

## Health visiting and school nursing services consultation

### Frequently Asked Questions

*This document contains a summary of the questions that have been asked so far. We will update it as further questions come in.*

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#### **Q: What is the consultation about?**

**A:** Northumberland County Council is leading a joint consultation on a potential partnership with Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust (HDFT), aiming to link health visiting and school nursing services more closely with other services which support children and young people and their families in Northumberland.

#### **Q: Why is a new partnership necessary?**

**A:** Northumbria Healthcare informed the Council in early 2021 that it no longer saw formal partnership arrangements as the best way to work with local authority services. The existing partnership which included the health visiting and school nursing services will finish at the end of September 2021.

Despite the ending of its partnership with Northumbria Healthcare, the Council's view is still that partnership arrangements can provide a particularly flexible way for local authority and NHS services to work together.

Where partner organisations have shared objectives and a high level of mutual trust, the framework of a partnership agreement enables them to work together like departments within a single organisation, making it easy to find joint solutions to unanticipated problems or pressures on services.

#### **Q: Why did you choose Harrogate instead of a local NHS trust?**

**A:** We identified HDFT as our preferred NHS partner because we believe their approach to the joint development of services most closely matches ours.

Successful partnership working is not dependent on the headquarters of both partners being in the same place, it's dependent on mutual trust, openness and transparency and a shared vision and shared values.

HDFT have considerable experience of delivering health visiting and school nursing services in rural and urban locations, and currently do so in seven local authority areas, six of them in the North East, including County Durham and Gateshead.

Furthermore, they have shown that they are committed to the local delivery of services by ensuring they are an engaged and supportive partner to the wider system and through the retention and development of local staff and management teams.

**Q: If the proposal goes ahead, what would happen to the existing school nurses and health visitors?**

**A:** The health visitors, school nurses, managers and associated staff would continue to deliver the services in Northumberland, the only immediate difference being that would transfer to HDFT under a TUPE transfer process which would protect their existing employment rights. They will continue to be NHS employees, with national NHS terms and conditions.

**Q: Will the staff have to travel from Harrogate?**

**A:** No. HDFT employ local staff from local areas. HDFT also provide local corporate functions, for example HR and IT.

**Q: Shouldn't services be delivered by local people, who understand fully the demographics and can relate to local needs and concerns?**

**A:** The services will continue to be delivered by the same staff, with their wealth of experience of the needs of each of the local areas within our diverse county. HDFT fully support the principle of local services being provided by locally-based teams.

The purpose of entering into a partnership is to enable our two organisations to develop service delivery together, and HDFT in particular will want to build relationships with other services in Northumberland for children and young people, and explore with staff their ideas about how their contribution to the wider collection of services could work better.

**Q: If it's all going to be the same, why do you need to change anything?**

**A:** The reason for this proposal is that the wider partnership arrangement between the Council and Northumbria Healthcare within which the 0-19 services have been provided is coming to an end in September.

The Council has therefore been considering what is the best framework in which it can now work jointly with the NHS to integrate 0-19 public health services with other early help services for children and young people.

The Council currently thinks that HDFT shares the Council's view of how partnerships should operate and what kinds of management and decision-making arrangements best support the joint development of services.

HDFT will work alongside partners and the 0-19 staff to support any local service transformation.

**Q: Why can't you just agree a new partnership with Northumbria Healthcare?**

**A:** Northumbria Healthcare told us earlier this year that it no longer believes formal partnership agreements are necessary and it wanted to end the existing arrangements.

Although Northumbria Healthcare subsequently indicated that they would prefer to continue providing the 0-19 services, the Council and Northumbria have different views about how partnerships should operate and the Council believes that its own approach more closely matches that of HDFT.

Successful partnership working is dependent on mutual trust, a shared vision and shared values.

**Q: What kinds of changes to services might there be?**

**A:** We currently expect our two joint priorities to be the further development of a 'family hub' model, and more immediately, finding ways to address the increasing demand on the school nursing service as the first level of support for children and young people who have mental health issues – which seems likely to continue to increase as we progress through this pandemic.

HDFT will work with staff and the 0-19 management teams to support any changes required to meet the changing needs of the population, including 5-19 safeguarding transformation and more emphasis on emotional health and resilience.

**Q: What do you mean by a 'family hub' model?**

**A:** The precise form which they will take may vary, because of the differences between areas of Northumberland – what works well in the areas of South East Northumberland where most people live in large towns may not be a good solution in the rural West and North of the County.

Creating a family hub need not mean all the professionals involved working in a single building – there are advantages in services being based together, but it is also important to ensure that services are accessible, and that links with other key services such as primary care are maintained.

In Ashington health visitors are based in a children's centre alongside a range of other Early Help services for children, and a similar arrangement is now being introduced in Bedlington.

In other areas of Northumberland many health visitors are based in GP practices, and we know that these are important points of contact for families. We will be talking to families, staff and other stakeholders in each local area to find the best way to make services as accessible and as integrated as possible.

Whatever the precise arrangements, we see it as crucial for health visitors and school nurses to be part of the integrated range of support which a family hub offers.

**Q: Is this a way to cut costs or reduce services?**

**A:** No.

Both services are crucial parts of the wider pattern of services supporting children, young people and families. They provide public health support to all children and families. They also provide additional support to children and families who need it, and can when necessary call on the help of a range of other support services.

The proposal is to provide coordinated support for children of all ages and their families. Our aim is to build on the work of existing children's centres, which initially focused specifically on young children, and of "early help" services for older children, to provide a more integrated support service for all families who need it.

HDFT does not intend to cut any staff and will work with the local teams and the management team for the service to ensure all vacancies are reviewed to develop new roles if required to support specialist roles.

**Q: How will the services maintain links with their partners in Northumbria Healthcare?**

**A:** The operational staff and management structure will remain the same, delivered by the same staff with their local knowledge of Northumberland, and retaining those key relationships with all stakeholders.

**Q: Will staff be consulted about a transfer to HDFT?**

**A:** There will be a separate consultation beginning shortly specifically for staff in the health visiting and school nursing services, focusing on the proposed change of employer, and what that would mean for staff. This consultation will be led by Northumbria Healthcare and supported by HDFT.

To ensure a smooth transition between employers, HDFT will provide Welcome Events on virtual platforms or face-to-face, and will also offer all

staff an opportunity for a one-to-one meeting with HDFT HR and a Senior Manager.