

Report of the Great Childhoods Ambition Task and Finish Group (TFG) to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee (OSC) on 29th April 2025

Findings & Recommendations of the OSC's Great Childhoods Ambition Task & Finish Group

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 As part of their work programme, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee (OSC) conduct three separate task and finish groups during the autumn to allow for a more-in depth investigation into topics that have been identified by elected members as facing particular challenges or warranting more robust scrutiny.

1.2 For 2024/25 the three Task and Finish Groups established by the committee were:-

- Autism (All Age)
- Barnsley Carers (All Age)
- Great Childhoods Ambition (GCA)

1.3 This report outlines the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the Great Childhoods Ambition Task and Finish Group.

1.4 It is worth acknowledging that there is significant correlation between the three task and finish groups of the OSC as effective pathways and support for those with Autism and for Young Carers enable those cohorts of children and young people to thrive.

1.5 The members that took part in the Great Childhoods Ambition TFG are:-

Cllrs Paul Murray (TFG Lead Member), Ruth Booker, Sherry Holling, Jake Lodge, Kath Mitchell, Margaret Sheard, Mick Stowe, and the Committee's Primary School Parent Governor Representative, Liz Iles.

1.6 Over the course of the investigation, the group met with key officers (witnesses) from Early Start, Prevention & Sufficiency; Children's Commissioning; Education & Partnerships; Employment & Skills; and Healthier Communities, who provided expert advice and guidance. Written evidence was sought from young people via the Youth Voice & Participation Team, and from Barnsley College.

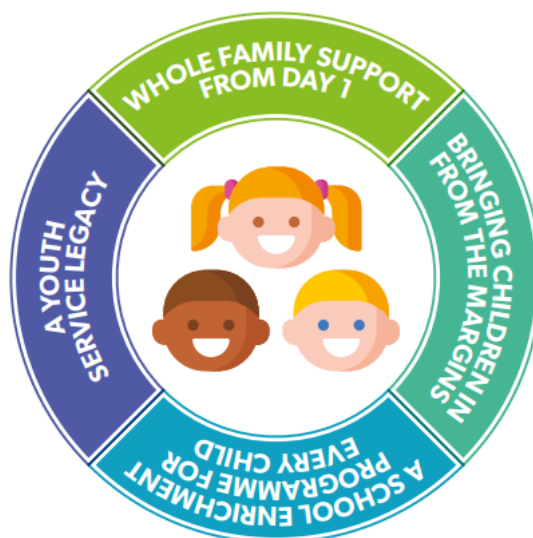
1.7 Members also visited the Central Family Hub along with members of the Autism Task and Finish Group to see what the offer looks like in practice.

1.8 The group would like to take this opportunity to give thanks to all officers who engaged with the process and provided information to support their investigation.



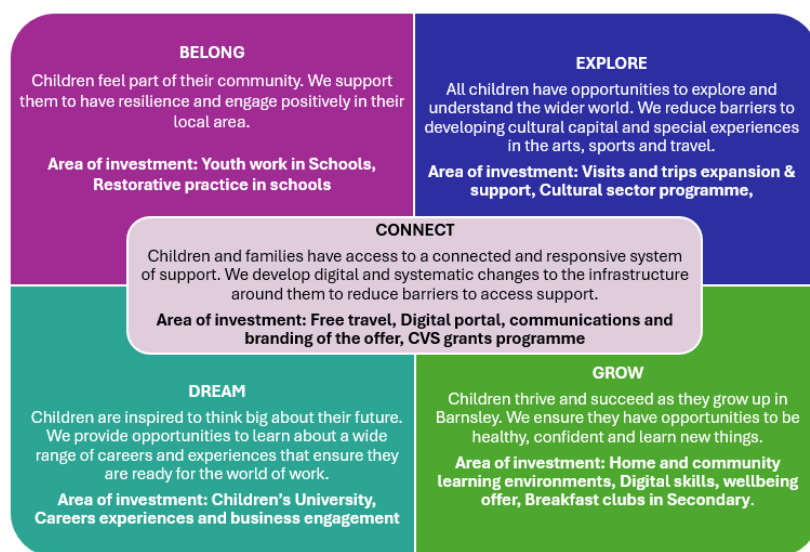
2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 There are approximately 32,000 school age children across Barnsley. Over 700 children are currently educated at home. In the 2021/22 academic year, 32.1% of students were classed as disadvantaged (entitled to a free school meal), 5.6% higher than the national average.
- 2.2 Barnsley's disadvantaged students have a significantly higher number of fixed term exclusions, and a poorer attendance rate than the national average for this group and those who are not classed as disadvantaged. Attendance data for 2022/23 shows that 35.1% of disadvantaged students were persistently absent compared to 17.3% of non-disadvantaged students. Of Barnsley's disadvantaged students, 24% have a Special Education Need and/or Disability.
- 2.3 Although educational attainment has been improving year on year, data shows that by Key Stage 2, disadvantaged students fall below national average in many areas with poor performance continuing through to Key Stage 4. The percentage of students achieving a grade of 5+ in English and Maths is 31.9% lower than the national average.
- 2.4 Barnsley residents have a lower level of skills than the region or nation, with only 31.1% of working-age people in Barnsley having qualifications at Level 4 and above.
- 2.5 There are many wider determinants that impact upon the quality of childhood. Basic needs such as health, employment, and housing must be met, and it should be acknowledged that a great childhood is not solely based on a good education. Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs (SEMH) have increased in children and young people in Barnsley, which is higher than national and regional figures, and recent data demonstrates that attendances at A&E for anxiety, depression, and low mood has increased by 45%, alongside a 6% rise in admissions due to overdose.
- 2.6 In a 2021 report of the think tank Centre for Social Justice, entitled "Levelling Up For Children", they stated that:-
- "the Government needs a social response to the levelling up narrative, alongside the economic one, and this must focus on support for children and families from the first days of their lives. The long-term answer to social problems lies in early help and prevention rather than significant interventions later in life".*
- 2.7 They proposed four interventions to the Comprehensive Spending Review, each focused on helping children reach their full potential:-



The Ambition

- 2.8 In April 2025, Barnsley Council launched its Great Childhoods Ambition, a borough-wide, collaborative approach to support all children and young people to thrive. The ambition is part of the vision for Barnsley 2030, which seeks to foster and grow ambition, enabling everyone to be the best they can be.
- 2.9 The Council wants Barnsley to be a place of possibilities for everyone, where children and young people from all backgrounds and starting points can benefit from the opportunities that great childhoods bring.
- 2.10 It wants to create opportunities for all ages, stages, and level of need, growing the universal offer for all children, young people and families, as well as extra support for those who need it.
- 2.11 The five golden threads of the ambition show that the Council wants everyone, but particularly children and young people, to:-



- 2.12 The approach will be to:-
- Build on the foundation of opportunities that are already established
 - Incorporating pipeline and planned programmes that are being developed across Barnsley
 - Dedicate funding to increase support for children who need it
- 2.13 New digital and physical 'store-fronts' in communities will be created to enable access to the programme and a marketing campaign using real Barnsley stories will demonstrate the impact and inspire action.
- 2.14 The approach aims to improve self-reported wellbeing and ambition, enabling positive destinations for young people. It also seeks to improve educational attainment and attendance, whilst reducing exclusions from school.
- 2.15 There is no end date to the ambition, and it requires a whole system approach. National, regional and local best practice has been researched to identify how the right conditions can be created for children and young people to thrive.



2.16 Additional funding (£1.6 million) will be invested into specific areas to accelerate progress. A mapping exercise will be carried out to identify gaps based on feedback and a grants programme will be developed to expand existing provision with a focus on building community and voluntary sector capacity. To reflect the voice of young people, feedback has been collated from a range of universal and targeted services through the Make Your Mark survey and wider engagement activity. Specific investment will be used to identify barriers for key cohorts. Investment will also be used to deliver against the five golden threads:-

- Belong – Youth work and restorative practice in school
- Explore – Visits and trips expansion support, cultural sector programme
- Dream – Children’s University, careers experiences and business engagement
- Grow – Home and community learning environment, digital skills, wellbeing offer, breakfast clubs
- Connect – free travel, digital portal, communications and branding of the offer, community and voluntary sector grants programme

2.17 Milestones already achieved include the planned development of the Youth Zone and the Northern Academy for Vocal Excellence (The Nave), which will be home to Barnsley Youth Choir, and the introduction of travel subsidies for children and young people which will be launched in 2025.

2.18 Next steps for the ambition include:-

- Agreeing a strategic framework
- Mapping opportunities and identifying gaps for investment
- Continuing to secure wider buy in
- Developing an outcomes framework
- Establishing the Barnsley Children and Young People Partnership Board to oversee the strategy and plan
- Developing a launch programme of events
- Refreshing the Children and Young People’s Plan

2.19 Challenges in delivering the programme include:-

- Gathering existing system and governance arrangements around the strategy
- Keeping the definition between sector activity and programmatic activity
- Balancing work through schools as anchor institutions, and community engagement
- Delivering system change when wider pressures are impacting on delivery and collaboration
- Defining outcome reporting to focus on programme work, whilst contributing to wider outcomes, eg. education and participation

3.0 SCOPE OF THE INVESTIGATION

3.1 The ambition is wide reaching and potentially cuts across all aspects of the organisation and the work of key partners; businesses; and communities, and a ‘great childhood’ will look different to each child.

- 3.2 The investigation had to focus on areas where members felt they could add the most value and the areas that would have the biggest impact on improving outcomes for children and young people.
- 3.3 With this in mind, the task and finish group agreed to focus their efforts on asking the following questions:-
- What are the specific challenges faced by children, young people and families during each significant phase of child/young person's life, namely early years; primary; and secondary and beyond, particularly for those who are classed as disadvantaged?
 - What are the aims of the ambition and what are the challenges and opportunities in delivering such an ambition to each of these cohorts?
 - What support is available to remove barriers and enable progression to the next stages of life?

4.0 FINDINGS FROM THE INVESTIGATION

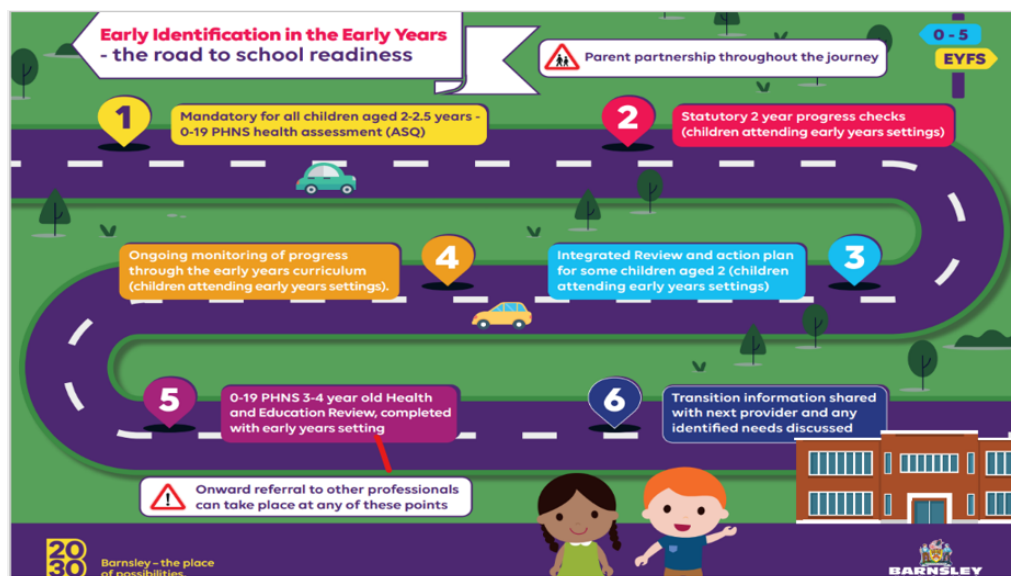
Early Years

- 4.1 In the Government's Spring Budget 2023, the Chancellor announced transformative childcare reforms. These included:
- Funding for 15 hours a week for 2 year olds of working parents from April 2024
 - Funding for 15 hours a week for 9 months olds of working parents from September 2024
 - Funding for 30 hours a week for 9 months to 3 year olds of working parents from September 2025
- 4.2 In addition, all primary aged children would have access to wraparound care from 8am - 6pm by 2026.
- 4.3 In 2024, the 0-4 population in Barnsley was 10,575. There are currently 258 childcare settings in Barnsley, which includes childminders, day nurseries, out of school provision and other providers, offering a total of 4,857 registered places. Of those, 4,418 places have been offered to a child aged 0-4.
- 4.4 Currently there are sufficient childcare places to enable families to access the funded 15 & 30 hour offers for working parents. To ensure the borough has sufficient childcare places to enable all families with children aged 9 months to 3 years, a further 296 places (50 hour) need to be created by September 2025. In respect of wraparound provision a total of 997 places are required to be created by September 2026. Whilst there is an awareness of the need to increase places, infrastructure and the demand for spaces outside of the Central area, particularly in the North and Dearne, are a challenge.
- 4.5 As of August 2024, 93% of local registered childcare providers were rated as Good or Outstanding by Ofsted, in comparison to 98% regionally and 97% nationally. Early Years Improvement Officers within the Early Years Quality Team advise and provide support to settings on the Early Years curriculum and guidance from the Department for Education (DfE).
- 4.6 The take up for 0–2-year-olds considered 'disadvantaged' is 78%, for 3–4 year-olds, it is 99%. Contact is made with the remaining 22% (0–2-year-olds) to encourage engagement with early years providers as it is well known that the first 1001 days of a child's life are vital in building the foundations for emotional and physical wellbeing and the more work done with this cohort, the better the outcomes later in life.
- 4.7 The negative impact of Covid should not be underestimated for all children. Particular challenges for this cohort has meant that the development of some young children has been delayed and there is an increase in demand for support service such as Speech and Language

Therapy (SALT). There is a trend for SEND Support being the reason that some settings have received a less than 'Good' judgement from Ofsted and some settings do not access their entitlement to the local inclusion grant. As well as impacting on the child's development, an increase in the need for this type of support affects the child to adult ratios offered by providers, meaning that less spaces are available in settings.

4.8 Early identification of need includes picking up on home environments and supporting parents to engage in conversations and play. Although early years settings have the skills to support parents, they do not have the capacity to go out into the community and provide the targeted support that is needed. Playgroup leaders, the 0-19 Public Health Nursing Service and other services/agencies have been trained to build early connections and relationships and are able to signpost to appropriate support. The statutory two-year progress check is carried out in settings to assess development and identify any needs. This information is shared with the local authority to determine whether an Early Help Assessment (EHA) or an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) may be needed. Work is currently underway to develop a data warehouse so that early help services have a single view of the child.

4.9 In 2024, a joint report of Child of the North and the Centre for Young Lives, entitled 'A Country that Works for All Children and Young People' makes a series of proposals to tackle the high number of children starting school not 'school ready', and the crisis in early years and childcare provision – particularly in disadvantaged areas. School readiness is a challenge across the borough. To prepare for the next stage of life, the service focuses on Ready Children, Ready Families, and Ready Schools, and have developed a transition video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LwZMWwDDQL8> and road map to support parents in identifying the key milestones in a child's life and preparing them for school:-



4.10 The current Government recently set an expectation that 75% of children will be school ready by 2028. In 2024, the percentage of children achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD) overall in Barnsley was 68.8% compared to the national figure of 67.7% and the Yorkshire and Humber figure of 66.3%. However, the score was worse than national for the Personal, Social, and Emotional Development (PSED) element of the assessment. 57.3% of those who are considered 'disadvantaged' achieved a GLD which demonstrates that they are already noticeably behind their peers. 59.8% of boys (overall) achieved a GLD, performing significantly lower than girls (78.3%). In terms of education outcomes, the gap between those who are deemed disadvantaged or have an additional need, and their peers, is obvious by the time they start school.

4.11 It is important for early years settings and schools to share information to support effective transition between providers so that children's needs can be met and they are ready to learn

when they begin school. Transition records have been developed and are promoted by Early Years Consultants in the summer term so that providers know what good quality information looks like. Barnsley Alliance is continuing its work to develop relationships and co-working between providers.

Primary Phase

- 4.12 This phase of the ambition focusses primarily on a partnership approach with schools, the voluntary and community sector, activity providers, and the Children's University. The Children's University helps children and young people make friends, have fun, and most importantly, helps them develop key skills needed to succeed in their learning, work, and life.
- 4.13 Given that 93% of employers consider essential skills to be just as important, if not more important, than hard skills when evaluating job candidates, all activities validated through the Children's University link to the Skillsbuilder framework so that children, parents, and schools can reflect and build upon the skills being developed through participation.

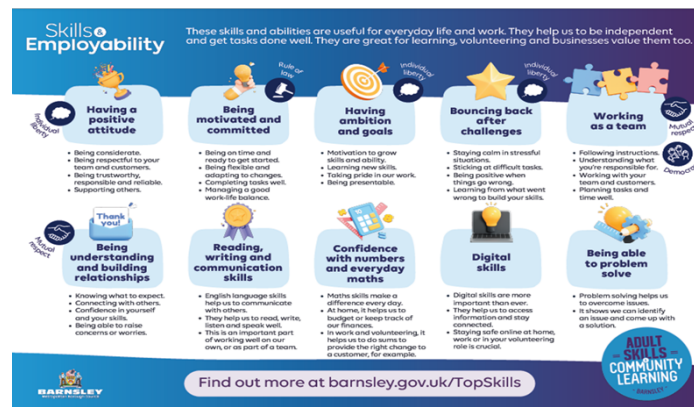


- 4.14 There are approximately 21,000 children in the primary phase. Positive feedback has been received from schools and students who took part in the pilot project of the Children's University programme. Seven schools are now fully signed up and a further 18 schools are showing an interest. 2,150 children are registered, totalling over 15,500 hours of logged activity. Work needs to be done to ensure that schools with the highest levels of deprivation and lowest educational attainment engage with the scheme to ensure that the gap between those who are disadvantaged and those who are less so is not widened.
- 4.15 All schools are grappling with the same challenges – namely attendance, inclusion, and suspensions – and coproduction, cooperation, and working as a sector are key to improving outcomes for all children and young people across the whole of the borough. Data and intelligence is shared where necessary and officers regularly meet with education leaders to build relationships and encourage equitable access to opportunities for all.
- 4.16 Work with health partners is key to supporting children and young people in achieving at this stage. Public Health have developed a good offer for schools to engage with and officers are connecting with health boards to build relationships and strengthen partnerships. Some primary schools offer a higher quality of Social, Emotional & Mental Health (SEMH) support than others.
- 4.17 Barnsley took part in the Start Small; Dream Big pilot, which is part of the government's drive to ensure all young people are supported to develop the right skills and knowledge to enable them to thrive in their future careers. Research shows that children can fix their aspirations and create

future-limiting stereotypes by as young as six years of age. Research has also shown that Career-Related Learning (CRL) can widen aspirations and challenge stereotypes so that children keep an open mind about the world of work as they move through education. Now, career options are starting to be explored at primary stage through the work of the Growth and Skills team.

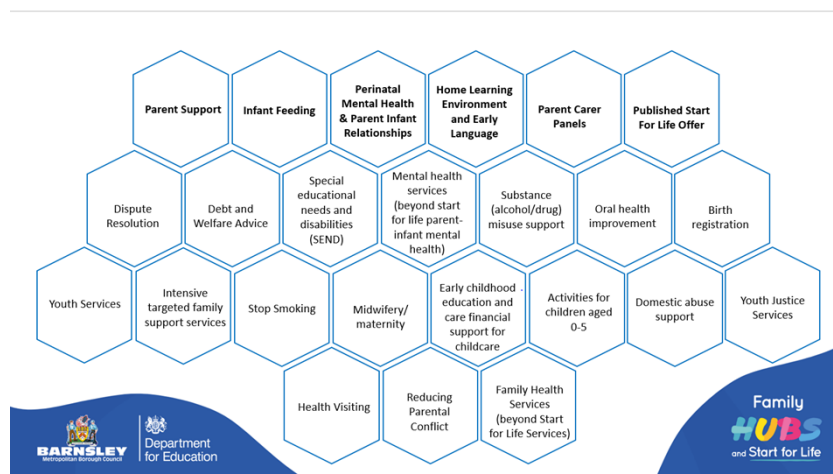
Secondary & Beyond

- 4.18 Whilst educational attainment fairs well at primary stage, there is a noticeable decline at secondary level and absence and exclusions are an issue. Attitude and aspirations account for a staggering 22% of the socioeconomic gap at GCSE attainment.
- 4.19 The aspiration for the secondary phase of the ambition is to:-
- Provide an online platform to capture extracurricular activities, self-led, and reflective learning
 - Promote and encourage volunteering and work experience opportunities
 - Support transition to further education and employment
 - Support the development of digital CVs that link to the skills and attributes that support employability
 - Widen curriculum development, character building, and mentoring by enabling access to trusted adults
 - Identify off-site and residential opportunities, including volunteering
 - Work with parents, carers, families and the wider community
 - Engage with businesses to support young people to develop the skills and attributes to support employability
 - Provide extra support to ensure all young people can achieve good GCSEs in English and Maths with digital skills development through the 'Every Child a Coder' programme
- 4.20 Following on from the success of the Children's University at primary phase, a suitable model is being developed for secondary school age and engagement is underway with Horizon school to understand what that offer should look like.
- 4.21 Mental health support in secondary schools is more comprehensive than in primary, with secondary schools having wellbeing leads within their structure, however, there has been a noticeable increase in emerging need in this cohort that has not previously been identified.
- 4.22 The development of the Youth Zone will provide opportunities for this age group, however work needs to be done to take this type of work out into communities.
- 4.23 The Targeted information, Advice & Guidance (TIAG) service offers a wide range of support to ensure that young people are work ready, including:-
- personal advisors for young people from Year 9, focussing support on Looked After Children (LAC), those with an Education, Health & Care Plan, in contact with the Youth Justice Service (YJS), or those who are Electively Home Educated
 - work with additional 'at risk' groups through grant funding (Pathways to Work)
 - a Careers Consultant provides support to secondary schools and Further Education providers to deliver their statutory functions in terms of careers education and the 8 Gatsby Benchmarks of good careers education
 - connecting schools with employers
 - working in partnership with the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) to support those aged 18-24 who may be claiming Universal Credit



Family Hubs

- 4.24 In 2021, the Government published the report 'Best Start for Life; A Vision for the 1001 Critical Days', a vision based on six action areas and 29 individual actions to deliver a step change in outcomes for babies and adults.
- 4.25 In February of 2023, the Government announced that Barnsley would be awarded a grant to establish Family Hubs which would build on the existing early help offer in Barnsley. The six Family Hubs offer information, help and support to families from conception up until age 19 (or 25 for young people with SEND). They bring together staff working across a range of different services, including the council, health, and education, along with voluntary and community organisations. The ethos is the right help, in the right place, at the right time. In addition to the six hubs based in localities, support is offered in community venues and online, and there is now a recently developed offer within the Glass Works/Market Kitchen.
- 4.26 The early help and support provided by the various services via the Family Hubs aims to empower families and to help them overcome any barriers they may be facing that prevents them from moving forward. There are parent peer support groups and families are involved in shaping the offer.

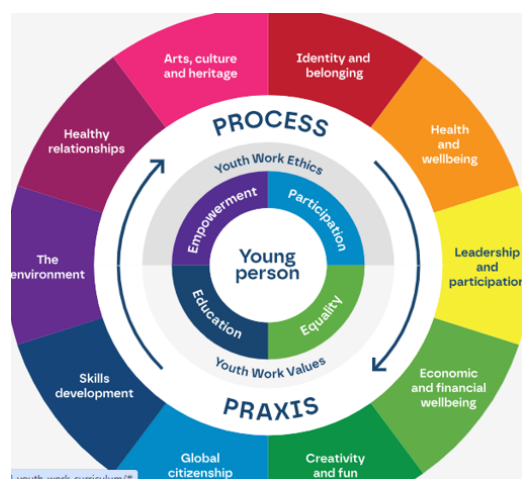


- 4.27 There are currently 16,900 individuals engaging with Family Hubs across Barnsley and this has increased rapidly over recent months. Promotional activity has been ongoing, and a festival was held in the town centre where 800 information packs were distributed – this is scheduled to be repeated in the summer of 2025. Residents can walk-in/self-refer or be signposted by a professional. There are also Early Help Navigators working on wards and in A&E at Barnsley Hospital. Data dashboards show who is engaging, and what they are engaging with, and this information can be used to shape the offer and target support. Data is also collected so that they can build a picture by layering information relating to school attendance, attainment etc to build an evidence base for interventions.

- 4.28 There has been a large upturn in demand, and a booking system has been developed to try and manage it. The Hub managers are acutely aware that there is significant need across communities, with some services under more pressure than others, and to ensure they are reaching all sections of the community, including those with protected characteristics, they are looking at the flexibility of the offer, including whether offering some services on weekends and evenings would be viable.
- 4.29 Staff demonstrate an enthusiastic and passionate approach and have a tenacious attitude, engaging with schools and families to highlight the value of the hubs as a positive space and increasing engagement with a view to improving outcomes. For those less likely to engage, they try to demonstrate the value this brings by sharing lived experience of those who have already worked with the hubs. The service is also keen to work more closely with Area Councils and Ward Alliances and is already looking at how this can be approached to add the most value.
- 4.30 Whilst there is a strong focus on support for families with younger children, support for older children/young adults is not as strong. The youth service is co-located in some of the same spaces, and Compass Be deliver drop in emotional health and wellbeing sessions and attend community events, however, it is acknowledged that the offer for older children/young people needs to be widened and the service would benefit from listening to the voice of young people and families to understand how to develop this further.
- 4.31 Challenges that need to be overcome include funding, sustainability, workforce stability, capacity to do engagement work, and wider partnership working.

Targeted Youth Support

- 4.32 The local authority has a statutory obligation to ensure there is a sufficient youth service offer. Targeted Youth Support delivers building and street based interventions to prevent the need for a system-based response when issues escalate. It provides essential structure; agency; appropriate role models; and exposure and challenge to take on new opportunities; encouraging young people aged 11-19 (up to 25 years old with additional needs) to broaden their horizons, develop skills, and become active citizens. Targeted support is offered in the form of 1-2-1 sessions, as part of a group or project, and is delivered by qualified youth workers.
- 4.33 The service currently works with schools and academies across the borough, addressing areas such as online safety and exploitation. There is a desire to create more opportunities for every child in Barnsley, not just those at greatest need or those who are disadvantaged. The GCA will fund two Youth Work teams across two secondary areas and the ambition is to see these teams working as a bridge between schools and their communities to offer support where most needed. The initial pilot will start from April 2025 to design and develop an enhanced school and community based youth offer, including for those who are electively home educated. It may also fund sector support to Barnsley's Youth Alliance model and other partnerships to facilitate collaboration, workforce development, training, and joint-working – enriching and expanding the local youth offer.
- 4.34 The National Youth Work Curriculum is a flexible framework which allows youth workers to identify how their interventions and activities can be used to support the personal, social and political development of young people. This can have a positive impact upon health and wellbeing; attendance; behaviour; safety and safeguarding; and development and enrichment.



Emotional Health & Wellbeing Offer

4.35 The Integrated Care Board currently commissions the following to support young people's mental and emotional wellbeing:-

- Compass Be – Mental health support teams in all schools (100% coverage) and specialist support
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)
- Chilypep
- Kooth – online and digital, young people access this themselves
- Branching Minds is the single point of contact for ALL children and young people up to the age of 18 (or 25 for those who are care experienced) registered with a GP or attend a Barnsley school. All those referred in are triaged for mental and emotional health and wellbeing needs

4.36 Emotional health and wellbeing inset training days for school staff are delivered, and are co-produced with multi-agency services. The training day is very comprehensive, enables connections and the building of relationships between professionals in the education settings and professionals from a variety of organisations/services (including Barnsley Sexual Abuse and Rape Crisis Services (BSARCS), Independent Domestic Abuse Service (IDAS), 0-19s Public Health Nursing Services, Virtual School, SEND Improvement, Compass Be, Educational Psychology, Chilypep, Youth Justice, Early Help, Public Health etc), and also provides resources to be used in schools, including 30 emotional health and wellbeing support boxes.

4.37 The Great Childhoods Ambition is proposing to build on the inset training days with a relational approach programme called When the Adults Change which offers strategies for behaviour management in schools.

4.38 A young people's group, Just Us, is involved in planning and decision making around emotional health and wellbeing and they have co-produced a video to show the importance of supporting each other to work through emotional issues as soon as possible, to help young people's mental health resilience.

Holiday Activities & Food Programme

4.39 Part One of the two-part National Food Strategy (2021) contained urgent recommendations to support the country through the turbulence caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and to prepare for the end of the European Union (EU) exit transition period on 31 December 2020. It focused on making sure a generation of our most disadvantaged children do not get left behind, and grasping the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to decide what kind of trading nation we want to be. Recommendation 2 of the report states that the Government should extend the Holiday Activity

and Food Programme to all areas in England, so that summer holiday support is available to all children in receipt of free school meals.

- 4.40 The Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programme has been supporting children and families in the school holidays since 2018 and was significantly expanded in light of the pandemic and the recommendation in the report. The programme was supported and promoted by Marcus Rashford in his campaign to end food poverty.
- 4.41 The scheme is funded by the Government (Department for Education) and in Barnsley (known as the Healthy Holidays programme) it runs in the Easter, Summer and Christmas holidays. The purpose of the programme is to support families who need help to access food and activities to keep their children healthy through the school holidays. Children who are in receipt of free school meals have the opportunity to access a free place at Healthy Holidays clubs where they can engage in activities and eat a nutritious meal.
- 4.42 It is recognised that children from more well-off backgrounds are more likely to engage in and be exposed to enriching activities. Some children have less exposure outside of school and the Healthy Holidays programme aims to offer activities to those who may not have access to those type of experiences and opportunities, thereby aligning with the Great Childhoods Ambition.
- 4.43 In 2024, the grant Barnsley received totalled £1,057,820. The Council manages the grant and commissions clubs to provide the activities and food. Sadly, to date, grant conditions are incredibly prescriptive:-
- Clubs have to provide a minimum of 60 minutes physical activity per session
 - Each session has to be 4 hours long
 - Food provision has to be to school meal standard and preferably a hot meal
 - There have to be activities linked to nutrition
 - The grant can only be spent during the main holidays, not during half terms
- 4.44 Commissioners looked at the local market to understand the provider base and what young people want, and worked with the school meals team, libraries and museums to tap into activity programmes already in existence. The offer has developed over the years and the standard of provider has been described as excellent, with Grassroots Sports Academy in Cudworth given as an example of good practice, as they have used the grant to provide sessions on trampolining, parkour, football, running groups etc.
- 4.45 For children who may have additional needs or may need adjustments, commissioners work with the parents to understand what the child is interested in and then work with the providers to make adjustments so that they can be accommodated. They try to ensure that sessions are as inclusive as possible but if a child's needs cannot be met then food vouchers are provided instead.
- 4.46 Strong systems have been established to identify and target those who are eligible for the programme to ensure that the grant conditions are being met, and this compares favourably against other local authorities. However, abiding strictly to the grant conditions and getting children who meet the eligibility criteria to actually engage, is an ongoing challenge due to a number of identified barriers:-
- There still seems to be a stigma attached to being in receipt of free school meals. Whilst children of primary age are not necessarily aware of this, it does become a major barrier for those in secondary school
 - Those who are eligible for the programme will not attend if their friends, who are not eligible, cannot attend

- Sessions have to be pre-booked by those wishing to attend, there is no spontaneity, and this is a challenge for older children as they want a 'drop-in' offer so the programme does not successfully reach teenagers
- Many families want to spend time together during the holidays, but feeding adults is not permitted so the children don't attend

4.47 These challenges result in the clubs running at less than full capacity with limited reach. Commissioners are confident that, if the eligibility criteria was expanded or relaxed slightly to capture those on the 'edge' of qualifying for Free School Meals (FSM) or those who have been identified as needing support, then this would increase participation of those actually on FSM and would deliver value for money. To expand reach, they would also be interested in developing the offer, for example by tagging onto existing community events and providing street food for families in identified areas of deprivation, but current grant conditions are stifling flexibility, collaboration, creativity, and innovation.

5.0 CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 Reducing inequalities and not widening the gap is key so that no child is left behind. Although opportunities should be available to all, efforts should be targeted towards those who are less advantaged. This includes raising aspirations, changing attitudes, and demonstrating the value in participating in activities.
- 5.2 Barriers to learning and wellbeing need to be removed to allow children and young people to engage, thrive, and achieve. There needs to be a full understanding of what prevents young people from moving forward, so that effective targeted support can be offered.
- 5.3 Whilst the offer for the primary phase is commendable, there needs to be an equal offer for those aged 11+ so that they can become successful, independent adults. It is also quite clear that the wider impact of Covid continues to be felt and evidence demonstrates the value of investing in good quality early years provision and support, particularly for the first 1001 days.
- 5.4 Engagement with young people and families will be key to gathering qualitative data which will inform decision making, and prevent disparity between the offer and actual need. This means reaching out to those who don't normally engage, not just the 'usual suspects'. There is also a role to play in supporting health partners to understand the Great Childhood Ambition and how they can contribute.
- 5.5 Whilst recognising there is lots of evidence of good practice and plans in place to tackle the challenges, the TFG have made a number of recommendations to support continual improvement with a view to achieving local priorities and improving outcomes for the residents of Barnsley. In support of this, members feel there are a number of practical steps that can be taken by the committee and the Council -

Recommendation 1 – Provide targeted support for Early Years Providers to increase take-up of the funding entitlement from the local inclusion grant. To help early years providers meet the needs of those with lower level or emerging special education needs, providing extra resources and help, so that support can be put in place as early as possible.

Recommendation 2 – Provide targeted support for those who are disadvantaged who are not in a childcare setting to increase the number of children achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD) by the time they start school. It is clear from the data that there is already a gap between those who are considered disadvantaged and other children within the same cohort by the time they start school, particularly following Covid, and hopefully this would go some way to narrowing that gap.

Recommendation 3 - Target the offer to increase the number of children and young people who are disadvantaged, and those who are home educated, who actively engage with the Children's University and Skillsbuilder scheme. Members do not wish to see any child left behind due to their circumstances or the choices made. Therefore, this recommendation has been made to make sure that all children get the same opportunities, regardless of starting point, or where they live, and to ensure that the gap between those who are privileged and those who are less so does not widen. To encourage take-up there needs to be thought put into demonstrating the value of engaging in such a scheme and the wider benefits this brings.

Recommendation 4 – Identify ways to increase the take up of Free School Meals (FSM). Members would like to see an increase in the percentage of those who are eligible who actually claim, and eat, a free school meal. As well as providing nutritious meals and the benefits this brings, it also attracts additional funding for schools to provide additional support for those classed as disadvantaged and opens doors to other opportunities.

Recommendation 5 – Ensure there are effective training and development opportunities for schools to help identify specific need and to raise awareness of the pathways to support. To support those who work in schools, and those who may have additional needs, training and development needs to be assessed to ensure that processes are robust and put into practice. Pathways to support need to be clearly identified so that parents and carers fully understand how to effectively navigate the system and get the support they need for their child.

Recommendation 6 – Work with partners to fully understand the underlying causes, and effectively address barriers to good attendance and engagement with mainstream education, particularly in relation to Social, Emotional, and Mental Health (SEMH) issues, and for those who are Electively Home Educated (EHE). Effective interventions cannot be put in place to support learning unless the underlying causes are fully known. By tackling these barriers it is hoped that this will have a positive impact upon attendance, exclusions and education outcomes (particularly at GCSE level), and facilitate a return to mainstream education for those who have elected to be educated at home because their needs were not being met by the system.

Recommendation 7 – Focus on levelling up the 'offer' for those aged 11+ so that there is equity across all age groups and to increase educational attainment at GCSE stage. Although members are aware that there are plans to develop the offer for those aged 11+, at the time of the investigation, it was clear that this area of work was not as well developed as for those in the primary phase. By levelling up the offer, it is hoped that it will give equal access to opportunities and will build on the success at primary stage as those cohorts move into the next stages of life, enabling them to develop the skills needed to become a successful and active citizen as they transition into adulthood.

Recommendation 8 – Develop a mechanism to constantly gather qualitative data to understand what children and families think a 'Great Childhood' looks like and where they need support. Members are conscious that there needs to be ongoing dialogue to ensure synergy between the needs of children, young people and families and the strategies developed by decision makers. A 'great childhood' will look different for each individual child, with some challenges easier to address than others. Anecdotal evidence suggests that young people are particularly interested in practical life skills, such as budgeting, and becoming an active citizen, and these views need to be considered when developing the ambition. Work needs to be done to ensure that all sections of the community are represented in engagement activity, including Young Carers and those with Special Educational Needs and/or Disability (SEND)..

Recommendation 9 – Link in with local employers to identify gaps in the labour market and promote those careers across the borough, along with the full range of Post 16 options. There are likely to be specific job roles that are difficult to fill across the borough.

Members would like work to be done to understand these gaps and promote them accordingly, to all ages. Promotion work would also be beneficial to highlight the Post 16 opportunities for those who are less likely to achieve at GCSE level and may want to continue with their learning, set up a business, or pursue more creative or practical careers.

Recommendation 10 – The Committee should lobby the Government, requesting a change to the grant conditions attached to the Holidays and Food Programme. Members were disappointed to hear that the grant conditions applied by the Government are stifling innovation, creativity and reach, which in turn does not deliver value for money, and will write to the Department for Education requesting a review of the guidance.

Recommendation 11 – The Committee should add Elective Home Education to their work programme for 2025. Members share officers concerns about the increasing number of children being electively educated at home. They would like a report to be presented to the committee to fully understand the reasons, the risks, and the work being done to support those educated at home as part of their work programme for the 2025/26 municipal year.

Recommendation 12 - The Committee should request an All Member Information briefing on the Youth Zone so that members can fully understand what this will look like and the services available to young people. Whilst members were keen to see youth work continue in their local areas, there is a desire to understand what the Youth Zone will actually look like, the services on offer, and what it hopes to achieve. They would also like this offer extended to all elected members, delivered through an All Member Information Briefing (AMIB). The Cabinet Member for Children’s Services has already extended an invite to Members of the TFG to visit the Youth Zone before the official launch.

6.0 NEXT STEPS

6.1 The report is presented to the Committee for discussion and approval. Once approved by the Committee:-

- the Task and Finish Group Leads and the Chair of the Committee will present the report to Cabinet (for information only unless any recommendations are subject to a key decision).
- Scrutiny Officers will work with lead officers to provide an appropriate response report within the guidelines and timescales of the Terms of Reference for the Committee and the Council’s Constitution. The response reports will be added to the work programme of the Committee at the most appropriate time.

6.2 It should be noted that although there are no direct implications from this report; in preparing the response, the appropriate officers/services should fully assess and identify any implications relating to legal, finance, risk, equality, communications and employees that may impact the service as a result of the recommendations made by the committee.

7.0 GLOSSARY

ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
AMIB	All Member Information Briefing
BSARCS	Barnsley Sexual Abuse and Rape Crisis Service
CAMHS	Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services
CRL	Careers Related Learning
DfE	Department for Education
DWP	Department for Work & Pensions
EHA	Early Help Assessment
EHCP	Education, Health & Care Plan
EHE	Electively Home Educated

EU	European Union
FSM	Free School Meals
GCA	Great Childhood Ambition
GLD	Good Level of Development
HAF	Holiday and Food (Programme)
IDAS	Independent Domestic Abuse Service
LAC	Looked After Children
OSC	Overview & Scrutiny Committee
PSED	Personal, Social, and Emotional Development
SALT	Speech and Language Therapy
SEMH	Social, Emotional, and Mental Health
SEND	Special Educational Need and/or Disability
TFG	Task and Finish Group
TIAG	Targeted Information, Advice & Guidance
YJS	Youth Justice Service

8.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

[Barnsley Joint Strategic Needs Assessment](#)

[Barnsley Council's Great Childhoods Ambition](#)

[Levelling Up for Children - The Centre for Social Justice](#)

[The best start for life: a vision for the 1,001 critical days - GOV.UK](#)

[An Evidence Based Approach to Supporting Children in the Pre-School Years: Chld of the North](#)

[Free Childcare Guidance - GOV UK](#)

[An introduction to Children's University](#)

[An Introduction to Skillsbuilder Partnership](#)

[Careers boost for young people - GOV.UK](#)

[Primary school pilot to help children dream big about their future careers | The Careers and Enterprise Company](#)

[Good Career Guidance | Education | Gatsby](#)

[Skills and employability support](#)

[Pathways to Work Commission](#)

[Family hubs](#)

<https://youtu.be/n2YdpXrdOzQ>

[Early help and targeted support for young people](#)

[National Youth Work Curriculum - National Youth Agency](#)

[Children's emotional health and wellbeing](#)

[HOME | WhenTheAdultsChange](#)

[The National Food Strategy - The Plan](#)

[Healthy Holidays: holiday activities and food programme](#)

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Date: 1 April 2025