own affairs. The Act will: pave the way for elected mayors to cover and chair a combined authority area; allow the radical devolution of functions, including transport, health, skills, planning and job support; and enable the creation of sub-national transport bodies which will advise the government on strategic schemes and investment priorities in their own area.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/radical-shake-up-of-power-puts-communities-in-control</p>	For information	
PLACE SHAPING		
<p>The government will directly build affordable homes (4 January 2016)</p> <p>The Prime Minister has announced that the government is to step in and directly commission thousands of new affordable homes. In a radical new policy shift, the government will directly commission the building of homes on publicly owned land. This will lead to quality homes built at a faster rate with smaller building firms – currently unable to take on big projects – able to get building on government sites where planning permission is already in place. The first wave of up to 13,000 will start on 4 sites outside of London in 2016 – up to 40% of which will be affordable ‘starter’ homes. The government has also announced a £1.2bn starter home fund to prepare brownfield sites for new homes. This will fast-track the creation of at least 30,000 new starter homes and up to 30,000 market homes on 500 new sites by 2020 – helping deliver the commitment to create 200,000 starter homes over the next 5 years. The new investment will help kick-start regeneration and secure planning permission in urban areas – renovating disused or under-occupied urban sites so builders can get to work without any delays.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-the-government-will-directly-build-affordable-homes</p>	For information	Paul Jones, Interim Director of Housing and Local Services

<p>The value of our green spaces</p> <p>Every pound invested in parks and nature reserves contributes £30 towards health and wellbeing benefits and £23 towards crime reduction and community safety. Those are the findings uncovered by national land management charity, the Land Trust, which commissioned an independent study by economic consultants, Carney Green to assess the value of the green spaces in its portfolio. The results were emphatic, demonstrating that green spaces are not just good for the environment, they are good for society.</p> <p>http://thelandtrust.org.uk/news/study-demonstrates-value-of-green-spaces-to-society/</p>	For information	Paul Jones, Acting Director of Local Services and Housing
--	-----------------	--

ECONOMIC PROSPERITY		
<p>Jobcentre Plus support rolled out to schools (14 January 2016)</p> <p>As part of the Jobcentre Plus support for schools initiative, local Jobcentre Plus advisers will offer 12 to 18 year old pupils insight into the world of work and advice on options like traineeships and apprenticeships. This scheme is designed to help young people think about their future career ambitions and make plans to realise them. As well as offering advice on the labour market, the advisers will help schools to offer high quality work experience opportunities so that young people can gain direct insights into what potential employers are looking for. This will help them to focus on gaining the skills and experience they need to get on in life. At its heart this scheme is about supporting young people to prepare for their futures, so that they are equipped to make the most of it. Each school will decide what level of support advisers' offer to their pupils, which could include setting up work experience placements, one-to-one advice and group-led question and answer sessions.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/jobcentre-plus-support-rolled-out-to-schools</p>	For information	Andy Johnson, Director of Education and Skills
<p>Town Centre Investment Zones</p> <p>Creating successful town and city centres remains high on the national – and local – agenda. Since the 2011 Portas Review, numerous high street regeneration initiatives have been launched. While these are welcome, they have largely failed to address the underlying structural problems in many town centres. This report produced by the British Property Federation, offers the radical, structural solution that is needed to breathe life back into struggling high streets. By pooling a critical mass of property assets on a high street, thereby turning a row of separately owned and managed units into a single investment vehicle; the whole high street can be adapted, curated, and marketed to customers as a whole.</p> <p>http://www.bpf.org.uk/events/town-centre-investment-zones</p>	For information	Geoff Paul, Director of Planning and Economy

HEALTH & WELLBEING		
<p>Better Care Fund: how it will work in 2016 to 2017 (8 January 2016)</p> <p>This document sets out the agreed way in which the Better Care Fund (BCF) will be implemented in financial year 2016 to 2017. It covers such issues as: the legal and financial basis of the fund; conditions of access to the fund; national performance metrics; and the assurance and approval process. The document needs to be read alongside the NHS Mandate and BCF planning guidance. It essentially sets out the rules by which existing funding are split between local authorities and Clinical Commissioning Groups.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/better-care-fund-how-it-will-work-in-2016-to-2017</p>	For information	Jane Bowie, Head of Safeguarding and Strategic Commissioning
<p>Prime Minister pledges a revolution in mental health treatment (11 January 2016)</p> <p>The Prime Minister has announced almost a billion pounds of investment to enhance mental health services across the country. The plans include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £290 million of new investment over the next 5 years to provide mental healthcare for new mums • £247 million to invest in liaison mental health services in emergency departments • over £400 million to enable 24/7 treatment in communities as a safe and effective alternative to hospital • expanded services to help teenagers with eating disorders – as anorexia kills more than any other mental health condition <p>All the measures have been recommended by NHS England’s independent mental health taskforce – comprised of experts, chaired by Mind CEO Paul Farmer and set up as part of the NHS plan for the next 5 years. The report, to be published in the coming weeks, will also suggest a 5 year mental health strategy for the NHS. It is anticipated that further investment and service expansions will be announced when the mental health taskforce report is published in the next few weeks.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-pledges-a-revolution-in-mental-health-treatment</p>	For information	Penny Spring, Director of Public Health
<p>Progress report on strategy for adults with autism (14 January 2016)</p> <p>This report shows what has been achieved since the publication of ‘Think Autism’, which updated the cross-government autism strategy in April 2014. It also sets 31 new actions to continue to help local areas implement the autism strategy. The report also outlines work to help people with autism live as full and independent lives as possible, including: reforms to the Special Educational Needs and Disability system; support with employment opportunities; better awareness of autism within the criminal justice system; and use of information and data by local authorities and their partners.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/progress-report-on-strategy-for-adults-with-autism</p>	For information	Jane Bowie, Head of Safeguarding and Strategic Commissioning

<p>Social work: improving adult mental health (28 January 2016)</p> <p>These documents are part of the ‘Social Work for Better Mental Health’ initiative. They are intended to help improve social work across the mental health sector and to make sure the value of social work in improving mental wellbeing is recognised. The documents include: an overview of the strategy and importance of social work in mental health services; an assessment of social work in a mental health context; and guidance about how to get and use feedback on mental health social work practice from service users, carers and family. They were developed by the mental health social work sector, following the publication of ‘The Role of the Social Worker in Adult Mental Health’ in 2014.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-work-improving-adult-mental-health</p>	For information	Jane Bowie, Head of Safeguarding and Strategic Commissioning
---	-----------------	--

STRONGER COMMUNITIES		
<p>Why Community Transport Matters</p> <p>In this report from the ECT Charity, an amalgamation of two ground-breaking studies led to help community transport organisations demonstrate their social value. In the first, ECT Charity has worked with Deloitte to produce <i>Tackling Loneliness and Isolation through Community Transport</i>, a major piece of research into the economic cost of loneliness and isolation. The report concludes that community transport schemes have the potential to make savings of between £0.4 billion and £1.1 billion a year for the public purse, as well as reducing pressure on public services and helping older people to remain active members of society. The second study, <i>A Practical Method for Measuring Community Transport Social Value</i>, will help community transport organisations make a compelling case to commissioners on the value of their services. It was developed through the London Strategic Community Transport Forum (LSCTF).</p> <p>http://ectcharity.co.uk/news/story/ect-launches-groundbreaking-report-why-community-transport-matters</p>	For information	Geoff Paul, Director of Planning and Economy

COMMUNITY SAFETY		
<p>Fire and rescue policy to move to the Home Office (5 January 2016)</p> <p>The Prime Minister has confirmed that ministerial responsibility for fire and rescue policy will transfer to the Home Office from the Department for Communities and Local Government, in order to support a radical transformation of how the police and fire and rescue services work together. Mike Penning will assume responsibility for the portfolio becoming Minister for Policing, Fire, Criminal Justice and Victims. The move will deliver the government’s manifesto commitment to deliver greater joint working between the police and fire service. It will pave the way for improvement in local fire and policing by providing clear leadership, supporting greater collaboration and delivering value for money for taxpayers. It will also allow the government to share good practice more effectively on areas such as procurement and prevention. The government recently consulted on proposals to enable Police and Crime Commissioners to take on greater responsibility for fire services at local level. The response across the country to recent flooding shows how well the police and fire service already work together to protect the public and support local communities. The 2 services cooperate closely operationally in times of crisis, but also more routinely.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/fire-and-rescue-policy-to-move-to-the-home-office</p>	For information	Alex Bennet, Chief Fire Officer

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE		
<p>Education Secretary unveils plans to change adoption law (14 January 2016)</p> <p>Education Secretary Nicky Morgan has confirmed a fundamental change to the law will make prioritising lifelong stability for vulnerable children with a loving family a legal requirement. Over the last 2 years, the number of decisions for adoption made by courts and councils has fallen by around 50% - almost half. The government has issued important guidance to make clear that where adoption is in the best interests of the child, they must be placed with their new family as soon as possible. In November, the Prime Minister announced a radical step change to increase the number of children adopted - including the news that the government was considering changing the adoption law to make sure the right decisions are being made - as well as plans to boost regional adoption agencies, allowing councils to merge and cutting the amount of time children spend in care. The government has now confirmed that it will seek to change legislation as soon as possible to make crystal clear that councils and courts must place children with the person best able to care for them right up until their 18th birthday - rather than with carers who can't provide the support they need over the long term.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/education-secretary-unveils-plans-to-change-adoption-law</p>	For information	Rachel Farnham, Head of Children's Social Care
<p>Nicky Morgan unveils plans to transform children's social work (14 January 2016)</p> <p>Plans for the creation of a brand new body for social work to drive up standards and put social workers on par with high-status professions such as surgeons or lawyers have been unveiled by Education Secretary Nicky Morgan. Frontline children's social work will also be bolstered by the recruitment of thousands of top graduates from across the country, thanks to the expansion of high-quality entry routes into the profession - backed by £100 million of government funding. The cash injection will see the expansion of the successful Frontline programme across the country, as well as a further cohort of the government's Step Up to Social Work scheme. The funding will result in over 3,000 of the best and the brightest graduates training to be social workers over the next 5 years - meaning by 2018, 1 in 4 newly qualified social workers will have joined child and family social work via exemplary fast track programmes. And to ensure social workers are empowered and supported to do the job they came into the profession to do - making change happen for the families they serve - the government has outlined a new vision for all child and family social workers to be assessed against the Chief Social Worker for Children and Families knowledge and skills statements by the end of this Parliament.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/nicky-morgan-unveils-plans-to-transform-childrens-social-work</p>	For information	Rachel Farnham, Head of Children's Social Care

<p>Creating an anti-poverty childcare system</p> <p>This paper from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation focuses on the impact of high-quality early education and effective early intervention, which can act as protective factors for children against the negative effects of poverty. It also highlights how access to flexible, affordable childcare can reduce pressures on family income and help parents work, train or study. The report finds that the current UK childcare system falls short of fulfilling its potential to help reduce the effects of poverty on children in that it does not allow children access to childcare of the standard required to improve developmental outcomes. Furthermore, families in areas of low parental employment are less likely to have access to flexible childcare; and support with childcare costs does not work well for parents with low incomes. The report calls for an anti-poverty childcare system which maximises on quality and removes the barriers of affordability and access to parents on low incomes.</p> <p>https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/creating-anti-poverty-childcare-system</p>	<p>For information</p>	<p>Rachel Farnham, Head of Children's Social Care</p>
---	------------------------	---

NORTHUMBERLAND

Northumberland County Council

**Policy Digest is produced on 4 to 6 weekly cycle by the Council's Economic and Inclusion Policy Team
within the Planning and Economy Directorate**

All issues are available at www.northumberland.gov.uk/policy