

Cheltenham Borough Council

Cabinet – 14 April 2026

No Child Left Behind Update

Accountable member:

Cllr Victoria Atherstone, Cabinet Member Safety and Communities

Accountable officer:

Richard Gibson, Head of communities, wellbeing & partnerships

Tracy Brown, Safeguarding & partnerships manager

Ward(s) affected:

n/a

Key Decision: No

Executive summary:

This report asks Cabinet to note the progress that No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has made during the past year. Key achievements in 2025 include the successful delivery of the Year of Youth Action, major engagement activities such as Party in the Park (attended by over 3,600 people), coordination of the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme, and development of legacy projects including the Youth Activity Pass and a new Youth Café in the town centre.

The report also seeks Cabinet approval for a Year of Action on Education for All commencing September 2026 that will address challenges around school attendance, engagement, and mental health through community-based solutions.

Recommendations: That Cabinet:

- **notes the progress that has been made by No Child Left Behind in the past year.**
- **agrees to undertake a Year of Action on Education for All that will run from September 2026 to September 2027 and that the proposed purpose, themes and activities are consulted on.**

- **agrees to delegate authority to the Head of communities, wellbeing & partnerships, in consultation with the Cabinet Member Safety and Communities to develop a detailed plan for the Year of Action on Education for All**
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Implications

1.1 Financial, Property and Asset implications

There are no financial implications for the Council as a result of the recommendations set out in this report. The Council will continue to support NCLB from existing staff resources and from within existing service budgets.

Signed off by: Ela Jankowska, Finance Business Partner

Date: 31.03.2026

1.2 Legal implications

On the basis that no contracts or procurement are required for this proposal, there are no direct legal implications, however each project may require legal advice on an ad hoc basis.

It is understood that the NCLB Year of Action on Education for All will be signed up to voluntarily by participating organisations and as such, the Council should consider other requirements such as whether consent forms are required, whether staff interacting with the group should have DBS checks (or other safeguards in place to allow the Council to continue with the programme) and whether it has sufficient funding in place to allow the programme to continue.

Signed off by: Alison McKane, Interim Deputy Monitoring Officer,
alison.mckane@cheltenham.gov.uk

1.3 Environmental and climate change implications

There are no environmental or climate change implications envisaged as a result of the recommendations set out in this report. The environmental and climate change implications of the year of action on education will be assessed once the detailed delivery plans are more progressed.

1.4 Corporate Plan priorities

This report contributes to the following Corporate Plan Priorities:

- Key priority 2: Quality homes, safe and strong communities
- Key priority 4: Reducing inequalities, supporting better outcomes

1.5 Equality, diversity and inclusion implications

The equality quality impact assessment screening is attached as Appendix 2. The full equality impact assessment will be undertaken once the final plans for the year of action are developed.

1.6 Performance management – monitoring and review

A report on progress will be brought to meetings of the NCLB Strategic Board every two months.

The final report on progress of the Year of Action on Education for All will be brought to Cabinet in 2027 for endorsement and to agree the next steps.

2. Background

2.1 About No Child Left Behind

2.2 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was formed in December 2018. The Council currently employs one full-time officer on a fixed term contract and a part-time officer funded from the Council's allocation of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to deliver this in consultation with the Cabinet member for safety and communities. Given that NCLB is a collaborative movement, it has established a strategic board (see below) that advises the cabinet member in her decision-making.

2.3 Key Priorities for NCLB

- 1. To highlight the issue of children growing up in poverty in Cheltenham and the inequality between them and their more affluent peers including:**
 - Commissioning research;
 - Engaging and listening to local young people.

- 2. To address the inequality gap with a programme of events and activities:**
 - Coordinating the Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) Programme that provides free enriching activities and nutritious meals during school holidays for children on free school meals;
 - Large-scale free community events including Party in the Park.

3. **Be a call to action for all sectors to work together to make transformational change over the longer-term:**

- Community agreement in place which 105 organisations have signed;
- Collaborations with local VCS organisation, schools, and community groups;
- Hosting an annual awards and showcase events to celebrate individuals, organisations, and projects that make a positive impact on children and families here in Cheltenham.

2.4 Given that NCLB is a collaborative movement, it has established a strategic board that advises the Cabinet member in her decision-making. The board is an informal partnership, without a separate legal entity, and has the following purpose:

- Develop a strategic vision for helping children and young people in Cheltenham, which all NCLB members will follow;
- Engage in and create fundraising campaigns to support relevant events and activities;
- Have oversight of delivery;
- Agree the direction and priorities with the operational sub-groups;
- Monitor and review delivery outcomes, including risks, and advise on delegation of funding for operations.

3. **Data and insights: understanding current needs**

3.1 The NCLB Strategic Board reviews county-wide data to stay informed on issues affecting children and families and engages directly with young people through the current Year of Action.

3.2 Current key insights include:

- **Child poverty:** 15% of children under 16 live in absolute low-income families; eight local areas rank among the 20% most deprived nationally for the proportion of children living in income deprived families.
- **Education:** Children in poverty face higher school absence rates and a significant attainment gap of 34% in English and Maths GCSEs between free school meals (FSM) pupils and their peers.
- **Health and wellbeing:** Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) referrals have risen 25% since 2021, with increasing cases of autism, social/emotional needs, and speech/language difficulties. FSM pupils

report higher rates of self-harm, eating disorders, and mental health support needs.

- **Safety concerns:** Teenage girls report harassment and fear after dark; Free School Meals pupils are more likely to experience police involvement and gang association.
- **Youth priorities:** Young people want more free/affordable activities, safe evening spaces, jobs, apprenticeships, and inclusive town centre spaces.

4. Key projects: progress and next steps

4.1 Year of Youth Action

Cabinet endorsed 2025 as a Year of Youth Action to celebrate and mobilise young people's voices, talents, and leadership.

Highlights:

- Youth engagement programme delivered over the year to deepen understanding of issues affecting young people;
- Delivery of events including Party in the Park 2025 and NCLB Awards in February 2026;
- Scoping of the Youth Activity Pass and Youth Café as legacy projects – see below.

Engagement Activities:

- Cheltenham Education Partnership Horizons event;
- The Children's Society Your Voice event;
- Cambray Carnival;
- COP30 School Climate Conference;
- Her Voice: Her Cheltenham survey and focus groups;
- Youth Activity Pass engagement;
- GCC One Plan consultation at Party in the Park.

What young people have told us:

Throughout the engagement activities, young people have consistently told us what they would like to see more of in Cheltenham:

- Free and affordable activities in the town for young people including arts and sports
- Jobs for young people

- Apprenticeships and work experience opportunities
- Places to go, instead of hanging out in the town centre
- Inclusive youth provision where everyone can feel safe and welcome
- Low-cost spaces for teenagers to come together
- Evening safe spaces after 5:30pm in the town centre

NCLB has also worked with teenage girls at risk of exploitation, engaging with Pittville School, All Saints Academy, The Children's Society and Youth Justice team to gather their experiences of living in Cheltenham. Key issues raised include:

Harassment and personal safety concerns:

- Catcalling, being followed and inappropriate touching
- After-dark, in parks, during raceweek and in the town centre

Barriers to seeking help:

- Judgement and stigma
- Professionals' responses and lack of trust
- Complexity of services

Challenges teenage girls face in the town:

- Exposure to violence and fighting
- Emotional and social pressures
- Pressure to try drugs and alcohol

Next Steps:

- Sustain and build on engagement initiatives;
- Proposed 2026 focus: *Year of Action on Education for All* to address declining school attendance and engagement.

4.2 Holiday Activities & Food (HAF) / Party in the Park

Achievements:

- NCLB coordinated the delivery of the HAF programme in Spring, Summer, and Winter holidays funded by GCC, including sports, arts, trips, and family activities;
- Party in the Park 2025;

- Over 3,600 children and young people attended, 955 free meals provided to eligible families.
- Inclusive event with 1,600 attendees reporting additional needs.
- Cost: £20k, equating to £5.55 per child including food.

Next Steps:

- The Council entered into a competitive procurement exercise to be the district lead for Cheltenham. This has now been agreed by GCC and the Council will now coordinate the delivery of HAF in Cheltenham.
- Party in the Park 2026: Scheduled for 5 August; plans include enhanced facilities, healthy food options, and inter-generational activities.

4.3 Youth Activity Pass

Overview:

- In direct response to the feedback from young people, NCLB secured £20k from the UKSPF to develop a digital pass for young people (11–18 years) offering discounted access to events, shopping, eating out and activities.
- Phase 1 (to April 2026): Develop proof-of-concept platform through collaboration with CyNam, GlosCol, and industry partners; pilot testing planned for April/May with local schools.

Next Steps:

- Complete platform development and launch with all schools in Summer 2026.

Future Scope:

- Expand to include skills development, mentoring, work experience, and apprenticeships.

4.4 Youth Café

- In direct response to the feedback from young people, NCLB secured £9k from the Police and Crime Commissioner's Problem Solving Fund to pilot a town-centre Youth Café at Smokey Joe's for 6 weeks. Opened successfully on Thursday 12 Feb with 22 young people in attendance on the first night and a regular attendance of around 30 young people subsequently each week proving demand for the cafe.
- The delivery partners are Springbank CIC and The Rock with partnership support during the pilot phase from Music Works.

Next Steps:

- Monitor pilot delivery of Youth Café to inform the development of a longer-term solution.

4.5 Business Engagement

- Strengthened partnerships with local businesses (e.g. Infrastar, McDonald's Incito, Renishaw and HBD).
- Fundraising group established; LinkedIn page launched December 2025.
- Nine sponsors were confirmed for the NCLB Awards that were held on 5 February 2026.
- HBD-supported best practice visit to Sheffield (25 March).

Next Steps:

- Explore sponsorship and social value opportunities.
- Grow LinkedIn presence and secure further sponsorship.

4.6 GCC One Plan

- NCLB designated as Cheltenham's Integrated Locality Board for delivery of One Plan priorities.
- £51k commissioning pot launched to address local needs (school attendance, mental health, SEND) in January 2026, with 8 successful bidders.

Next Steps:

- Work with GCC to promote future bidding rounds.

5. The proposed Year of Action on Education for All September 2026 to September 2027

The NCLB Strategic Board recognises growing challenges in school attendance and engagement. Recent data from GCC shows that absence rates from children on free school meals and those requiring SEN support are twice those of the average rates. The data also shows a significant increase in the rates of fixed term exclusions for pupils requiring SEN support.

National data shows that pupil engagement and satisfaction fall sharply after transition to secondary school and continues to decline through Years 8 and 9. Feelings of safety and belonging also decrease significantly during these years. Nearly one-third of pupils in upper secondary report concerns around motivation to learn.

Declining engagement is strongly linked to worsening attendance, with

vulnerable groups (SEND, FSM-eligible pupils) disproportionately affected.

While education remains the responsibility of schools and statutory partners, NCLB can play a vital role in mobilising community-based solutions that strengthen learning, wellbeing, and aspiration both with young people and their families.

5.1 Purpose:

The Year of Action on Education for All will shine a light on the scale and complexity of the challenges we face with school non-attendance, exclusions and overall engagement to support children and young people to achieve their full potential.

NCLB will raise awareness and promote collaborative approaches to help remove barriers to learning while supporting children and their family's overall wellbeing.

5.2 Theme 1 - Raising awareness and understanding across the community

Proposed activities:

- Parent Workshops: helping parents understand the education system and strategies to support their children, especially those that have additional needs
- Support everybody involved in working with children and young people to better understand issues that can impact engagement with education including children with SEND, trauma, neurodivergence and mental health
- Promote understanding within the community of the key issues that impact attendance to gain wider support to preventative initiatives
- Mapping and communication of existing support and initiatives, including promotion of the virtual family hubs

5.3 Theme 2 - Supporting children, young people and families

Proposed activities:

- Support families with their basic needs to remove barriers to education such as help with transport, uniform banks, housing concerns or food poverty
- Signpost to mental health support that meet the needs of children and young people most at risk of non-attendance

- Develop peer-support opportunities for children, young people and parents to help build belonging and community
- Work with children, young people and families to understand the issues that arise during transition from primary to secondary school to develop evidenced-based solutions
- Work with existing community support to ensure it links with schools at an early stage to prevent persistent absence
- Pair students with mentors from local organisations to build aspiration and belonging

5.4 Encouraging informal learning and extra-curricular development

Proposed activities:

- Engage with the National Year of Reading campaign organised by the National Literacy Trust and the Department for Education. Cheltenham Festivals are also engaging with this through the year so there are opportunities for collaboration;
- Facilitate connections between sports, activity, cultural and creative projects and schools and youth work to allow children and young people to develop confidence and skills that help them in their education;
- Develop the Youth Café pilot to allow young people with a safe place to support practical learning and social skills outside of education settings;
- Launch the Youth Activity Pass to allow young people with discounted activities, a greater understanding of opportunities open to them and personal development whilst creating a sense of belonging and reward;
- Encourage partners to provide meaningful work experience and volunteering opportunities for young people especially those at risk of non-attendance.

5.5 No Child Left Behind will now undertake further consultation on the proposed purpose, themes and activities to ensure that there is widespread support for the proposals before agreeing the final plans by June 2026.

6. Next Steps

Cabinet is asked to note the following areas of NCLB action during 2026:

- **NCLB Awards and Showcase**

- Successfully hosted the No Child Left Behind Awards on 5 February 2026 and will now commence planning for next year’s awards and showcase ceremony.
- **Holiday Activities and Food Programme**
 - Coordinate delivery of the Spring HAF programme in April 2026.
- **Youth Café pilot**
 - Extend the Youth Café pilot to Summer 2026.
- **Youth Activity Pass**
 - Develop a proof of concept web-based platform for pilot testing with selected schools by end of April 2026.
- **Party in the Park 2026**
 - Deliver the next Party in the Park event on Wednesday 5 August 2026.
- **Proposed Year of Action on Education for All**
 - Commence a Year of Action in September 2026 focused on three themes:
 - Awareness and understanding across the community.
 - Support and engagement with children, young people, and families.
 - Informal learning and extracurricular development.
- **Business Engagement**
 - Explore business sponsorship opportunities for NCLB in greater detail, alongside social value initiatives.
- **Governance Models**
 - Officers to review future governance models for NCLB and bring a future paper to Cabinet for consideration.

7. Consultation and feedback

- 7.1** The proposals set out in this report all respond to consultation and engagement undertaken through No Child Left Behind either with young people or with the partners that support NCLB. The proposals were also shared with the Council’s Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 2 March 2026 who were supportive of the proposals.

Report author:

Richard Gibson, Head of communities, wellbeing & partnerships

Tracy Brown, Partnerships and Safeguarding Manager

Appendices:

Appendix 1 - Risk Assessment

Appendix 2 - Equality Impact Assessment – Screening

Appendix 3 – Data and Insights

Appendix 1: Risk Assessment

Risk ref	Risk description	Risk owner	Impact score (1-5)	Likelihood score (1-5)	Initial raw risk score (1 - 25)	Risk response	Controls / Mitigating actions	Control / Action owner	Deadline for controls/ actions
	If there is insufficient capacity within the team to manage the year of action on education, it might not meet the expectations of the council and its partners.	Richard Gibson	2	3	6	Reduce	The year of action will be partnership-led and will not all fall on CBC to deliver. However, officers will keep plans for the year under review so that there is confidence that they can be delivered within existing staff resources.	Richard Gibson	ongoing
	If the council and its partners do not respond to the issues raised through the youth engagement activities, then there might be some frustration expressed by young people with not being heard.	Richard Gibson	3	2	6	Reduce	Maintain progress on projects that are directly responding to the views of young people including the youth café and the youth activity pass	Richard Gibson	
	If there is insufficient external funding secured to ambitions for the year of action on education, then action will need to be taken to curtail activities to fit within existing budgets.	Richard Gibson	2	2	4	Reduce	Keep plans for the year of action under review so that there is confidence that they can be delivered within existing budgets.	Richard Gibson	

Appendix 2: Equality Impact Assessment (Screening)

STAGE 1 – Equality Screening

1. Identify the policy, project, function or service change

a. Person responsible for this EqIA	
Officer responsible: Tracy Brown	Service Area: Community, Wellbeing and Partnerships
Title: Safeguarding and Partnership Manager	Date of assessment: 23.3.26
Signature: THS Brown	

b. Is this a policy, function, strategy, service change or project?	Other
If other, please specify: Year of Action on Education for all	

c. Name of the policy, function, strategy, service change or project	
Year of Action on Education for all	
Is this new or existing?	new
Please specify reason for change or development of policy, function, strategy, service change or project	
<p>The NCLB Strategic Board recognises growing challenges in school attendance and engagement. Recent data from GCC shows that absence rates from children on free school meals and those who requiring SEN support are twice those of the average rates. The data also shows a significant increase in the rates of fixed term exclusions for pupils requiring SEN support.</p> <p>National data shows that pupil engagement and satisfaction fall sharply after transition to secondary school and continues to decline through Years 8 and 9. Feelings of safety and belonging also decrease significantly during these years. Nearly one-third of pupils in upper secondary report concerns around motivation to learn.</p> <p>Declining engagement is strongly linked to worsening attendance, with vulnerable groups (SEND, FSM-eligible pupils) disproportionately affected.</p> <p>While education remains the responsibility of schools and statutory partners, NCLB can play a vital role in mobilising community-based solutions that strengthen learning, wellbeing, and aspiration.</p>	

d. What are the aims, objectives and intended outcomes and who is likely to benefit from it?	
Aims:	The Year of Education for All will shine a light on the scale and complexity of the challenges we face with school non-attendance, exclusions and overall engagement to support children and young people to achieve their

	<p>full potential.</p> <p>NCLB will raise awareness and promote collaborative approaches to help remove barriers to learning while supporting children and their family's overall wellbeing.</p>
Objectives:	<p>To work in partnership to deliver a set of actions under the following themes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Raising awareness and understanding across the community 2. Supporting and engaging with children, young people and families 3. Encouraging informal learning and extra-curricular development
Outcomes:	The year of action will deliver a range of outcomes across the three themes. These outcomes will be defined as the development of the year of action progresses
Benefits:	The year of youth action will mainly benefit young people 11-18 and the wider community

e. What are the expected impacts?

Are there any aspects, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could have an impact on the lives of people, including employees and customers.

Yes

Do you expect the impacts to be positive or negative?

Positive

Please provide an explanation for your answer:

The year of action will start to address challenges in school attendance and engagement, particularly with children who require SEN support or who are on free school meals

If your answer to question e identified potential positive or negative impacts, or you are unsure about the impact, then you should carry out a Stage Two Equality Impact Assessment.

f. Identify next steps as appropriate

Stage Two required

Yes

Owner of Stage Two assessment

Tracy Brown

Completion date for Stage Two assessment

June 2026

[Stage Two assessment to be completed as part of the sign-off of the final delivery plan]**